

Hope in the Lord

弥生台 MJCF November 27, 2022

Jeremiah 33:14-18, Romans 8:18-25

Today, we begin the season of Advent, the 4-week preparation time before Christmas. Advent comes from the Latin word, "Adventus," meaning "coming," or "visit". We remember the coming of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We celebrate his coming as a baby at Christmas. We also look forward to the second coming, when Jesus will come again at the end of time. During Advent, each week we light another candle, representing various themes. Today's theme is hope. In a world of chaos and problems, we place our hope in Jesus, the one through whom we experience the power and love of God, the creator of the universe. God's promises are certain, but in our world, hope is often used for situations that are not certain. Often, we use the world hope to describe things that we wish for.

There's a story told of a mother who

was taking her four-year old daughter to school. She was a doctor and had left her stethoscope on the car seat. Her little girl picked it up and very excitedly began to play with it. Excellent, thought the Doctor. My daughter wants to follow in my footsteps! Then the child spoke into the instrument: 'Hello and welcome to McDonald's, may I take your order?' All parents have high hopes for their children.

Some parents hope their child will grow up to become a doctor, but there are no guarantees that the child won't end up working at McDonalds instead. It's been said that

Our use of the word "hope" is usually based on uncertainty. [Here's another image I came across...] Suppose an engaged couple says, "We have an outdoor wedding planned for Saturday; we hope it doesn't rain." In saying this, they are saying that the possibility of rain is there, but their preference is for no rain.

But when the [Bible] uses the word hope, it is based on certainty. It's stating an absolute fact, but that fact hasn't occurred just yet. Let's go back to that engaged couple. Suppose it's Friday night, and one of them says "I hope tomorrow is going to be Saturday," we'd think that a little strange. Of course, tomorrow's going to be Saturday! It might rain, it might not. It could be cold; it could be hot. But no matter what, the day after Friday is Saturday, and nothing can change that. When [the Apostle] Paul uses the word hope, he is doing something like that. He is stating a certainty that has not yet occurred.

Paul is no stranger to suffering. In his second letter to the Corinthians he says, "Five times I have received...40 lashes minus one." (The whipping that was standard punishment for those who broke the law. This often resulted in death). Paul continues, "Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning." It sounds like many people wanted him dead! Not only that, Paul continues, "Three times I was shipwrecked..." and so on. It's a miracle that he was still alive to continue sharing the good news about Jesus Christ.

Not just Paul, but many people around him also experienced suffering. In Today's passage, Paul begins with, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." Someday, Jesus will return to earth and we, who are the "children of God" through the work of Jesus Christ, will finally be able to live with him, in a world without sin. Right now, sin clouds everything in darkness. Through Jesus, the light of God's goodness will shine and reveal the truth of God's great work in us, his children. We wait, "in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Later, Paul says, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The worst that can happen, even death cannot separate us from God's love. These promises give us hope.

It seems as if things are not much different today than in Paul's day. Our problems are different, but we also "groan inwardly" as we wait for God to set things right with all of Creation. We are

increasingly aware of climate change and the effects of pollution. The Corona Virus pandemic continues to wreak havoc as it refuses to disappear, with numbers of people infected in Japan increasing. The war in the Ukraine also continues despite massive destruction, thousands of people dead, and increasing numbers of refugees. Closer to home, all around us people are suffering from broken relationships, and tensions in families. As we age, the aches and pains increase, and suddenly we are thinking more and more about how to deal with various health issues. It's easy to long for the day when there will be no more pain or suffering. But, as we read Paul's words, even though we may only be able to see all of the problems, we can also be filled with hope. Paul writes, "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we see that God is stronger even than all the powers of sin and death. This gives us hope.

The other passage we read today is from the book of the prophet, Jeremiah. Here's the situation Jeremiah was facing. I'm reading from Jeremiah chapter 32, verse one, "The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him." Jeremiah's message was that the city will be destroyed. Because of Israel's sin and idolatry, God was allowing Jerusalem to be conquered by the Babylonians. They can't fight against what God is allowing. But, Zedekiah didn't want him to discourage the people supporting the war effort, so he kept Jeremiah in custody, not allowing him to share his message publicly.

The siege of Jerusalem lasted one and a half years. During this time, Jeremiah's message also included hope. The allowing of the destruction of Jerusalem related to God's judgement for their sin, but God also promised that afterward there will come a day when God would restore Israel. People would return to Jerusalem, and there will be a time of peace. To symbolize this, God tells Jeremiah to buy a field. This is a pretty stupid thing to do while losing a war, since the enemy will be taking over everything anyway. But, God says buy the field. So, Jeremiah arranges payment and witnesses and buys a field. This symbolized hope in the fact that one day God would restore Jerusalem and there would be peace, as promised.

Another symbol of hope comes in Jeremiah 33:14-18, the verses read today. God promises Israel and Judah that a Righteous One would spring up for David, leading with justice and righteousness, and there would always be someone in the line of David leading Israel. The prophet Isaiah says something similar (Isaiah 11:1), saying a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse (the father of David). In the midst of death and devastation, from a "dead" stump will sprout a new shoot. There is hope in new growth. Even though Israel was in the midst of war and everything would be destroyed, someday people would return from exile and Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and new leaders would continue. We know that eventually this did come true. Peace did come, people returned, and Jerusalem was rebuilt. But, there is a deeper level to this passage. It is connected to the coming of Jesus Christ.

There is a bigger picture than just Israel. How are all people be saved from spiritually? The coming of Jesus is God's answer – He is the righteous Branch that has sprung up in the line of David. In Jesus, we see someone who does the work like a human priest, mediating between us and God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we now can have a closer relationship with the Almighty God. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, in Bethlehem, born to Mary, and Joseph who was a descendant of King David. Jesus is now the righteous Lord of all. In him we have the light that illuminates our sin, but in him we also have forgiveness. Romans 5:8 says that, "...God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." God is love. God is good. The Almighty God is for us! God knows our weakness, and yet through Jesus, we see that we are accepted, imperfect

as we are. These are all facts that are repeated all through the Bible. We can be certain of these things. We can confidently place our hope in Jesus Christ!

Most Christians agree with this. My question is, how is this hope affecting your life right now? If it isn't making a positive difference, why isn't it? It might be tough to completely believe. If we truly place our hope in Christ, it must make a difference in how we live. Looking at the story of Paul, it's easy to see that his hope in Christ kept him going, even through so many terrible experiences. His eyes were on God rather than on his circumstances. In the story of Jeremiah, God gave him hope through the promise that God would eventually restore Jerusalem. God gave hope in the promise of the coming of a "righteous Branch" that would spring up in the line of King David. Jeremiah shows trust in God and hope for the future by buying property in the middle of a war. The hope was that someday God would bring peace and people would return to buy and sell property. Both Paul and Jeremiah placed their hope in the certainty of God's promises, and it made a difference in their lives. Over the coming weeks we are preparing to celebrate the coming of Jesus at Christmas. If you believe what God has said is true. If you place your hope in the goodness of God as shown through Jesus, how does it affect the way you live? Let's pray.

Loving God, your ways are far beyond our understanding. There is so much we would like to know, especially when things feel out of control. Although we could list many problems and struggles happening all around us in our lives, may we place our hope in you. Forgive us for getting caught up in our own worries. Help us to remember that you are in control, that you have the power to lead us in the midst of whatever we face in life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.