

*Romans 13:11-14, Isaiah 2:1-5*

*Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Evie Macway*

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## Hope: Waiting on Tiptoe

Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! It is Advent once again. We turn our calendars to a new church year and we begin again this season of hope, expectation and light dawning here in our sanctuary and, we hope and pray, in our world.

Now a days it seems that by the time the season of Advent officially begins here in the church, these four weeks we very intentionally wait and prepare for the coming of God into world in the person of Jesus, our culture around us is already way ahead. Christmas decorations are out in the stores around Halloween. Catalogs have been arriving for weeks, if not months. Advertisements meet us at every turn, with scenes of bountiful tables, beautiful clothing and accessories, and toys and gadgets for children and adults alike, all that invite us lean into this season of anticipation and expectation, fully into the waiting and hoping mode already. I often have this image of standing on tiptoe, like I did as a child when I just wanted to be that much closer to whatever or whoever was my heart's desire at that moment.

So when the first Sunday of Advent comes around and we begin our Advent waiting as a community of faith I often find myself working at slowing down and reminding myself, 'oh that's right, the waiting and anticipation of the Christmas season is not just out there. The toy companies and online stores didn't come up with the idea of a season of anticipating and hoping and wishing. It all started right here.' Advent is the original Holiday Season.

Now I know I am simplifying a lot with that idea. I am sure free market has had a lot to do with our ever expanding holiday season, but I found myself drawn this year to this idea of what it means to wait in anticipation, particularly to wait in faith. What is it we are doing when we wait?

As Christians today who have lived through many Advents and Christmas' already, some of us more than others, we are familiar with the already and not yet nature of this season. Advent reminds us that we are living in an in between time. Christ was born some 2000 years ago and, we believe, in many ways the reign of God the prophets, like Isaiah, whom we read this morning, envision and proclaim, is upon us through the man, Jesus. Jesus Christ is the one promised, the fulfillment

of all the prophecies of old. We even hear this understanding from Jesus when he quotes from Isaiah early in the gospel of Luke and says, following his baptism, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” (Luke 4:18). “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21). God is here, now.

And yet the world around us, and scripture as well, remind us that the fullness of God’s time has not yet arrived. Swords into plowshares and learning war no more are far from reality. Advent is the season in our church year when we both celebrate and affirm the birth of Christ, the one who comes to save us, and we remember that we are still a people in waiting, that God will come again. God is not finished with us. We still are leaning into what lies ahead with hope and anticipation.

In fact, I read a quote from Joe Phelps, a Baptist pastor friend of mine from my time in Louisville Kentucky who summed up the meaning of the Advent season very well I think. He writes:

Why Advent? The church has historically insisted on Advent before Christmas in order to bear witness to the inconvenient truth that the most significant act of defiance to be mustered in the face of life’s confusion and destruction is for a people to be shaped, again, by the primal hope that there is more in this life.

We need Advent because we need to be reoriented into the hope that is foundational to all that faith is predicated on: God. Advent refuses to analyze or explain God’s existence. Instead, Advent makes the bold pronouncement that, though darkness surrounds us, the God of Torah and prophets is not done. *Advent plays the long game*. It waits, like spectators at a close ballgame, for the next breakthrough, the next movement, the next flurry of action on the scene. Its words of longing, impatience, and pleading reveal our undergirding conviction that there is God, and this God is not relegated to the confines of history.<sup>1</sup>

This is our business during Advent – living into that primal hope that there is more to this life. That God is not done.

Our reading this morning from the prophet Isaiah is a good place for us to begin . One of the commentators I read on this passage cautioned any one preaching on

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<sup>1</sup> *Joseph Phelps, Highland Baptist Church, Louisville, KY, Preaching Advent Hope, Journal for Preaching, Advent, 2013, page 6.*

this text, “Don’t turn wine into water. One could hardly do better than simply to read this passage aloud in public, and often.”<sup>2</sup> I think he is probably right.

The words we read this morning from Isaiah are a proclamation. Clear and strong. This is not a prediction of what *might* happen. It is an affirmation of what *will* happen. It is not that God *might* come if we do this or don’t do that. This peace is not debatable or conditional. It is truth. These words are a firm, bold, powerful proclamation that the future, and even the present, belong to God.

It is strange to our ears, as it must have been to the people who first heard it. War, injustice, poverty, violence, hopelessness. Some things have not changed. The words Isaiah spoke seem so far from the present reality – then and now. Today still, we strain to hear them over the gunfire of wars, the continued unfolding of environmental disasters that silence life on land and in the sea, the voices raised in anger that only thinly veil the fears they seek to cover up.

And it is right here that we find our Advent hope. Advent is a poignant reminder that our life as Christians is all about living in the present, today, while leaning forward into the future God promises. God’s future colors our present. That is hope. This is the message of Advent. Our waiting is grounded in eyes-wide-open hope. This is what we are about. Jesus was born not in a palace but in a stable. The light of God’s love and peace will break into the reality we live in now, here. Advent reminds us that our faith is about living our lives right now, knowing that all of the world is ultimately in the hands of the God of peace and of justice we come to know in Jesus Christ. Hope makes all the difference.

Hope. The first candle we light each Advent season. Where the light that grows this Advent season begins. Hope. It is the faith we are living when we make the choice to raise a child, or plant a tree or work for peace and justice. Hope is what we are living when act on the love we have from God even when the world around us seems to tell us otherwise. Hope is acting today out of the sure knowledge that God has not given up on us. That God is not finished. That the peace and justice we read of in Isaiah will come.

This Advent season Irene and I have chosen to use some Advent materials created by A Sanctified Art. My understanding is that you used their materials last year as well. I did too in the church I served. A Sanctified Art is a team of artists and pastors who create resources for worship with a desire to spark imagination and faith in our worshipping communities.

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<sup>2</sup> *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pg. 70.

This year they have created a responsive liturgy for each Sunday based on the Advent candle word for the morning. Today's word, as I have mentioned, is Hope. Irene and I liked the liturgies so much we are planning to incorporate them into our Advent worship times this season.

The Sanctified Arts material this year is entitled From Generation to Generation. The liturgies invite people of different ages, of different generations to speak. This week Ainsley, Tana, Andrew and Kate will lead us.

This morning as we reflect on the hope in which we live this day let us listen to what nurtures hope in others:

Worship Leader: Over a hundred people, from the ages of two to eighty years old, were asked the question, "What gives you hope?" From the voices of different generations, hear their answers: .

Adult: My two-year-old son.

Child: Dogs wagging their tails.

Older Adult: Talking with young people.

Teenager: Kindness from strangers.

Adult: Spending time in the woods.

Child: Waffles.

Older Adult: Hands clasped in prayer.

Teenager: Social progress.

Adult: The way my son calls everybody "buddy."

Child: The ringing of church bells.

Older Adult: Babies trying over and over to take their first step.

Teenager: The turning of seasons.

Adult: Christian community.

Child: Books.

Older Adult: Friendship with my adult children.

Teenager: Advocates for justice.

Adult: Hearing children in the pews sing the hymns.

Child: The sunrise every single morning.

Older Adult: What gives you hope?

During Advent we remember that we are waiting people. We wait in hope. And we take up the Advent invitation, "Come let us walk in the light of the Lord." What nurtures your hope this year?