

## Becoming More Hopeful

Jeremiah 33:14-16; I Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36; Psalm 25:1-10 12-03-06

Advent is the start of the church year. This Sunday is the day when our Lectionary readings change from one gospel to the next, in this year's case from Mark to Luke, and when we begin the countdown to the commemoration of the birth of Christ. The color for the season is purple which signifies a time of penance or the coming of royalty. Penance seems more in order for the season of Lent, the color of which is also purple. So, the time of Advent is a time of waiting and watching for the appearance of royalty, the coming of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords who will reign forever and ever.

This first Sunday Dick and Joyce lit the Advent candle of Hope. Where would we be in life without hope?

As we move through life we hope for major and minor things, for survival in times of a devastating illness, for a long and lasting love, for children that will be a bit smarter and quicker than their parents. I have this kind of children.

When I was at home in Wisconsin for Thanksgiving one of my daughters replaced my cell phone with a new model. Somehow or other, my old one had gotten wet and was working on a rather sporadic basis. I think my child hopes I will be a little more careful with the new one. I am technologically challenged, big time. So, my hope is that I will figure out how to answer it and how to use it to its fullest extent. This little phone can even take pictures, a fact some of you have already learned. Of course, once the picture is taken it is lost forever in the phone until I can figure out how to find it again. Right now, my hope is that I will be able to have the time to read through the 130 page booklet of instructions that came with it. So far it has been a daunting project. But, in spite of a few frustrations, I have not lost hope, yet.

Do you remember the myth of Pandora and Epimetheus? The first humans to wander the earth, a little like Adam and Eve. All was perfect until temptation entered their lives in the form of a box left in their care by Mercury. As the story goes, Pandora was curious about the box and when she thought she heard voices coming from it decided to open it and take a little peek inside. Now, Jupiter had malignantly crammed into this box all the diseases, sorrows, vices, and crimes that afflict poor humanity; and the box was no sooner opened, than all these ills flew out, in the guise of horrid little brown-winged creatures, closely resembling moths. These little insects fluttered about, alighting, some upon Epimetheus and some upon Pandora, pricking and stinging them most unmercifully. They then flew out through the open door and windows. Pandora had closed the box very quickly after being stung by its contents. But as she listened she heard another voice saying, "Open, open, and I will heal your wounds! Please let me out!" Fortunately, Pandora reopened the box and released Hope. It left the box rather weakly but is far more potent than any of the evils. For when all else seems to be lost, Hope lives on. It can heal all the evils of the world, the legend tells us. And this seems to be true for there always seems to be hope for the future no matter how dark the present may be.

That hope for the nation Israel was the coming of the Messiah. While the carol "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" tells us Isaiah 'twas foretold it..." that is not the only prophet who looked to a more positive future and the fulfillment of God's promise. Our reading this morning from Jeremiah is another place the promise is predicted. While, we,

as Christians, point to these readings as prophecies foretelling the coming of Jesus, they are not specifically so. Some Jews accepted Jesus as the Messiah who was to come, more did not. And so Judaism continues to look for its Messiah. The Jews live in hope and expectation.

While Jeremiah speaks of the first coming of the Messiah, the reading from the gospel of Luke speaks of the Second Coming of Christ. We moved into this arena last week when we looked at apocalyptic literature in the Bible. This reading seems to stress that the return of Jesus, something the disciples believed would occur in their lifetimes, was going to be a great relief after the mess the world had gotten itself into. Jesus warns in this reading that people need to be prepared for his appearance. They needed to read the signs around them.

Jesus' contemporaries lived in the hope that he would come back to them. They wanted him to return following his death and to catch them up with him as the kingdom of God was established on the earth. This was going to be a time of selection, a time of sifting and winnowing, a time of choosing who would be in this Kingdom and who would not. This promise of the coming Kingdom kept people working to establish the new Way so that many would be saved at the time of the Second Coming. As time passed, nothing happened, Jesus did not appear again and those who had waited so faithfully died, but others took their places and becoming more hopeful, carried on watching and waiting.

As we watch and wait in our day and age. While we may not expect the appearance of Jesus riding to the earth on clouds, we may expect the dawning light of his way within us if we will only allow it. We are the gatekeepers of what we allow to touch us and what we deny entry. If we believe, in our arrogance and pride,--that we do not need to have within our beings the memory of the life and teachings of Christ, that we can go it all alone, we will keep out much that has great value. Of course, I am preaching to the choir, for we all know and understand this at some level of consciousness. But if we have hope in our hearts and minds and souls for a better future for ourselves we can begin to move forward in the manner of Christ.

A wise person once wrote, "Hope works in these ways; it looks for the good in people instead of harping on the worst; it discovers what can be done instead of grumbling about what cannot; it regards problems, large or small, as opportunities; it pushes ahead when it would be easy to quit; it "lights a candle" instead of "cursing the darkness."

Those words tell us that hope has the capacity for giving us a new outlook on life. It tells us we need not be defeated by what is going on all around us but that we will be able to find new doors to open that will lead us to new vision and to new progress.

As we work on becoming more hopeful about the life around us and about our world which seems so mired in despair and a loss of direction we must make sure that we allow the coming light of Christ to enter and inform us as we embark on our Advent journey.

- Amen