

## **Advent 1, Year A,**

Sermon by Rev. Glenn A. Brumbaugh

1<sup>st</sup> December, 2019

### **Isaiah 2:1-5 NIV / Matthew 24:36-44 NRSV**

Hope can be an elusive commodity, can't it?

We often seek and place our hope in so many aspects of our lives.

We hope that our job will give us security and fulfillment.

Our family and friends, particularly our children,

can be great sources of hope for us.

We have hope that our physical journeys will be healthy and long.

We seek hope in the institutions and foundations of the world around us,

those tenets of our country and culture that give us security,

in human nature itself

Yet many events in our lives can cause us to lose our grip on what gives us hope.

I'm sure we can all identify with jobs we've had

that have caused us frustration,

where it seems like we don't seem to be making an impact

or getting very far ahead.

Sometimes our hope can be shaken in our connections to family and friends.

We want the best for those we care about

yet often they make choices and take actions

that we see as not living up to the potential

That we expected them to achieve in life.

Our own life journeys can leave us in the lurch as well.

Has any of us really ended up where we thought we would be  
at this stage in our lives?

Some may have not even thought they'd reach the stage they're at now.

It's not just our own personal spheres that can shake our hold on hope.

Events in the larger world can shatter the hope

That we placed in those institutions we counted on.

Governments can go astray and erode those protections

That we never thought we'd have to worry about;  
our leaders can let us down

and not show the compassion and caring we expect.

When faced with hopelessness, we often look to other times to find hope.

We look to the past, to what we remember as better times,  
when the world made more sense,  
when there seemed to be promise in the future.

We wish for a return of the "good ole days."

Some, however, set their sights on the future,

putting their hopes on the promise of better days to come.

Regardless of where we seek hope,

we tend to focus on keeping ourselves busy in the here and now.

We stay involved in the present day to day activities of life,

going about our days with our attention  
on the very human tasks of a human life:  
we go to work, we socialize with family and friends,  
many marry and have families, and so on.

These become the things that give us joy and we carry on through carrying on.  
Our scripture lessons this morning are full of these themes.

In Isaiah, we have the hope for the future,  
written down in a time when its readers  
were under the control of a conquering enemy,  
living in exile in a foreign land.

They had lost everything, and had to rebuild their lives and culture from scratch.

The prophet offered them hope in a future redemption  
under a leader who would usher in  
a golden era of peace and tranquility.

Likewise in Matthew, we have people who had lived for centuries  
under brutal oppression and foreign domination in their own land.  
By the time Matthew was written down, most of them were again exiled,  
this time throughout the known world, scattered to the wind.  
As followers of Christ, they desperately clung to the hope of his return,  
and many eagerly looked for signs  
that promised redemption was soon at hand.

Yet a generation then two had come and gone,

and there still was no redemption,  
no relief from the struggles they faced.

In Isaiah, they likewise found themselves quickly  
under the control and domination of a foreign conqueror,  
longing again for the hope of promised redemption.

So in a very human way, they began to find ways  
to fit into the normalcy they could create for themselves.

They married and had careers and families,  
and focused on the here and now,  
sometimes at the expense of the gospel they were called to spread

Jesus addresses this very human condition

in comparing the current generation to that of Noah.

In Noah's day life carried on as if all was well, people married and had children,  
confident in the hope of a future for the next generation.

Yet they were still living in the time of God's choosing,  
and were caught up in the course of events like everyone else  
and were likewise caught unawares when the flood waters came.

In the early Christian community you also had the opposite,  
those who thought the signs were clear of Christ's imminent return,  
and no longer saw the point in living a productive, evangelical life,  
Instead they were content to look to the skies  
for that cataclysmic sign of Christ descending from the clouds.

That is the struggle of living in the “between time.”

There is the hope of a future redemption  
yet the uncertainty of when that time will come.

It is a liminal space frustrating in its lack of clarity and definition.

The end could be tomorrow or the end could be a millenia down the road.

Jesus reinforces this uncertainty in stating  
that not even the angels nor he knows God’s timeline for the end of things.

So the only reasonable course is to be ready, to be prepared;

to live your daily life as if it were the last day.

That doesn’t mean you abandon the routines of life in the world in which you live,  
but you live out that life with the hope of a promising future.

You live into the kingdom of God that draws nearer.

How do you live your life?

Where do you find hope in the “in between” time in which we live?

Jesus is the hope promised in Isaiah and offers the hope of a future through him.

But it isn’t just about having hope.

It’s also about giving hope.

In the rest of this chapter and the next, Jesus tells three parables

all with messages defining our role in staying prepared and being ready.

None of these focus on sitting quietly in contemplation.

None of these stresses only making sure you yourself get your ticket to heaven.

They all stress working to bring hope to others.

The last of these parables ends with the line,

“whatever you did not do for the least of these, you did not do for me.”

Those that did not offer hope to the hopeless,

in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats

did not have a good time

when called to account before their Creator.

French poet and novelist Victor Hugo wrote,

“Hope is the word God has written on the brow of every man.”

How do people see hope through you?

Is it clearly evident when they look at you as if it were written on your brow?

How do you offer hope to those in need of hope,

and how do we as a community of faith be the beacon of hope we are called to be?

This morning those are not simply rhetorical questions.

You may have noticed you have an extra half sheet of paper in your bulletin.

Today instead of having a video to meditate on the Word,

our meditation and call to serve are interactive. You have work to do.

As we listen to our musical interlude, you have two assignments.

The first is to write down one thing you can do

to offer hope to another person this week.

The second task is to list one way we as a community of faith

can offer hope to the community around us.

At the end of the service, you can drop them in the offering plates at the back  
as a way of symbolizing your commitment to God to work

in not only seeking hope in the promise of God's eternal future,  
but sharing that hope in a tangible way with others.

Let us take time to reflect on how we can be God's people of hope

in a world that finds itself more and more lacking in hope of any kind. Amen.