



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*Time to Wake Up!
to True Hope...in God, or in
our own devices?*

Isaiah 11:1–9

By Pastor Greg Davidson Laszakovits

Message from December 8, 2019

777 South Mount Joy Street
Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania 17022
717-367-1000
www.ETOWNCOB.ORG

REINTRODUCTION TO TIME TO WAKE UP!

THEME

Last week we introduced our Advent theme: Time to Wake up! We acknowledged that sometimes the world seems dark. So called peace comes at the end of a sword. Hope is for us at the expense them. Joy is found in more things rather than life in God. Love is held rather than released... We need some light!

The narratives of Jesus' birth also paint dark pictures—it is a time of indentured servitude, coerced religion, violence, and economic injustice rule the day. *Where's the good news!?*

Advent—this season before Jesus' birth—is not a warm-up to get us in the Christmas spirit. Advent is a time to acknowledge that darkness is part of life. But that God is always breaking in, reaching out to us. Inviting us to see the light! To “Be up and awake to what God is doing!”

Advent is our annual alarm clock to wake up to what God is doing in the world. A time to seek the true spirit of Christmas through the four Advent themes of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love. Today is HOPE.

TWO KINDS OF HOPE:

As I thought about hope I realized that we use the word *hope* in at least two distinct ways. The first is what I think of as a **shallow/short term hope**. This is hope as wishes. *I hope it doesn't rain today. I hope that package arrives by tomorrow. I hope the teacher doesn't dock me too many points on that assignment I threw together at the last minute. I hope my Fantasy football team wins today (watch our Will Hershey—here I come). I hope I get a new sweater for Christmas.* On and on goes our hopes as wishes. To show how short term these Christmas wishes can be: did you ever think about how we hope for things that are seasonal? How many of us are hoping that new sun umbrella or patio furniture will be under the tree this year? These are the kinds of hopes that come and go. More wishes than anything substantial.

2

But there is another kind of hope that is deep and long term, even faithful. Dictionaries start to get at it when they describe it as “an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one’s life or the world at large.” Here we’re moving towards Biblical Hope. Advent Hope.

Hope based on expectation of what God can do. This is the hope that MLK spoke of when he said that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” This is the hope that the Israelites had for the coming Messiah. This is the hope that the writers of the New Testament had for the Second Coming of Jesus.

This is the hope that believes in the vision of a reordering of creation. This is the hope of the writer of Isaiah:

ISAIAH 11.1–9

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

²*The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

³*His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;*

⁴*but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

⁵*Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

⁶*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.*

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
 their young shall lie down together;
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
 and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy
 on all my holy mountain;
 for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea.

This hope believes that the tree that has been leveled still contains life and can and **will** grow again. This is the hope that people will turn to God. This is the hope that peace will reign to the extent that God will make things right, that justice will be served by God in God's time. This is the hope that people will really understand and live peaceably with one another. A peace will reign that is so profound that even lion will lay with lamb in harmony, that children will play with rattlesnakes.

Let's not get tangled in Biblical literalism here; we note that Isaiah is speaking in metaphor. And he's not predicting the future so much as expressing the hope that **with God it'll all be okay**. One way or another. This is Biblical Hope.

This is the hope that our Nigerian sisters and brothers display when they believe that God will do anew things and keep going even after kidnappings, murders, church burnings, and displacement. This is the hope that propels a mom to leave her children to travel to another country to seek work so money can be sent to her children to go to school and have a brighter future. This is the hope that encourages a congregation like this one to keep reaching out with a message of peace, service and openness. The hope of cancer patients who are part of this community. This is the hope that a bed-ridden 90-something year old woman has for her drug-addled great-grandson. Not just wishes, but living in expectation that God is moving.

OUR OWN DEVICES...

Possessing this hope is challenging. And so rather than Hope in God, we go to our own devices. We choose distraction!

4

This is where I give you the gratuitous statistics on the distraction of handheld devices. We know cell phone use while driving is a serious no-no. 1.6 million crashes a year, 390,000 injuries and thousands of deaths from texting and driving. 1 of 4 accidents is cause by texting and driving. But it's not just behind the wheel that we need to be careful. Texting and walking injuries are also up.

And if that weren't enough, studies show that parents who look at their phones too much delay the communication development of their kids, and this has even been hypothesized to be a link to the increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnoses. But if we are honest, cell phones and other handheld devices are not the only "devices" we use to distract ourselves from living life that is really life and keep us from embracing deep Biblical Hope. Think about devices like:

Habitual Avoidance of problems in our lives and families is a device that stunts our growth.

OR

Sunshine optimism that everything is just peachy keen is another device that helps us ignore reality.

These are just a couple, but I'm sure you can identify the devices you use to keep yourself from risking the vulnerability of the deep Biblical Hope that the moral arc of the universe does bend towards justice, that in the end all will be alright with God.

STORIES/IMAGES OF HOPE


Like I said earlier, I wondered if I could put some of our devices to work for us in a way that could bring deep hope. And I was impressed. I posted this on Facebook on Tuesday, December 3, 2019:





Now to be honest, I didn't know what people would write. Would they say hope is the perfect Christmas gift, my favorite team winning the game this weekend, ...


Instead this is what they wrote:




Each day holds promise!
Love · Reply · 1d  1


My faith.
Love · Reply · 1d  1


Gratitude and learning something new!
Love · Reply · 1d  1

this picture is so beautiful
Love · Reply · 1d  1


is a small town in Arkansas.
Love · Reply · 1d  1



Hope is also being able to be in relation with other people and learning new things, each and every day about them.
Love · Reply · 1d  1



Hope is KNOWING that the God of the mountain is the God of the valley.
Love · Reply · 1d  2


Another new day to enjoy living.
Love · Reply · 1d   2



Coffee! ☺
Love · Reply · 1d   2


Young people/children.....in our congregation.....in my family.....many all around the world rotary exchange students.....new ideas.....we're all in this together surrounded and uplifted by God's love...
Love · Reply · 1d  2

That a smile, an act of kindness can change a person's day and possibly their life!
Love · Reply · 1d   3

Hope is seeing more kindness than evil in my daily life. Yes bad things are happening but I'm mostly surrounded by good people doing good things. It brings me hope for a happy future!
Love · Reply · 1d   4

That there are good people in the world. That we can connect and laugh and grieve together. The diary of Anne frank speaks to me on so many levels and this famous quote comes to mind all the time "I keep my ideals because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart"
Love · Reply · 1d   2

Playing with children, music & the arts, being in nature...
Love · Reply · 1d   2

Greg, I've just spent six months writing a piece about hope, and I just wrote my program notes that have some philosophizing about hope. Maybe I should send that to you.
Love · Reply · 1d  2



My Facebook post was an experiment to see how people think about hope, I am inspired by the depth of sharing. I asked, and people responded in deep and meaningful ways that hint at the larger meaning in life, and the things that really matter. Transformation of self in God, that God is moving hope in humanity, that there is action with God.

I also think it's really interesting how many people name children. Is it any wonder the Prophetic voice of Isaiah speaks of a child leading them. Or that the light of the world is a newborn baby? God's wisdom and movement may be unexpected, but it is not without a logic of its own.

You may have seen the response of someone who wrote about spending the last six months writing a piece of music. That was from my friend Shawn Kirchner who is the music director at the Lavern Church of the Brethren in Southern California and composer. He just wrote a seasonal piece entitled "The Light of Hope Returning". After this post he shared his program notes with me, and I want to close with them.

8

“...the hope we sing of in *The Light of Hope Returning* is not a hope of airy lightness it has the powerful, heart-lifting light of a distant star that is actually, up close, an unimaginable furnace of fire. It is allied with the basic driving force in the universe that turns the galaxies, forms the planets, and spurs the countless generations as Life find an ever-forward way. This hope *is* our Life-force, the fire that burns at our core, our DNA-level birthright, the momentum of God within us.¹”

That is Advent Hope.

BENEDICTION

Next week Pastor Josh is going to talk about whether True Joy is found in all of the stuff we get for Christmas.

I “hope” today has re-lit or added fuel to your Advent candle of Hope that lies within.

¹<http://www.shawnkirchner.com/blog/the-light-of-hope-returning/>

