

Sunday December 2nd, 2018



What are you hoping for?

A good test result? An interview? A mended relationship?

Hope is a funny word. To me, it's kind of a nebulous word for a nebulous idea or feeling. How many times do we say, "Oh, I hope so!" To your spouse or child, you might say, "I hope you have a good day." or "I hope you have a great time!" It's kind of like a wish.

Other times it's an expectation for something to happen or for someone to make something happen. We often put our hope in things, in people, in events. Recently, a lot of people placed their hope in a presidential candidate... hoping their candidate would win... and that their candidate would make our country a better place.

We aren't alone in that hope for an improved political climate. The Jewish people living more than two thousand years ago were hoping and wishing for rescue from the tyrannical rule of the Romans. They were hoping for the arrival of the Messiah to rescue them and bring about a just and peaceful kingdom.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent.

This is the day that many will observe by the lighting of the first candle in their advent wreath.

The candle of HOPE.

It's appropriate for the first candle to be the hope candle.

As weary people, we all have a longing or hope in our hearts. We hope for something better. We long for God to answer our prayers. I've been waiting a very long time for an answer to a particular prayer. Maybe you are waiting for a special answer, too. In Luke 1:1-25 we learn that Zechariah served as a temple priest and was married to a woman named Elizabeth. They were old and had nearly given up the hope of having children. Elizabeth felt great shame because of it. But, one day when Zechariah was serving in the temple an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that God had heard his prayer and his wife would give birth to a son and that he was to name this baby, John.

This baby wasn't going to be any ordinary baby. God had big plans for him.

The angel told Zachariah...

"He will go before the Lord in spirit and power like Elijah. He will make peace between parents and their children and will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking, to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord." Luke 1:17

After John grew up, he became known as John the baptizer and did exactly what the angel said. You might know him best for this statement, *"I am a voice from the barren wilderness, shouting as Isaiah prophesied, 'Get ready for the coming of the Lord!'"* John 1:23

Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews and us, came. He walked on earth. He healed people, performed miracles, and told people how they could be a part of his kingdom. And then, he took on all the sins of the world, conquered death, and rose again. Before he left the earth to return to be with the Father in heaven, he told us that he would be back. He also told us that he would never leave us or forsake us.

Today as we light the candle of hope...

We know that our hope is not an empty hope. I love these lyrics... "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Jesus freed us from sin and shame. He made a way for us to live in love and joy and peace.

Whatever our circumstance Jesus has provided a way for us. And he has placed in our hearts a desire for something more than this world has to offer. We know that God has something better for us. And yet, while we are here, we should not only live in hope and expectation but live well because of that hope. Because Hope with a capital "H" resides in us... We get to be Hope-givers to a weary and hurting world. We get to share our Hope so that others are liberated and can also walk free from chains of despair, addiction, and fear. And though that song is not a Christmas song, it certainly is perfect for the Christmas season. Not only of glitter and tinsel, but a season of light brought into the darkness, of hope where there is oppression, a season of redemption and renewal. This Christmas may your life be the banner of Hope to a weary world....

How's your hope? Does it need to be super-charged with a capital "H"?