

## Awakening to New Hope Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 1:24-37 Psalm 122 11-27-11

As most of you know, I traveled to Wisconsin this past week to spend Thanksgiving with my daughters and their families. I carry many hopes with me as I fly from here to there. I hope for decent weather, for a Packer victory on Thanksgiving and for a warm and wonderful holiday with my family. This year I also hoped that my aunt would wait for me to get home so that I could say a final farewell to her. She did and died very peacefully on Thanksgiving day. This coming Tuesday I will return to Wisconsin to officiate at her memorial service.

I never expect these things, I just hope they will. I have found, when I rigidly expect one result or another, something always goes wrong and I end up disappointed or hurt. Hoping instead of expecting is a far gentler thing for all concerned.

All of my hopes were realized on this trip. The weather was mild, the planes were on time and the hours spent together as a family were very nice. Isabelle did not like the look of the “big chicken” we were cooking, but she loved the rest of the goodies on the table. We were all reminded how different things appear through the eyes of a child. She now chatters almost non-stop and is speaking in full sentences. It's mazing to observe the way we all develop—something I missed with my own children.

Our hopes are very small ones compared to the hope the nation Israel gleaned from the words of the prophet Isaiah. This reading comes along during the Advent season reminding us, that, no matter how dark our former days may have been, there is the promise of a brighter future. Israel calls out God to come down and straighten things out, not to leave the nation floundering around. The people hoped that God would sustain the nation of God's chosen people and eventually they would see the right way of living and moving and having their being. They wanted to be clay in the hands of the potter. Of course, this did not happen quickly, but it gave those who had ears a chance to hope. God, through Isaiah, awakened the people to new hope.

Often, we Christians, take these prophecies as a sign that Christ is coming. They were not written with any specific person in mind. They were written to give the people hope that a messiah would arise and lead them from the wilderness of their souls. Many still wait for this to happen.

The gospel of Mark speaks of the end times. The author reminds us that we need to stay awake to see what it is that is coming, even though we never know the day or the hour when we will enter God's kingdom. Jesus told people to be ready, to watch and to wait and to make their lives all they could be. They were to note the signs around them and become the very best humans possible. They were to love and forgive one another, find joy in life and share the hope that they would be sustained until the end would come.

Advent is the season of waiting and watching and preparing for the light to come into the world in the person of Jesus. It has become, for most of us, a hectic time of year. One that sees us scrambling to find the right gifts for those we love, decorating our houses to reflect the season, and just feeling worn out by the time Christmas rolls around.

We are surrounded by news that is not at all good about the economy, about death and taxes. We lose sight of the light that is promised to lead us from times of doubt and despair into a better world. We look outside ourselves for some beacon of hope. Perhaps, we are looking in the wrong place. Maybe we need to look within and discover the light that is already there. That precious light we are called to share with those around us. The light represented by our first Advent candle that reminds us of the hope, we as God's people, should have—a light that needs to be fanned into something stronger and brighter. A light that will serve as a beacon to others.

As I was writing this I thought of that hymn, “Lead, Kindly Light.” “Lead, Kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on. The night is dark and I am far from home; Lead thou me on. Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.”

We are called to consider and follow the light that Jesus brought to the world through his life and teachings. And, we are also called to let our lights shine so that we can find our way, together, through any encircling gloom we may encounter. Together we can find hope for our future. We may stumble and fall but there is always a pathway that can be illuminated by joining our lights and hopes together. As the nation Israel learned and, as the followers of Jesus have known all along, “The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.” The light of hope and promise still shines on us, within us and through us.

Amen