

Friday — Hope and a Future

Read Jeremiah 29:11-14. This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. It was spoken by our Lord through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel who were in exile at the time and had been for quite a while. They were losing hope of ever returning home again. But the Lord wanted to remind them that even though it may seem like a long time and that it may seem as though He had forgotten them, they were still very much on His heart and in His mind. The Lord's plans go far beyond the here-and-now of our thinking and the same is true for us still today. Granted, we aren't in any kind of exile and in fact, many of us live relatively easy lives. But there are still stresses and heartaches and challenges that we face which can sap our hope and can bring on discouragement or even depression. We, too, need to hear our Lord's assurances – He has a plan! And a plan FOR US! The awesome thing is that His plan is the same plan He held out to His people thousands of years ago. It is the same hope and the same future. His message to us? No matter what we're facing, no matter how difficult life may seem, no matter how forgotten we may feel, we are not alone. We have a God who loves us, a God who has great plans for us, and a God who has given us hope and a future!

Saturday — O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

To end the week of devotions, I invite you to take time to listen, sing, and reflect on a powerful and ancient hymn of Advent, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." It is a hymn that speaks of the Advent themes of hope, anticipation, prophecies, fulfillment. I encourage you to listen to this recording by the a cappella group Pentatonix (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCDvc4G7EgI>). Let our ongoing prayer throughout this Advent season be just that – come, O come, Emmanuel!



What Now?

Be praying for people in your life who may not be connected to a church or who may not know Jesus. Pray for them and for an opportunity to extend an invitation for them to join you for worship this Christmas.

This week's *Bring It Home* devotions were written by Pastor Glen Schlecht.
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Monday — Hope!

Yesterday we were able to experience a beautiful and fun musical celebration of Christmas entitled, “Hope!” And that’s a powerful promise and assurance that our Lord intends and desires for us to experience in this season of the year. As we’ve been talking about the past several weeks, the season of Advent is about watching, waiting, and preparing – preparing for Jesus’ coming, His “advent.” A significant part of that preparation, even the foundation of that preparation, is the hope we have. Read Romans 15:13 where St. Paul speaks to us about the God we worship and serve. Aren’t those powerful promises?! Hope has been part of God’s Story from the very beginning. Adam and Eve were given hope in the promise of the “seed,” the Savior who would come to save them from their disobedience and sin. The prophets spoke of hope for God’s people time and again, especially when the going got rough, reminding them of who God was and the promises He had made. And then came Jesus! In Jesus, hope took on new meaning, as hope became flesh and blood. Hope is ours to claim because of that glorious moment of fulfillment, when in a stable in Bethlehem, a baby was born. Through faith in that baby who was our Savior, hope remains alive for us still today. Give thanks for this amazing gift and the many expressions that we know of the hope we have and can experience in our lives today.

Tuesday — More than a Wish and a Prayer...

Read Hebrews 11:1. When we talk about hope from our Christian standpoint, it is a far stronger word than how it is normally thought of in today’s vernacular. When people talk in general about hoping for something, it typically is nothing more than a wish and wishful thinking. “I hope I get this for Christmas!” “I hope I get better soon.” “I hope next year will be better.” The difference for us as Christians is that hope resides in the very character of God and is who God is – as St. Paul puts it in Romans 15:13, our Lord is “the God of hope.” God is the source of the hope we have and our hope as Christians lies in Jesus Christ and what He accomplished for us by way of a cross and an empty tomb. Our hope lies not in this world but in the promise of eternity that is ours and is a certainty for all who believe in Jesus (John 3:16 and John 11:25-26). This hope we have is a hope we hold to through faith – and faith not just in a general sense but faith in Jesus. That is a hope that goes FAR beyond wishful thinking. The hope we have is grounded in a person and a promise and a God who is faithful. When we find ourselves “up against it,” (whatever “it” may be) it is our faith in Christ Jesus that grounds us once again, reminding us that no matter what we have to face, we can be sure of the hope we have that there is nothing in this world that can take away the life, the promises, the forgiveness, and the love that we know and have in Jesus. There is much that we cannot see yet, particularly the glories of heaven, and yet we can embrace it with the same certainty as if it were right in front of our very eyes. That’s not just wishful thinking, my friends, that is faith in our victorious Savior, the same babe of Bethlehem that we think of and worship during this season.

Wednesday — Hope Overflowing!

Read Romans 15:13 to begin today, listening to some of the different pieces of “hope” that we have. What are some of the things that you’re anticipating and hoping for in these weeks leading up to Christmas? Anticipation and hope are some key themes for the season of Advent, particularly as we count down to Christmas but also keep in mind that we are waiting and watching for Jesus’ promised return at the end of time. As we thought about yesterday, the hope with which we are blessed goes far beyond wishful thinking – our hope is grounded in the “God of hope” whom we worship and serve. The hope we have as Christians is pretty amazing – so when St. Paul writes about us overflowing with hope, what is he getting at? How can we “overflow with hope”? Think about that for a moment. In part, it seems that we’re able to overflow with this gift and this assurance, not by our own thinking or work or anything else, but as our Lord continues to pour Himself and His gifts into us – gifts of joy and peace and faith and trust and the Holy Spirit at work in all of it! We need an “overflowing hope” because life can get pretty overwhelming at times. We pray with Paul in Romans 15 that our God of hope would indeed fill us with His gifts of joy and peace, helping us to put our faith and trust in Him, so that we will not only have hope but will be overflowing with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is that hope which can help us as we face the challenges and struggles and difficulties that we are hit with in our lives – an overflowing hope that will lift us up and remind us of the future hope and assurance we have because of Jesus. It is a hope that provides us with perspective of the bigger picture that faith in Christ and the life we’ve been given points us toward. Let our Lord fill you to overflowing today with His hope!

Thursday — A Word of Hope

Read Romans 15:4-5. Hang in there! Do you feel like you need to hear that from time to time in your life? I do! Because there are plenty of times that I just feel like giving up, throwing in the towel. But through faith in Jesus, we are called to not give up. And the reason for that is that we have a God and a Savior who has not given up on us. He could have – in many ways that seems like it might have been easier. But He didn’t. He persisted against all the advances and attacks of the enemy. He knew why He came into this world and was clear on His mission and purpose – to bring us back into relationship with Himself and to open up the reality of life forever with Him. How do we receive that hope and that assurance? What Paul laid out for us in Romans 15 is clear – we’ve got God’s own Word in our hands. And as Paul said, everything that was written in the past, all those stories of God at work, all the prophecies, all the promises, all that we have contained for us and passed along to us in the Scriptures, they were written to teach us and, ultimately, to encourage us. But we are also called to endure as we stay in the Word, as we stay connected to our Lord in prayer, as we live out our faith in service to others and to our Lord – and it is all of these matters that express the real hope we have. So hang in there! Stay in the Word and let the Lord continue to encourage you and fill you with His hope.