

Message for Sunday, November 30th, 2025

Scripture: Isaiah 2: 1-5

Title: Despair

Welcome

Announcements:

Giving Options; Special Offering for December is the Scholarship Fund;

Advent study “Seasons Greetings” starts today at 2PM. (video)

Special Thank you to Nancy Bowman for all her hard work for the

Thanksgiving Potluck. And the other volunteers (round of applause);

We are announcing the GIVING TREE theme for this year will be the food bank;

Toys for Tots box through mid-December;

Holiday gifts for staff basket in the foyer; staff are Pastor Jonathan, Val

Hansen, Billie Brooks and Angie Raulston;

Middle School items for cocoa bar;

Blue Christmas, December 14th at 4:30PM

Advent Readings (Nancy and Pat)

Week One – HOPE

Reader 2:

Today is the first Sunday in the season of Advent. Advent means “coming,” and in this season we prepare for the coming of Christ.

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We light the candle on the Advent wreath to remind us of the blessings that Christ brings to the world.

Reader 1:

The Advent wreath includes many symbols. The wreath is in the circle, with no beginning and no ending.

This reminds us that there is no beginning and no ending to God, and that God's love and caring for us never ends. The green branches are a sign of ever new life.

The candles tell us of the light shining into the world with Jesus Christ.

The colors of the Advent candles remind us of our need for God's help to be the people we should be.

The white candle, which we light on Christmas Eve, signifies the birth of Jesus.

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Reader 2:

Today we light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Reader 1:

The prophet Jeremiah spoke words of hope to Israel. He talked about the promise of Shalom and of a new beginning. We hope and pray for a world of peace and harmony.

Reader 2:

Hope is like a flame that warms and comforts us. As we light this candle, we celebrate the hope of the prophets and the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Both:

We continue to hope in God's promise that Christ will continue to fill our lives and the life of the world with love and joy and peace.

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Unison Prayer (Please say in unison):

Thank you, God for the flame of hope. As we prepare for Christ's coming, help us to share our hope with others.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

Song

Call to Worship

L: We begin the journey that leads to Christmas.

P: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

L: This is a journey of peace.

P: Let us beat swords into plowshares.

L: This is a journey of hope.

P: Let us walk with God.

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Unison Prayer

Everlasting God, we begin our journey toward Christmas with hope stirring within.

Teach us how to get ready.

Show how to prepare our hearts for Jesus.

Help us walk in your ways, as we put on your Son, Jesus Christ.

Guide us on your paths of peace and understanding, as we prepare our hearts anew for the road ahead. Amen.

Offering Lead In

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Song

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5 NRSV

2 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

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² In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

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³ Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

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⁴ He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.

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⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Meditation: Despair

Many years ago, my best friend died. I realized the other day that I haven't talked about that time in my life to much lately. Some of you met my

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friend's mother, you may remember our friend Jackie, who just passed away this past spring. She came out for Christmas with us for the past two years. It was Jackie's daughter who was one of my best friends in high school. We studied together, were in band and choir together. We never dated, it would have been like dating a sibling, disgusting and unthinkable.

I was in college in my freshman year, at the university of Valley Forge studying pastoral ministry. Like any young ministry candidate, I was quite passionate. I had certain views, views that dictated who could be considered Christian and who couldn't be. My thoughts and my beliefs left little room for people to express theological or belief differences. I wasn't cruel about my beliefs; I just wasn't flexible or willing to open myself up to other views. I was too worried about making it into heaven by believing and by extension studying the right thing.

I received a phone call from Jackie, asking for prayer. She told me that her daughter had been air lifted into Philly because she was having a medical emergency. I did what any dutiful theological student, heavily involved in the local church, would do. I called the prayer chain and started the people praying. The next day I was called by her father, Solomon, and told that she had died.

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Now even though I was young I was under no illusions about immortality. At this point in my life, I had already experienced the death of several friends, from car accidents, heart attacks, and my cousin, again from a car accident. Loss was upsetting but it isn't what caused the most problems. You see my beliefs at that time meant that I was fearful that my friend wasn't with God. She was not in heaven. You see her and I had discussed faith many times, we didn't agree on much of it at all. I couldn't reconcile that with my beliefs, instead, I was given to despair.

Not only did I mourn her loss, but I despaired that she was lost for all eternity. I was fearful that I would never see her again. Do you want to hear the really crazy part? Shhhhhhhhhhhh! She was presbyterian.

Now I'm playful with our former Presbyterians, but I share this story for a couple of reasons. One to show just how far I have come in my own beliefs and how I believe God works. I also share it because it was what I believed that drove me to despair. A complete and utter sense of hopelessness that one moment we are here, but if we don't believe, do and say the exact right things than we are lost for all eternity.

I share this story because in the past 19 years of ministry I have seen that all of us have stories of despair. They might not be times when we

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feared for someone's salvation. Or maybe it is. It might have been a time when we could not see the good things happening in our lives or our world because it seemed like so much bad was happening.

Today we light the Hope candle. After some prayer and thought, I decided that this year our advent messages needed to take a different approach. That I needed us to start us with the opposite of what the candle represents. Our scripture today is one that speaks of the hope of peace. There will come a time when the kingdom of God is so prevalent on earth that the reality of war is no more and that peace has come. When you first read this text, it seems only to be about peace-but the reality is we all know we are not at peace right now. We know that it feels like peace is a long way off. So far off that we may even put that peace into a future so far away that we will never see it.

Instead, this passage reminds us that the decision of hope means-not just a future hope, not something just off in the distance, but something that can happen now. It is a hope that things will be better today, that our weapons can be set aside today. If we do not approach our lives with that hope then we will give into despair. If we do not hope that God has grace enough for all of us then there is no way we can enter the kingdom of God.

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If we don't hope that we can love each other than there is no point in being together as a community. Hope gives us the possibility of a future but also the lived reality of the kingdom of God.

In our darkest times, in the times where we despair the most, things can change. You see I am sharing a very personal example and experience today, but it has irrevocably changed me to be the person I am today. I am trying to remind us that God's love is for all of us. Why? Because it is in that love that we have hope. You see I don't worry about seeing my friend anymore. I don't worry because I have the sure hope that God loves all of us. Take that hope for yourself, challenge yourself to see that hope and live that hope. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer/The Lord's Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song