

Drawing Near To Hope

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Jeremiah 33:14-16

CHILDREN'S TIME

Have you ever wished upon a star?
When I was little I remember there
was a rhyme that kids would say
when they saw the first star of the
evening out their window at night
before going to bed.

Star light, star bright,
First star I see tonight,
I wish I may, I wish I might
Have the wish I wish tonight.

After kids would finish saying the
rhyme, they would close their eyes
and make a wish for something
special. I don't ever remember
anyone's wish coming true, but if it
did, I'm sure that it had nothing to
do with wishing upon the star.

The people who lived 2000 years
ago were watching and waiting for
a Messiah to come, one who had
been promised by the prophets for
many years. Many of them
watched the stars in the sky looking
for a sign that would tell them that
the Messiah was coming.

And then, a star appeared and it
meant that the Messiah was born.
The wise men saw that star and
followed it to find Jesus.

It might be strange to think about,
but when Jesus was born not many
people knew about it. Only a
handful of people knew, and even
fewer were actually there.

But the message of Jesus' birth
started to spread and eventually
the message Jesus brought
changed the whole world.

One of the names given to Jesus
was "Bright Morning Star." Jesus is
not a wishing star to whom we say
a wish. He is a star of hope. Our
hope is in the living God, the Savior
of all people, and one who loves us
more than we will ever know.

SERMON

Advent comes at a time when
everything around us is speeding
up. We have parties, celebrations,
concerts and all variety of things
that occupy our attention. These
things are not bad.

However, the Christian observance
of Advent asks that we slow down.
I know it is tough. But this season
asks us to reflect ... to ponder... to
listen ... to consider both your life

and the difference that God's presence in the world makes.

This season beckons us to draw near ... and be present to what is going on around us and within us.

"Draw Near" is our theme for Advent. Each week we will be thinking about and reflecting on nearness to an aspect of God's grace. This week it is hope.

What does it mean to be near?

When we are near something or someone, we can no longer hide. The closer we are the more transparent we become and the more we can take in and be impacted by what we are drawing nearer to.

Nearness is intimacy. Nearness is vulnerability. Nearness is presence. And nearness presents the opportunity for truthfulness, for acceptance, for authenticity, for growth.

Nearness encourages us to let go of our agendas, to let go of our assumptions, to let go of our facade and our masks, and to be fully present.

Amid all of the chaos of life, including the expectations and pressures of this season, nearness

is the point at which we become conscious once again.

Nearness is risky, but also offers to us a great gift. It offers to us our very lives.

Nearness.

READ JEREMIAH 33:14-16

It sounds strange that a name would be "The Lord is our Righteousness." This probably is a word play related to the name Zedekiah, which means in Hebrew "Yahweh is righteousness." Zedekiah was the last king of Judah, who was killed by the Babylonians when they decimated the city of Jerusalem, including their temple and carried many of the people away into slavery.

The Hebrew word for "righteousness" in this passage also means "legitimate." Many opposed Zedekiah as a legitimate king. So, Jeremiah draws a picture of the future hope for a legitimate king to rule in such a way that demonstrated that the Lord was their legitimate ruler.

This story comes from about six hundred years before Jesus was born. The people of Israel had been carried off to exile in Babylon after many warnings from the prophets, including Jeremiah, that

exile would result from their unfaithfulness.

Now the reality of their exile was sinking in. I'm sure that they felt cut down, like a tree hacked down by the ax of a brutal and heartless oppressor.

Years prior, under King David, Israel had been a great political and military power, and the people still remembered those glory days and longed for them once more. But king Zedekiah was gone, and those glory days were now only alive in their memory — their hopes were dashed upon the rocks of a brutal reign of what seemed to be almighty empire.

Right at this harrowing moment, in the midst of despair, the prophet rises up — the prophet who was also a poet with an imagination and a vigorous sense of call to proclaim the promise (not merely wishful thinking) of a future king. A king who would rise up and take shape alongside desolation, destruction and loss.

What God was orchestrating from the underbelly of society, that nobody could yet see, was none-the-less very real.

In the midst of the terrible suffering of the people, with Jerusalem destroyed and the temple in ruins,

Jeremiah offers the people something to grasp, a hope they could claim. Jeremiah didn't say that things might get better, or could be better, or that they should be "optimistic about future possibilities."

Instead, he said that a better day was surely coming! They could count on it because God was the one making the promise. Everyone would have enough to eat, enough shelter and they would be safe. All the good stuff of life would be provided generously by a loving God.

The one who is yet to come, the one on whom they waited, and on whom we wait today, will bring justice and righteousness.

This passage is written for a broken people who were in need of healing. Let me go back and share with you a section earlier in chapter 33 that paints a picture of how their loving God would restore and heal them.

I invite you to slow down the chatter in your mind and heart and imagine yourself among the people who are now destitute and cut off, and listen to this message of hope and healing from Jeremiah.

READ JEREMIAH 33:6-13

Because we have slowed down and are drawing near to this hope, we find that we are compelled to organize around a new way to live our lives, a new picture of our reality.

As we breathe ... as we wait for our Savior ... as we ponder this hope, we are caught in the wonder of a God who loves us. Let us now reflect as we listen to the words of a poem called "Draw Near To Wonder."

draw near to wonder

By Sarah Are

*I wonder if the earth is waiting for a Messiah like I am—
Trees bending toward love,
fireflies keeping a promise to be light,
the moon returning over and over again
with hope that the world will look differently this time.
I wonder if I'll ever really know when it happens—
Those moments when God is in my midst.
Those all the time,
everywhere,
rare kind of moments that I'm terrible at trusting but know like a rainstorm.
I wonder, because I am human.
I wonder, because not wondering leaves me stuck.
And I cannot be stuck in a world
that separates children from parents,
women from their bodies,
and men from their emotions.
So I wonder.
Will the stars ever fall?
Will I see you face to face, and you see me?
Will the moon come back tonight and sigh, saying,
"Ah yes. I can see that God is here. This is what I've been waiting for."*