

**ADVENT SERMON SERIES**  
**FROM HEAVEN ABOVE**  
**(1) THE GIFT OF HOPE**

Psalm 130:5-8

Romans 8:18-25

Matthew 12:15-21

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**SCRIPTURE**

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. <sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. <sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities (Psalms 130:5-8 NRSV).

<sup>18</sup>I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup>for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup>and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:18-25 NRSV).

<sup>15</sup>When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, <sup>16</sup>and he ordered them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup>This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>18</sup> “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. <sup>20</sup> He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. <sup>21</sup> And in his name the Gentiles will hope” (Matthew 12:15-21 NRSV).

## MESSAGE

Why are we so surprised by the passage of time? C. S. Lewis says:

We are so little reconciled to time that we are even astonished at it. “How he’s grown!” we exclaim, “How time flies!” as though the universal form of our experience were again and again a novelty. It is as strange as if a fish were repeatedly surprised at the wetness of water. And that would be strange indeed; unless of course the fish were destined to become, one day, a land animal – (CS Lewis in *Reflections on the Psalms*).

According to Lewis, we are surprised by time because time is not our natural environment. A fish is not surprised that it is wet because that is its natural environment. Our surprise over the passage of time is evidence we were made for something more.

Lewis borrows a German word to describe it – *Sehnsucht* (ZEN zucht). It is difficult to pronounce. It is even more difficult to translate. It can mean ‘intensely missing’ or “deep longing.”

Dean Nadasdy makes this observation on *Sehnsucht*:

It happens to us all. Inside of us is a feeling, more than a feeling, a conviction, that what we experience right now in real time is never enough. We long for something more and something better.

The apostle Paul sees it as universal when he writes:

“The creation waits with eager longing” (Rom 8:19).

It can happen in the midst of great pain. We sense that somewhere in time or beyond it, there has to be more, and it has to be better. It is not surprising to read Paul's observation:

“That the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (8:18).

It can happen in the midst of great elation. A glimpse of a beautiful sunset or a moment rich with love fills us with joy. We may even say, "It doesn't get any better than this!" But no sooner does the moment pass than we wonder when the next one will come.

It's as if what we have here and now is only a shadow of what is to come. It's as if earth is begging for heaven, and we live in the not yet. And yet in the not yet is just where

Christian hope is to be found. Paul repeatedly mentions hope in our reading from Romans 8. Anticipating something more and better, we wait, we imagine, we believe, and we grow in character. These are the four elements of Christian hope: waiting, imagination, faith, and character.

When we hope we are looking for something we don't have yet. It may be expected. It may be promised. But it is not here yet. So we have to wait.

But it is not a passive waiting. It's not like sitting in a waiting room reading a magazine or watching TV. Paul says it's like a woman in labor. It is waiting with effort. It is waiting in discomfort. It is waiting with intense expectation.

For what do we wait? Paul says we wait for "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" and we wait for our "adoption, the redemption of our bodies." All of that and more will be ours when Christ returns. So whatever we know about freedom or glory or being God's children or redeemed bodies pales next to what is still to come. There is more to come, and it is better, if we just wait.

The first element of hope is waiting. The second element of hope is imagination. When we hope we are longing for that which we cannot see. The Apostle says:

"Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?" (8:24).

In 1886, George Frederic Watts completed a painting that depicts a blindfolded woman in tattered clothes clinging to one last unbroken string on her harp. She cannot see, but she keeps playing and listening. Watts called the painting "Hope."<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup>"Hope," 1886, at the Tate National Gallery in London.

Jesus said to followers,

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29 NRSV).

At present we do not see Jesus. But we can see signs that he is with us. We can see evidence of his love. But there is more to come, and it is better. The day is coming when we will actually see Jesus. John says:

"Every eye will see Him" (Rev 1:7).

Meanwhile, though we may not see now, we can certainly imagine. Hope is nourished by our imagination. Read through the Prophets. They use image after image to indicate to God's people what lies ahead. Do you want to have hope? Then you need to engage your imagination.

The first element of hope is waiting. The second element of hope is imagination. The third element is faith. The author of Hebrews defines faith as:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb 11:1 NRSV).

Faith and hope are partners. Faith gives content to hope. Faith plants what we imagine in the sure promises of God. Faith pulls hope to one side and says, “Look, I know we're missing something. There's got to be more to it than this. Something more is coming. Something better is coming. God has promised.” So we wait. We imagine. We trust.

The fourth element of hope is character. Earlier in his letter to the Romans Paul writes:

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope (Rom 5:3-4 NRSV).

Suffering over time calls for endurance. Through this process our character is strengthened. And one of the virtues that comes out of the field of hardship is hope. We learn in the crucible of life that God can be trusted.

God gives us time, signs, promises, and even hardship. If we receive these with gratitude they become the elements of hope: waiting, imagination, faith, and character. Through

these we have hope, not just a wish, not even just a prayer, but real hope. In Paul's letter to the Colossians he describes this hope as:

Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27).

Jesus is our hope. His sacrifice on the cross, his love, his power, his understanding, his compassion, his victory over death, his promises, his grace, his very presence – all give us hope. And this gift, unlike so many we receive at Christmas, will never disappoint.