

“Hope is the Icing on the Cake”

Salado UMC, Salado, Tx 76571—Preaching Text: Isaiah 64:1-9

29 November 2020—First Sunday of Advent

+++++

“Hope is a waking dream”—Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC).

+++++

Hear the day’s lesson:

[64:1] O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence--

[2] as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil--
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

[3] When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

[4] From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

[5] You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself, we transgressed.

[6] We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

[7] There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

[8] Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

[9] Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,

and do not remember iniquity forever.

Now consider, we are all your people (Isaiah 64:1-9).

The season of Advent is a season of expectation and anticipation. That is, we Christians trust that God will deliver on God's promises to God's people. Advent, in essence, describes why Christmas—and the coming of the Messiah—is necessary in the first place. If human beings were able to save themselves, then God would not be necessary in the human experience of life and death. We human beings needed someone or something to break in on us from the outside, as it were, to come and save us. This is the function of the Messiah—to come and save the people of God. Thus, in Advent, we move from the despair of our situation to the joy of knowing that God will come to save us.

Thus, there are two key features of Advent. First, there is the despair of our own limited resources to fix what ails us. We sense that life and we, too, are out of control. A second feature is that we also celebrate at Advent the bold confident conviction in God and God's promise to deliver God's people. This is the light and joyous side of Advent. Thus, the bad news of our situation without God is that our situation overwhelms us with the bad news of our human condition. But the good news is our prospect of God's promise of Emanuel—God with us!

My friend, Jerry Chism, wrote the following a few years ago, but the message for today is as vital now as it was 2000 years ago:

I was looking through some of my "old stuff" back in November and found some Christmas cards that I'd stored away in a shoe box. They were cards my family had exchanged through the years and some of them were quite old. I put several of them up in my office at home so that I would remember those I love who are now gone from me during the Christmas season.

As I was looking at them on this first day of 1995, I wondered about what my grandparents, aunts and uncles, and parents must have thought about the future back when they exchanged those cards. There was one that simply read, "Merry Christmas" on the cover, that was from one of my relatives to my grandparents dated 1937. During the Depression the future was not only uncertain . . . it was quite gloomy.

There was a card that read, “Christmas Blessings” on the outside. My uncle sent it from in England in 1943, just before a German bombing raid seriously injured him. None of them had any idea of what the future held for them.

There was another sent from my parents to my grandparents right after I was born. Although the future looked exciting back in the early 1950’s, no one really knew what was yet to be.

None of us knows what is to be in 2021, but I pray that your family and mine will remember that God’s love never leaves us alone in our uncertainty. My prayer is that you and I will put our faith and trust and hope in Jesus Christ.

Did you ever hear or read these words of Rosalind Russell, which appear on the Shubert theater in New York? She wrote them shortly before she died:

**Trust Him when darkest thoughts assault thee, Trust Him when the faith is small,
Trust Him when to simply trust Him is the hardest thing of all.**

Why is hope important? Well, life is difficult. There are many obstacles. Having goals is not enough. One has to keep getting closer to those goals, amidst all the inevitable twists and turns of life. Hope allows people to approach problems with a mindset and strategy-set suitable to success, thereby increasing the chances they will actually accomplish their goals (Scott Barry Kaufman, 2011, *Psychology Today*).

From *Parade Magazine* comes the story of self-made millionaire Eugene Land, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. The school asked Mr. Lang to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak impromptu. “Stay in school,” he counseled, “and I’ll help pay the college tuition for every one of you.” At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, “I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling.” Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school (*Parade Magazine*). Hope makes all the difference. Ask those kids from Harlem—or Isaiah!

David Mosser, Salado UMC, Salado, TX 76571