

**Advent Midweek 1: December 1<sup>st</sup> 2021**  
**“Stir Up the Power of Hope”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tonight, we hear again Paul collecting the faithful of both Jews and Gentiles, through the Old and New Testament times, as he first writes to the church in Rome words also for us, *“Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.’<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”<sup>1</sup>*

This Advent, we are going to be looking closely at the Collects that shape this penitential and preparatory time. The church uses the special term *collect*, so what does it mean? It is a prayer, so why don't we just use the word *prayer*? Language is important, and words matter; so, by calling it a collect we are in fact confessing something about these special prayers. If you remember from bible study this summer, we dug more deeply into the importance of the positions of these special prayers; some of that is summarized in the advent write-up found in various bulletins and the newsletter this month.

What is a collect? So, what is the collect of the day? It is a short prayer that collects the thoughts and connected themes of the readings for the day, and ties them together to prepare the hearers for what they should be listening for in the readings that will follow. As the pastor prays this collect on behalf of the people, the pastor faces the altar; then in a beautiful confessional act, the pastor will turn and speak the Word of God, that is God's response to the collect, to His people through the reading of His Holy Word.

Each Sunday of the Church Year, and every special feast and festival has at least one special collect that ties the readings together and prepares us for what we should be hearing. Just a bit of historical side-note, in the Anglican Church, the Collect for the Last Sunday of the Church Year says, “Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 15:12–13

of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." That collect isn't in our Lutheran list of collects, because it seems to teach works-righteousness. But in England it's so famous that the Last Sunday of the Church Year is called "Stir-Up Sunday." That's the day families go home and start stirring up Christmas pudding and other holiday treats. Prince Albert is supposed to have started that tradition.

We Lutherans do have "stir up" prayers, though—and in plenty of time for starting our holiday baking. As we will see, our stir-up prayers are not focused on our works. Our first "stir up" prayer is the Collect for the First Sunday in Advent, "Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."

This is one of the most theologically beefy prayers. It is one that boldly calls on our Lord Jesus to come and do what His Father intends. We ask that by his power he protect us, rescue us, deliver us from the threatening perils of our sins. Nothing here about rewards and pudding. It's all about rescue; to be rescued explicitly involves we cannot save ourselves. This was the purpose for Jesus' coming—coming as a child born in Bethlehem, coming through Word and Sacrament with His grace, and Him coming in all His glory at the end of the age.

It is on the certainty of this prayer being answered, that Jesus has come and rescued us, that we are now a people of hope; rescued by Jesus, who has stirred up His power and come, we are children of hope.

This is a word that is important to not misunderstand. Hope is always best when it's not something we invent or imagine. This is how it is often used, in a way that is synonymous with wish—"I hope the kids make it home for Christmas," "I hope to get all the cards in the mail by Monday," "I hope to get a hippopotamus for Christmas."

Real hope, hope that does not disappoint is based on a promise. This is how the Bible uses the word hope. It not just a wish that may or may not come to fruition; hope in the Scriptures is based on a promise from a God who never breaks, cannot break, a promise. When we hope in the Lord, it is a sure and certain fact.

Paul begins our text by recalling the promise spoken through Isaiah, “***The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.***”<sup>2</sup> Rescued by Jesus, who has stirred up his power and come, we are children with sure hope that is based in a promise. Isaiah has much to say about the promise of this root of Jesse. He will be born of a virgin.<sup>3</sup> “***His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Ever-lasting Father, Prince of Peace.***”<sup>4</sup> “***He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.***”<sup>6</sup> “***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***”<sup>5</sup>

The root of Jesse will do these things and more, so in Him the Gentiles-and all people- will hope. As a result, “***The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.***”<sup>6</sup> To help teach this, a custom that developed among German Lutherans and spread to many other Christian churches is the lighting of an Advent wreath. Each candle on the wreath signifies one week of Advent and each signifies a theme. The first candle, for example, signifies hope, given to us by Jesus, the Root from Jesse, the Promised Seed to Eve.

This reminds us of how faith begins, as a faint flame in our hearts. Born through the Word of God, poured out on us generously. Then, as we hear the word of God, as we don’t despise preaching and His word, but gladly hear and learn it, as we abide in the everlasting light of the Word of God, the light flickers and begins to grow steady. When the wick is removed from the source, the flame weakens and dies. When the wick remains connected to the source, stays in the wax, or the oil, of the candle in not only stays lit, but it grows stronger and brighter.

Hope in a promise as the Scriptures speak, gives something more. There is a by-product of this hope. Rescued by Jesus, who has stirred up his power and come, we’re children with the sure hope of peace. Paul continues, “***May the God of hope***

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 15:12

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 7:14

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 9:6

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 53:5–6

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 9:2

*fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”<sup>7</sup>*

Peace is another big word. It not just an emotion, but involves the entirety of life, body and soul. Many have forgotten advent and jump right to Christmas, even twisting peace from a Gospel promise and gift of God, to a work of the law. Peace pervades Christmas carols, and is plastered all over Christmas cards. Politicians and newscasters express blessings and wishes for peace. Maybe we get into the spirit of the season and actually try to put a little peace into action.

But if you think about it, living as children of peace shouldn't be that hard for us during the holidays, or any day for that matter. You and I have all the resources we need to be instruments of peace. The peace on earth that the angel choir celebrates at Jesus' birth is a proclamation; it's not a wish or empty aspiration.

With the birth of Jesus, who is the Sin-bearer of humanity who has died for our sin, God is at peace with us. Through the shed blood of His only-begotten Son, He declares you pardoned. The wrath of God's sin was poured upon Jesus on the cross, and He declared the war to be over. Payment is made. It is finished.

Through baptism, you have been given that peace of God that passes all understanding. Joined together in the body of Christ, you lovingly can lay down your arms of rebellion. Because God is at peace with you, you are at peace with God. There's no need to fake personal holiness. There's no need to get defensive. You are forgiven. There's nothing to prove. You are a sinner in need of rescue. So is everyone else here. So is everyone else out there.

Your goal is not to show everyone how great you are, or how much of a sinner you are; instead, you are free to simply announce the peace of God through Christ to your fellow saints and sinners so they too have that hope rooted and grounded in love, the love of God who sent His-only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. You do that patiently, with love, with an absence of hostility. You do that with Gospel words and actions that are befitting of God's children.

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 15:13

Jesus said, “***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.***”<sup>8</sup> This describes Jesus first of course, as well as those who are in Him. People who live in the peace of God in Christ are peacemakers. Instead of blaming, they forgive and focus on the new creation we are in Christ. We see badly behaved people not as enemies, but as lost souls Jesus wants to find.

We see ourselves as instruments of peace and dispensers of God’s grace and mercy because, “***We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*** <sup>13</sup> ***Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*** <sup>14</sup> ***Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*** <sup>15</sup> ***and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.*** <sup>16</sup> ***In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;*** <sup>17</sup> ***and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*** <sup>18</sup> ***praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.***”<sup>9</sup>

Usually, when an estranged couple comes for counseling, each wants to blame the other. They come loaded with evidence to prove their point. But since when did proving your partner guilty ever make for a peaceful, happy marriage? Blow off steam, sure. Then, "What can each of you do to improve your marriage?" As soon as each partner starts thinking that way, each partner becomes a peacemaker. It works not only in marriage. It works with co-workers, friends, and neighbors and those in the church. It can even work if it's one-sided. "What can *I* do to improve this relationship?" Ask it in prayer, search the Scriptures and God will answer. Sometimes we might not like the answer, sometimes it won't be well received, sometimes there are earthly consequences, but none of that changes the fact that Jesus made peace with God through the blood of His cross, and there lies our hope; there is our eternal peace.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:9

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 6:12–18

For children of hope that is pure joy. You all have heard about the man who told his pastor, "Pastor, you don't have enough joy. You need to be more joyful." Then he went on to criticize the pastor's sermons and just about everything else he did! It reminds me of the sign I saw on an office wall once that I should get for my study or the confirmation room, "The floggings will continue until morale improves."

Scolding someone for lack of joy is not how you make him joyful. Joy comes from the love and forgiveness of Christ. It is a fruit of the Spirit that He causes to grow. Joy is not the same as happiness. Like hope, it is not simply an emotion. It is something that is steadfast even in suffering. It rests on hope and lives in peace and is why we can say with Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Remaining ever in the true source of hope, we are free to rejoice in all circumstances.

With our hope secure, let us pray,

"Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.