

***Hope Rooted in Christ's Second Coming***  
***Luke 21:25-36***  
***December 2, 2018***

Look into the eyes of the inhabitants of Syria, of Gaza, the thousands gathered at the U.S. border hoping for asylum. Look into the eyes of millions forced from their cities, towns and villages by war and brutal oppression. Do we see hope in their eyes?

Look at the persons sitting across from you on the bus, waiting with you at the checkout counter, in the doctor's office, and see if their eyes communicate hope for the future. On Wednesday I volunteer at one of the Hamilton out of the Cold venues. They serve between 90 and 140 meals each week to over men and women and children. Many express gratitude for our service and they leave with some hope. The workers in Oshawa are probably feeling pretty hopeless today after the news of their jobs disappearing in a year's time.

Yes, hope seems to be in short supply, not only in third world countries, but also here in the West. And if there is a desire in our hearts for hope what is it we hope for? Is it peace, happiness, healing of our bodies, spiritual connection with God, reconciliation with those we are presently at odds with, or something else entirely? Think about that for a moment. What is it your heart tells you about what you hope for?

For centuries the Jewish families had waited for their Messiah. They lived in hope that their generation would be the one to welcome him. They had many biblical promises that God was sending him. They had these words from the prophet:  
*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse...The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding...(Isaiah 11:1ff)*

But when Jesus stepped into their world they didn't recognize him as the one promised. Some did, but the majority rejected him, and even pushed for his execution. So they still wait!

Between 66 and 70 AD the Romans leveled Jerusalem, including the temple. The loss of their city and especially God's temple was a

devastating blow. Did it mean that God had once again abandoned them? It certainly meant that the entire sacrificial system, so central to the Jewish faith for over a thousand years, was no longer possible.

Luke tells us that Jesus predicted this catastrophe. Writing one or two decades after Jerusalem's destruction, Luke tells the early Christian believers not to confuse Jerusalem's fall with the final apocalypse, the end of the world. The parousia (second appearing of Christ) will be global in scope and signals the end of the world. We call this the apocalypse, or revealing. The term 'apocalyptic' comes from the Greek word which means hidden.

Luke uses this apocalyptic style to describe the future cosmic upheaval that heralds Christ's second coming. We find this same style in several of the Old Testament writings such as Daniel, and Isaiah and Ezekiel. It is the biblical writers attempt to take us behind the curtain and reveal what is happening in the supernatural realm. The writers use vivid metaphors and dramatic, symbolic language to help us see the significance, within God's dimension of reality, of events that happen within our world of space, time and matter. None of which is to be taken literally! Jesus says:

*There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. (Luke 21:25-28)*

This sort of language is most often used when hope has been drained from peoples' experience. When suffering, persecution, and despair, floods our lives, apocalyptic language becomes a vehicle for hope. It serves to point people upward, to tilt their necks upward to view life from within God's dimension. It's like watching God's purpose unfold on a giant screen where everything is in high definition, perfect colour and sound. Hope is revived!

What about us? Our lives are sometimes clouded by loss, by despair, by sickness, and by various slings and arrows that defeat us. Hope is difficult to conjure up when life enters this cul-de-sac.

This Advent season is a gift to us, a journey that each week drops us off at resting places called hope, joy, peace and love. We no longer wait for Messiah's coming. We celebrate his coming into the world; we have experienced his presence in our lives. We await his second coming when all history will be wrapped up like a scroll and put away in a secret drawer.

Jesus tells his disciples that no one knows the calendar year, month or day when his cosmic appearing will take place. What we know from Jesus' words in Luke 17 and here in chapter 21, is that his appearing will be sudden, surprising, unexpected and dramatic. Jesus points to the trees. When you see their leaves appearing after the deadness of winter you know that summer is approaching. So when you see certain signs occurring you know that the end is near. These signs are: false Messiah's: false calculators of time and place of the end: and natural disasters with cosmic terror. In the meantime, while we wait, Jesus says, we witness to his first coming.

Our response is to celebrate the beginning of a new year during this Advent season. Our response is to continue to bear witness to those around us that Christ has come and will come again. Through our living out the good news in our actions, through our telling the story of God's love through our words, through our deeds of compassion, generosity and empathy, and through our commitment to God's future for planet earth and the universe, we wait for his coming with hope.

As Jesus reminds us at the end of his discourse, we need to be careful not to be seduced by society's preoccupation with entertainment and avoidance of reality. I like how the Message puts it:

*Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise, that Day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap, for it's going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once.*

It's so easy to lose our bearings. It's so easy to drift into complacency. It's so easy to be trapped in society's false hope.

May this Advent season be for each one of us a time of renewed commitment to our faith and to our waiting in hope.

***Amen***