

“What is Hope?”
Advent I midweek – December 5, 2018

Romans 8.24:

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

Proverbs 13.12:

Hope deferred makes the heart sick but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

No we don't need more sleep. It's our souls that are tired, not our bodies. We need nature. We need magic. We need adventure. We need freedom. We need truth. We need stillness. We don't need more sleep, we need to wake up and live. – Brooke Hampton

Advent. It is the Season of Hope – after a long, green season of growth and deepening our roots in faith through the summer Sundays of Pentecost, we've turned the corner into a brand new year and a brand new season – the season of blue – the Season of Hope.

But what is hope, anyway? Is it truly what Emily Dickenson wrote, “hope is a thing with feathers...”? Or, is it a *wish* coming true, as in “I hope I get a bicycle” or “I hope I get into the college that I want?”

Is hope a *desire of the heart* that we fear won't come true, as in “I hope we meet again,” or “I hope my children grow up in the church...”

If people before us have already received what they yearned for and waited for and prepared their hearts for – then why do we go through the motions as if we, too, are still waiting for Messiah to come – when our faith whispers to us that we've been there/done that?

What is our hope this Advent season? What is your hope tonight?

One of my most conspicuous acts of first world consumption is that I order my Christmas tree through the mail. I've been doing it for years – because (in my own defense) I once knew a family in Appalachia who grew and sold Christmas trees as their livelihood. They planted more than they cut each year, and their community did the same. I liked that idea, so I have gotten my Christmas tree each year from them. In a box. Delivered by Fed Ex. To my driveway. Usually a 6-7 foot Fraser Fir.

I love these trees because they last at least until Ground Hog day, which is when my husband forces me to take it down. But it is always still supple, still smelling like the forest.

The only downside to this December tradition is that I can't decorate my mail order tree right away, because it takes at least a week for the branches to relax from being bound and shoved into a box for their trip to Stilwell, Ks.

Last night I sat next to my tree. The smell was amazing. And I noticed its branches were starting to relax.

I think that is what Advent hope is all about. It's about relaxing into the space you have been given. It's about taking life's moments and days as they come, being refreshed by water and freed from the restrictions we place upon ourselves.

Advent can be a time like that, when we not only are keenly aware of serving others, but a time when we can relax so that we can enjoy every sight, sound, smell and taste of all the traditions we have loaded on to the point of our Advent trek, Christmas.

Some of you may enjoy every moment of the hustle and bustle and activities and festivities. Some may find the Christmas Spirit in treading over familiar and well-worn paths more slowly. But as you approach the manger, be aware of the rhythms of Advent: the quiet and the busy, the crowded and the solitary, the thrill of gift giving and the intimate moments of sharing with someone you love.

Advent Hope involves all of the preparations – the waitings, the yearnings, the excitement, the quiet – the promise that God is not uninvolved in how we spend our days, but especially since the Bethlehem event that changed human history – God is Emmanuel, God with us.

Just like my as yet unlit, undecorated fraser fir, waiting patiently for a day that is coming -- relaxing, breathing, preparing for the time when it will fulfill what it was born to do -- to bring light into the darkness, to nestle gifts below its branches, to become the center of a home filled with family and love. And a hope that expects God's promise...

...sort of like us. Amen.

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