

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans  
“The Essence of Hope”  
Matthew 24: 36-44  
Pastor Jonathan

December 1, 2019

Have you ever felt hopeless? What kind of thoughts do you have at that moment? What plans do you make when you feel that way? Are they good plans? What brings you hope again, in that low place? Do you have anything you would like to share with others that may feel hopeless? It is good to think about this as we enter the Advent/Christmas season. Many have lost loved ones during this time. Others have many mixed reactions to the season for many different memories and reasons. Don't try to force joy on anyone this season. Don't force back your own ho-ho-ho, but don't try to make others love the season the way you do. Just some friendly advice. And remember, Christmas is not a season for competition in decorating...in my opinion. Enjoy what you can do and want to do.

Advent is a season where we celebrate the second coming of Christ before we celebrate the first coming of Christ, his birth, Christmas. The second coming of Christ brings up the subject of the end times. On this subject, Christians are divided. But we do agree that Jesus will return. The question, since his earthly ministry, has always been, “Will He find us faithfully carrying out His mission?” Matthew, whose Gospel we will be studying this year, puts it bluntly: “No one knows the time or the hour.” No one does. So I can't tell you when Jesus will return. I can say to you that it is interesting we are getting close to the exact date of two thousand years from Jesus' beginning of his ministry and crucifixion and resurrection. If Jesus died and rose again in 30 AD, then the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be in 2030, which used to seem like a science fiction year, but now is only 11 years away. In fact, if Jesus was born in 6 BC (yes, most scholars believe he was born a few years before the calendar was reset to his birth), then he started his ministry in 24 AD (Dr. Luke tells us in his Gospel in 3:23 that he began his ministry at age 30) and died in 27 AD. The 2000<sup>th</sup> year anniversaries would then be coming in 2024 and 2027 respectively. All of a sudden, the second millennial anniversary seems in reach, only five and seven years away...Could his second coming be on that anniversary? I don't know. I'm just getting your curiosity up for a major anniversary that the Church should be celebrating big time; more than any church building or ministry, in my opinion.

Jesus is coming again. That is reason for hope. But perhaps you need more encouragement to get you in a right relationship with Jesus. So he teaches in Matthew 24 that there will come a time, perhaps soon, when you won't be able to make the decision any more. You will be taken directly to judgment. So don't put off your decision to get right with Jesus Christ. Tell Him today that you want to know Him and love Him. Tell Him at His table that you give your whole life to Him: your car, your house, all the rooms of the house...walk through it with Him, give everything to him, your old storage units, your closets of stuff, your everyday living, your finances, your money, your treasure of all kinds. Because tomorrow it may be too late. Matthew was very succinct: two men were working in the field, one taken, one left; two women working at the mill, one taken, one left. (24:40)

I have a friend that I have known since the early '80s. He is a doctor and lives in the western provinces. He is a bright, gifted man, an accomplished author and has the Order of Canada. He has brought healing to thousands over his career. When it came time to accept the Lord, he did so, rightly and whole heartedly. But when it came to practicing his Christianity, he told his wife and friends that he didn't have time for that, and besides, people at church would ask him about their medical problems, and so that wasn't much fun at church, it was more like work. So he stopped going to church. And he said that he would definitely make time for the Lord, as his retirement project. He would do his Christianity whole heartedly in his retirement. But do you know what? He is retired now. And guess what? He hasn't got time for that... His story is to warn you and me about when to practice your faith, your trust in Jesus. Don't wait until you have enough time, because that time will likely not come. Today is the day to respond to Jesus. Don't hold back.

Paul says in Romans 13: 11ff., that it is time to wake up. The night of this broken life is nearly over. The new day will come with Jesus' return. So start living in light of the new day, not with the drunkenness and sexual immorality (no matter how you define yourself sexually), but with daytime activities that honour Jesus. In fact, clothe yourself with Jesus, which means let Him touch every part of who you are, privately and publicly; let Him be seen in every area of your life, not just the Sunday or small group part. And don't spend long hours trying to figure out ways of getting away from Him. Welcome His presence. And so we do today at the Table that belongs to Him.

Earlier in his book of Romans, chapter 5, Paul talks about the beauty of relationship with the Lord, that we have been justified through faith. This means that when we trust Jesus to forgive our sins, it is just as if we have not sinned. Jesus takes the penalty on Himself.

We have peace with God because of this relationship with Jesus. He puts us in good standing with God. And so we rejoice. We sing to Him in worship.

We can rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. That is, the time when we will see Him face to face. Where His glory will be the streetlights and the internal lights of our life.

But now, we don't see that kind of existence. We see the brokenness. We see the church making wrong decisions, being divided, not always following Jesus. But Paul tells us we can rejoice not only in the coming hope, once Jesus returns, or we go to be with Him, we can rejoice in our sufferings.

How is that possible? Nobody likes to suffer. Enjoying pain is not a mark of good health. No, we can rejoice when we suffer for our trusting Jesus, because Paul says we know that that kind of suffering produces perseverance in our relationship with the Lord, we can go through anything, and we have done so in the last several years here. We are going to make it.

Out of that perseverance, comes character, something that others may see that you don't see. They see you trusting Jesus, and they may not understand it. But in staying the course, pointing the ship toward the Lord, we find that our character is built, and that the Lord comes first in our life decisions and that He guides us faithfully. Out of that proven character of trusting Jesus comes a new kind of hope. It is a hope that sees beyond the current, broken circumstances. It is a hope that leans heavily upon Jesus, in spite of so many questions and challenges.

We live in such a time. It is time for you and I to lean heavily upon Jesus. Do so at His table. Ask Him to speak to you about how much you need his hope for the Church, for this congregation. Ask Him anew to give you His perspective on His Church, His bride.

Because hope does not disappoint us, Paul says. God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us. Re-read the first

five verses of Romans 5. Faith or trust in God is the assurance of things unseen, and being sure of what we hope for... (Hebrews 11:1)

How can you trust someone you can't see? How can you believe in something you can't see? Of course, we do so everyday, when we cannot see our loved ones, because they are not in the same room, or the same city, or the same country. We know they are there and they are real. We know the air we breathe is real. We know our lungs process that air, until that process breaks down and we need all kinds of medication to just breathe. Just breathe.

One of the major things that happens when we come to the Lord's Table is just hanging out with Jesus. Don't focus on the music. Don't focus on what your neighbor is doing or not doing. Just focus on Him. It's only a few moments, but they are critical. That is the moment to receive hope from Him. Jesus is the essence of hope.

He is the source. Come close to Him.

Let us pray.