

**11.27.22 – Advent 1**  
**“Remember the Hope in Christ”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Isaiah 2:1-5 (NRSVue) ~ Pam**

*The Future House of God*

<sup>1</sup> The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> In days to come

the mountain of the Lord’s house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many peoples shall come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;  
neither shall they learn war any more.

<sup>5</sup> O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!

**L: These are God’s Words to Isaiah, the Prophet. All: Thanks be to God!**

**Matthew 24:36-44 (NRSVue)**

<sup>36</sup> “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. <sup>42</sup> Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

**Leader: These are Prophetic Words of Hope. All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Lord, this holiday we are grateful for and reminded of many blessings. Many of us enjoyed a big meal, time off, football, shopping, and now we are refocused on you and your Son Jesus; some spent the day in lack, hunger, depression, or fear. We pray for them deeply at this time of year. Let us open our minds and hearts to be expectant and hopeful for both the Christ Child and for his return one day. May we embrace the prophetic imagination you created in us, while functioning responsibly and generously in this real world of hatred, violence, and disaster, yet also joy, peace, and love. Be with those who cannot be here today; may we hear your word through this messenger's voice. Amen.

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I do hope you had a delicious Thanksgiving, and “smelled the love” as you walked into a home with a feast in preparation! Today is the first Sunday of Advent! It feels like we have an extra week this year, because Advent Sundays [Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love] only take us through December 18<sup>th</sup>, then Christmas Eve, then the last Sunday in December is Christmas Day itself! Yes, we are meeting both Christmas Eve at 3 pm as usual and on Christmas Day. Plan for our normal schedule but we will get back to you soon if there are any adjustments to Christmas Day's timing.

We begin our Advent journey together in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century before Jesus was born and in Matthew's Gospel just before Christ's crucifixion. At first that seems an odd place to start, so let's hear a little from the prophet Isaiah. He received a waking vision from God about the judgment that would come upon Judah and Jerusalem because they had neglected to uphold the Mosaic Covenant. The nation had become an idolatrous and rebellious people. Some of the evildoers would be consumed while others would be sent into captivity and exile.

By Chapter 2, Isaiah shares God's vision of hope for the exiles; Israel and Jerusalem would eventually have a restored future, with a purified land and city. In the ancient Near East, people assumed that their gods dwelt in the temples, so by restoring them with human hands, they

could reclaim the gods they worshipped. Isaiah was correcting their misunderstanding; he reminded them that Jerusalem itself was referred to as the mountain, or elevated temple of God. We know from our study this year in Nehemiah that the Jerusalem walls and the temple were finally restored; and Isaiah knew Israel would again occupy the land because of the covenants Yahweh, God, made with Abraham, Moses, and David. Because of the world in which we live now, we read this passage differently today than years before. Isaiah is saying that even though bad things will happen (destruction and exile and for us violence or inflation), God's covenant with Israel will be protected and honored. We know that came true in history, because Jesus was sent by His Father to renew **our** covenant through his sacrifice and resurrection. We know this in present time as well when we renew our covenant with Christ through the Lord's Supper each month and quarterly read the church covenant.

Our future HOPE in verse 4 is that God will bring about peace, not through human achievements or victories of war, but through his own love, presence, and work in Jerusalem. Isaiah compels his readers to walk and to live in the light of the Lord. This vision is about our faith as a human race. God's great power to bring peace to all nations is the foundation of our belief in his mercy and grace, even though we may not witness it in our lifetimes. The kind of peace Isaiah writes about is transformational as it changes human hearts, places, governments, cultures, and societies. Isaiah knows that God will become central to everyone's trust. He will settle all disputes and issues of uncertainty. This vision of universal peace brings about and sustains our Hope for a

merciful and gracious God who gave us his only son. Imagining that kind of transformation into God’s view of the world should give us **hope!**

It's a kind of hope that is like faith – “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1 <sup>NRSVue</sup>).” Therefore, no one knows when Christ will return but we know that He will. Humans plan everything; there are thousands of planners out there, wall calendars, briefcase-type Day Timers, Day Runners, desk planners, spiral or bound, journals, digital Gantt charts, telephone “notes,” computer templates, excel planners, whole software programs like C-vent, Realm, or Evernote. We plan for the holidays, our events, meals, gifts, and vacations, but there is no lasting power in the planning. Things can change in the blink of an eye. Only God knows our steps and his plans for us:

<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. Jeremiah 29:11-14a <sup>NIV</sup>

and from Paul in his letter to the Romans 13:11-12, 14a:

<sup>11</sup> Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup> the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light . . . <sup>14</sup> Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

As Paul writes, we must be ready for Christ’s return for no one knows the precise day, year, or time. What are our instructions in Matthew? We must be in prayer, listening for God (which we have been doing all this year); we must be observant about how God is currently working all around us (we have been watching for the extraordinary

among the ordinary this quarter). We must also be ready not only for the Son of Man but realize that our HOPE is found by being ready to help others when opportunities to do so arise. Like the military, we are to be in a constant state of “readiness” so that we may act on His direction and receive any call.

How does one prepare to be ready? Our next few weeks we will study not only the traditional Advent messages of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, but will prepare our spiritual selves much like we do at Lent, by “emptying” ourselves of sin, selfishness, regret, stress, misplaced priorities, unfruitful habits, and unrealistic, unhealthy expectations. With all those things clogging up our hearts and brains, how can we possibly take in the innocence, holiness, beauty, humility, salvation, awe, glory, and power of the Lord Jesus Christ?!

So, for today’s lesson of Hope, we must first give up it’s opposite: fear. We began Thursday by reminding ourselves for that which we are grateful. We expressed our Thanks and gratitude for all the Lord has done and is doing in our lives. Expression is one way to empty ourselves to make room for the new. Confession is another way, so this week, please focus a bit on sins of commission and omission and ask God for forgiveness. We know from the cross that we are already forgiven, but unless we verbalize or write them down our hearts and minds are still too full of guilt or regret to joyfully receive the infant in the manger. Will you begin this process of emptying today? As you go home or out to lunch, be thinking of what holds you back from being hopeful about our world and your life? Name it even if it hurts! Then let it go. Leave it at this altar for God’s healing and renewal. Empty yourself of busy-ness, envy, fear,

sadness or whatever keeps Hope out of your heart. Then we'll come together for PEACE next Sunday. Keep watch! Amen! |/

**Will you pray with me?** All knowing God, thank you for these prophecies to remind us that *Emmanuel* is why we are here today. May our faith and hope be more obvious to others than our cynicism or fear. Help us to consciously empty our minds of distraction so we may watch and wait for the Christ child and for Jesus' return. Bring transformational Hope to our world and grace to our actions. Forgive us, oh Lord, as we humbly ask these things in Jesus' name, **Amen**.