

## **“Hope With Color”**

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Mark 13:24-37

### **CHILDREN’S TIME**

Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent. This is the beginning of the countdown to the day when we celebrate Jesus’ birth. I look forward to this time of year because of the great music, lights, and decorations of the Christmas season. After worship today we will be decorating the sanctuary.

Have any of you decorated your house for Christmas yet? Do you have a favorite decoration? My favorite decoration is the star. Stars are everywhere during Christmas. A few years ago, I learned how to fold pieces of paper and put them together to make stars, like this one.

The reason we see so many stars during this season is because a star was very important on the very first Christmas. That year, there was a really bright star in the sky that the wise men followed to find where Jesus was born.

God's prophets had written about that star hundreds of years before.

They wrote about how the stars would tell when and where a great leader would be born, who would help all people throughout the world to be free and to know God better. The wise men studied the stars and planets every night looking for signs that might predict the coming of this very special baby.

Can you imagine how excited the wise men must have been to see the star that those prophets wrote about so long before? They hadn’t yet seen Jesus, but seeing the star gave them hope that God was coming to be with them.

So, when you see stars in the decorations for Christmas, they can remind you that God is coming to be with us and that is an exciting thing!

### **SERMON**

The season of Advent is about waiting for something that we expect will be important — but not only important, what we wait for, hope for is essential to our lives and the vitality of our world. A lot rides on that for which we wait. In fact, Advent holds the expectation and hope for what will give meaning and purpose to us all.

The fact that we are waiting for something means that we do not yet have what we hope to have in the future.

So, Advent can be a time of awkwardness, of incompleteness, of hanging, of waiting.

What do we find and discover in the waiting? It takes eyes that are open, a mind that is open, and it takes a heart that is open.

I invite you to be open as you look at a painting. I'll then read a scripture. Then, I'll ask you about your thoughts and feelings on their relationship.

You have seen this painting on the screen since you walked in to the sanctuary. I invite you now to take another look during a few moments of silence. Look at the colors, the shapes, the relationship between the different elements in the painting. Notice how the painting makes you feel and about what does it prompt you to think. ...

Now, I invite you to listen to the scripture for today.

### **READ Mark 13:24-37**

Now, share with me your thoughts and feelings.

Does it surprise you to know that this painting was created as a reflection on this scripture?

The artist, Lauren Wright Pittman, wrote about her inspiration and thoughts regarding this scripture that led to the painting. In that statement she wrote:

*“All I know is to keep awake — to keep pointing to the miraculous signs of God’s love and light breaking into the world, to work to bring more of that light in and break down those things that seek to block the light — until light swallows up the darkness.”*

Between now and Christmas Eve, we will be considering a different painting each Sunday, as an access point into the world of art, creativity and the season of Advent. However, there are many more mediums of art beyond painting.

There are drawings in charcoal, pencil, crayon & pastel. There is sculpture of all varieties: clay, metal, wood, even sculpture with junk. There is the art of music: singing, chanting, all variety of instruments, bells, organ, and in genres of rock, country, folk, jazz, classical, and more. Then, of course there are ceramics, photography, tapestry, stained glass, architecture, and film. There

is artistry in writing, in home design, in clothing, and landscape, and there is certainly artistry in how relationships are formed and sustained. The list can go on and on.

The purposes for art are varied. They include the utility function of art, like with bowls and cups, but also storing the shared memory of a community or culture. Art can tell the stories of the past, and engage us in religious rituals that tell us who we are. Art also is made to create beauty in the environment.

Art can also give expression to something beyond words. It can probe the depths of emotion and broadcast it to the world. This allows for deeper and more meaningful connections between people. In this way, art can form community. Think of the groupies of the Grateful Dead through the 1970s and 80s who are still bound together by what the artful music has done for them.

A worshiping group of people like us can be unified by art in this way. We also celebrate art as an expression of who we are as human beings. “Doing” art then flows naturally out of what it means to be human — what it means to be made in the image of a creative God.

We celebrate God as Creator with great artistic flair as seen in the amazing sunsets we have had in the past week or so.

We are all creative artists, made in the image our God who loves us.

So, what do we do as we wait in this season of Advent? Maybe art and color can give us access to something in the waiting that goes beyond words.

### **Perhaps art and color can give us hope.**

I want to share with you a few pictures of how color can offer hope.

Several years back, I took some trips with middle and high school students, as well as adults and families into the community of Brightmoor, on the west side of Detroit. In that neighborhood, there were, and probably still are, many abandoned houses. These houses are havens for drug dealers and prostitution.

However, a woman named Riet Schumack moved into the community more than a decade ago and began to change that reality. She partnered with community residents to start youth gardens. She wrote grants and secured money to buy a

community shed with gardening tools and lawnmowers, and to build a playground and nature trails. She helped to turn an abandoned lot and house into an open air community theater.

One of the things that she did was instill hope through colorful art. One way she did this was through an “Art In The Park” program led by a young artist in the community.

She also found that an abandoned house with a mowed yard, and boards on the windows that are painted with color is one of the strongest deterrents to drugs and prostitution. Art was creating beauty and pride in the neighborhood.

They also created colorful signs in the shape of butterflies throughout the neighborhood to designate different community gardens.

Art instilled pride for people who lived there, and sent a message to people who didn't live there that people in the community cared about where they live. Truly colorful art transformed the community, one lot at a time, one person at a time.

Hope is found in art and hope is found in color!

During Advent, I challenge you to notice how art might offer you hope in the middle of this season when you wait for your savior to come.

I'll leave you with a prayer written by prominent theologian Walter Brueggemann:

*“Give us the grace and the impatience to wait for your coming to the bottom of our toes, to the edges of our fingertips. We do not want our several worlds to end. Come in your power and come in your weakness in any case and make all things new. Amen.”*