

Advent 2 (2024)

Hope. Without it, life would not be fit to be lived.

With it, all is changed. Hope gives us the ump to carry on even in difficult circumstances, to dare and try new things, to face danger and uncertainty, to sparkle, build and grow.

Four hundred eighteen years ago almost to the day, hope is what enabled a group of Englishmen to board three ships – the Susan Constant, the Godspeed and the Discover -- and head for the New World.

On April 29, 1607, their hope was rewarded as 103 men and boys arrived at Chesapeake Bay.

Without hope, they would not have made the journey. Without hope, they would not have

stayed and faced the hardships that accompanied putting down roots on this side of the Atlantic.

Closer to our own time, 83 years ago this country faced one of its greatest challenges.

The Empire of Japan launched a naval and air attack on Pearl Harbor.

A total of 2,393 Americans were killed, and 1,178 others were wounded, making it the deadliest attack against the United States until the Sept. 11 attack of 2001.

What gave the people of this republic the resolve and fortitude to unite and meet this great national tragedy? /// Hope. Hope for victory – yes -- but ultimately hope for a more secure world.

President Roosevelt set the tone for the hour in his address to Congress the following day:

“With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph so help us God.”

Hope propels action and inspires confidence even in the most difficult of times.

Closer still to home, hope is why there is a church here on this knoll in Blue Ridge today.

Services began on June 7, 1987, as almost an experiment to see if there was enough interest to establish an Episcopal Church in this town.

Thirteen people showed up for that first service; the following Sunday a few more came.

But, as summer and later winter came, there would be Sundays where there were only a handful, maybe two, four or six.

It would have been easy to give up and abandon the whole project, but thankfully this did not happen. Hope prevailed.

Hope is the catalyst for everything that is good in our world. Without it, we would perish as individuals and as a race.

The Second Sunday in Advent might well be called “The Sunday of Hope”, this designation coming from the Epistle appointed in the Book of Common Prayer.

Taken from Romans 15, the passage begins with these words: **“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”**

It ends on the same note:

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

We can learn at least two things from this passage.

First, the source of hope. God is that source and He wants us, according to this last verse, to abound in it . . . that is, have lots of it!

If He did not exist, if we were here by random chance (which is a pretty silly idea considering the complexity of the natural order including humans) there would be little reason for hope.

Our existence would be a fluke, and our continued presence on this earth tenuous.

But thank goodness, that is not the case. There is a Creator who loved us into being and

who sustains us day by day, who supplies our daily bread.

More than that, this Creator has chosen to pull back the veil and reveal His face.

From the prophets of old time and now from the Incarnate One we can know where we came from, what our problems are as humans, what God had done to address this problem and where we are going.

The source of much of our anxiety and discontent is that we forget God, we take our eyes off Him. We think life all depends on *us*

When we do this, it is easy for us to slip into the ‘slough of despond’.

But faithless fears and worldly anxieties don’t have to control and defeat us. When they come, we have only to redirect our focus back onto the God of all hope. ///

Today's Epistle has another focus as well. We learn from it that God is not only the source of hope, but that this supernatural hope comes to us through the scriptures. For this reason, this Sunday is commonly called **Bible Sunday**.

The Bible is the story of God's faithfulness. He stays true to His promises even when His people prove faithless.

The prophecies found in the Bible come true.

Paul in today's Epistle specifically highlights those prophecies concerning the Gentiles. God's plan all along was to join those outside the family of Abraham with His people Israel . . . to make of twain one people.

He quotes Deuteronomy 32:43: **“Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.”**

By the time Paul wrote Romans many Gentiles had received the Gospel and had been grafted into the family of Abraham. A single worldwide family was already emerging.

God's faithfulness in the past gives us cause for hope in the present.

For example, in the New Testament we find Jesus giving His followers this promise: **“Lo, I am with you always even unto end of age.”**

Another promise concerns our personal future. This life is not it. **“I go to prepare a place for you,”** says Jesus in John 14. And then as if to underscore this promise, He adds, **“If It were not so, I would have told you.”**

We can take these promises and others found in the Bible to the bank.

Christians are called to be people of hope in an uncertain world. It is easy to become fearful.

The antidote to fear is to read our Bibles. There we find that God is working out His purposes with each passing day and year . . . not on our timetables, mind you, but on His. This is where patience comes in.

Do you ever want God to act now? To blow evil out of the water with a bang?

I suppose we all have this impulse. We are not alone. Long ago, the psalmist in a desperate moment, cried out: **“Up Lord, why do you sleep?”**

From the scriptures, we learn God is not asleep. His delay is not slackness but kindness, giving people more time to get on the lifeboat.

The sacred writings mediate hope but are also wonderfully practical. They give us instruction for daily living. Paul writing to his younger colleague Timothy, says:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

The question is: Are we availing ourselves of the practical instruction found in the Bible? Are we allowing it to be “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path”?

During 16th century men like William Tyndale risked their lives by translating the Bible into English.

People were excited about hearing God’s oracles in their own tongue. Today Bibles are plentiful. Sadly, though, in many homes their covers remain closed.

As we prepare for Christmas, why not make the Bible an open book? You might want to

begin by reading through one of the Gospels and then moving to Acts, the first volume of church history. Then, you can decide where you want to go from there.

On this Sunday, we are reminded that God is the source of hope, and that the Bible is the chief means by which we take in that hope.

But one final thought before I close:
Possessors of hope (which includes all of us if we are Christians) are called to be purveyors of hope. Can that be said of you and me? ///

Be a light. Let the whole world know God is in control. Be a beacon of hope in this dark world.