

Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nation and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of [a] heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷ But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² Watch therefore, for you do not know what [a] hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known what [a] hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

POET EMILY DICKENSON WROTE: "HOPE IS A THING WITH FEATHERS THAT PERCHES IN THE SOUL, AND SINGS THE TUNE WITHOUT THE WORDS, AND NEVER STOPS AT ALL...."

THE POWER OF HOPE, HOWEVER IS NOT AS MUCH IN THE ONE WITHIN HOPE IS FOUND, BUT THE SOURCE OF THAT HOPE.

FOR EXAMPLE: THERE IS A SCULPTURE OUTSIDE THE UNITED NATIONS BUILDING IN NEW YORK CITY.

THE SCULPTURE IS OF A MAN BEATING A SWORD INTO A BLADE OF A PLOW.

A PORTION OF THE WORDS FROM ISAIAH 2:4 ARE ENGRAVED ON IT, SAYING: "THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES."

IT IS A NICE PIECE OF ART, WITH AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE, EXCEPT FOR THE FACT IT POINTS PEOPLE IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.

YOU SEE THE SCULPTURE IS MEANT TO SYMBOLIZE THE HOPE ENVISIONED IN THE UN CHARTER, WHICH IN PART SEEKS TO: "MAINTAIN INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY, UPHOLD INTERNATIONAL LAW...

ADDRESS "ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, HEALTH, AND RELATED PROBLEMS", AND PROMOTE "UNIVERSAL RESPECT FOR, AND OBSERVANCE OF, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS FOR ALL...."

THE IDEA, WHILE ADMIRABLE HAS NOT BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS THE FOUNDERS AND SUPPORTS OF THAT ORGANIZATION HOPED.

YES, THE UN HAS DONE ITS PART IN MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT IN THE WORLD, BUT IT HAS NOT ALWAYS MADE GOOD CHOICES, NOR BEEN ABLE TO LIVE UP TO ITS IDEALS.

THE REAL PROBLEM IS NOT WITH THE ORGANIZATION ITSELF, AS MUCH AS IT IS THE FACT IT PUTS ITS HOPE IN HUMAN NATURE AND OUR DESIRE AND ABILITY TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT AND FAIR.

HOWEVER, WE ALL KNOW THAT FAR TOO OFTEN SUCH HOPE IS SHOWN TO BE MISPLACED, WHEN THE DESIRE FOR REVENGE OR POWER WIN OUT OVER NEGOTIATION AND COMPROMISE.

MY POINT IS NOT TO PICK ON THE UNITED NATIONS BUT RATHER TO REMIND US ABOUT A BETTER SOURCE OF HOPE.

AFTER ALL, TO PUT OUR HOPE IN OURSELVES, OTHER PEOPLE, AND OUR ORGANIZATIONS WILL MORE OFTEN THAN NOT LEAD TO DISAPPOINTMENT.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY WE CAN NEVER TRUST OURSELVES OR OTHERS TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT AND FAIR.

INSTEAD, THE POINT IS- EXPECTING THE BEST TO ALWAYS COME OF IT- IS MORE WISHFUL THINKING THAN IT IS HOPEFULNESS.

ADVENT REMINDS US ABOUT AN ALTERNATIVE AND BETTER PLACED SOURCE OF HOPE- THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY.

CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND THAT JESUS IS THE ONE WHO MAKES TRUE AND LASTING PEACE BETWEEN US AND GOD AND WITH EACH OTHER.

THE PRESENT SEASON ITSELF, ALONG WITH ONE OF THE SIGNIFICANT RELIGIOUS PRACTICES COMMON THIS TIME OF YEAR EMBODY THIS HOPE.

ADVENT BEGINS WHEN DARKNESS IS GROWING IN THE WORLD AS THE EARTH'S ORBIT CARRIES US FARTHER AND FARTHER FROM THE SUN.

IT IS FITTING THAT WE USE CANDLES ON A CIRCULAR HOLDER TO REMIND US THAT LIGHT OVERPOWERS DARKNESS.

TRULY, THE ADVENT WREATH AND THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS ARE WORTHY SYMBOLS WHICH CALL US TO HOPE IN THE LORD AND THE PROMISES OF GOD.

THIS HOPE IS BASED ON GOD'S PROMISES THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN FULFILLED, AND THOSE THAT FAITH CALLS US TO WATCH AND WAIT FOR.

THE GREATEST OF THIS HOPE IS THE DUAL REMEMBRANCE OF THE BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOR, AND HIS PROMISED RETURN.

TWO DIFFERENT ADVENT HYMNS VOICE THE PAST AND FUTURE HOPE THAT CENTERS ON GOD'S SON.

THE FIRST PROCLAIMS: "LIFT UP YOUR HEADS YE MIGHTY GATES, BEHOLD THE KING OF GLORY WAITS; THE KING OF KINGS IS DRAWING, NEAR, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD IS HERE."

AND THE SECOND PROMISES: "JESUS COMES WITH CLOUDS DESCENDING; SEE THE LAMB FOR SINNERS SLAIN! THOUSAND, THOUSAND SAINTS ATTENDING, JOIN TO SING THE GLAD REFRAIN...ALLELUIA, CHRIST THE LORD RETURNS TO REIGN."

JESUS, HIMSELF SPOKE ABOUT HIS PROMISED RETURN TO EARTH SEVERAL TIMES, AND ONE OF THOSE TIMES IS FOUND IN TODAY'S READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.

THE MAIN EMPHASIS THERE IS ABOUT HOW HIS RETURN WILL LARGELY CATCH THE WORLD UNAWARE.

A GOOD ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT THE SAVIOR IS WARNING ABOUT IS FOUND IN SOMETHING I READ ABOUT SUNRISE NEAR THE EQUATOR.

THE RISING SUN IS, OF COURSE, EXPECTED AT A CERTAIN TIME. SOME PEOPLE ENJOY WATCHING THE GRADUAL RISING OF THE SUN AS MUCH, OR MORE, THAN ITS SETTING.

HOWEVER, FOR THOSE WHO LIVE AT OR NEAR THE EQUATOR THERE IS NOTHING GRADUAL ABOUT THE SUNRISE, BECAUSE IT APPEARS ON THE HORIZON WITH LITTLE WARNING.

JESUS CALLS US TO BE AWARE AND REMAIN VIGILANT THAT HE WILL APPEAR WITH LITTLE WARNING.

INDEED, CHRISTIANS DO NOT NEED TO WAIT FOR THE SECOND COMING ALONE, BUT ARE CALLED TO EXPECT CHRIST'S PRESENCE AMONG AND WITHIN THEM AND OTHERS.

THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS ADVENT IS VALUABLE- IT CALLS US TO HOPE IN THE FULFILLMENT FOUND IN GOD'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE PROMISES REVEALED IN JESUS, HIS SON.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, MOST CHRISTIANS EMBRACE MORE FULLY THE PROMISE FULFILLED BY CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND BIRTH.

IT IS THIS HOPE THAT HAS ALREADY COME TO PASS WE CELEBRATE THE MOST FROM NOW THROUGH CHRISTMAS.

TODAY'S PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH IS RELEVANT IN THAT IS SPEAKS ABOUT THE PROPHET SEEING GOD'S WORD. THE RELEVANCE FOR CHRISTIANS IS SCRIPTURE'S TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS AS THE WORD MADE FLESH.

INDEED, IT IS THE LIGHT OF CHRIST THE LORD, WE WHO FOLLOW JESUS, ARE BLESSED TO WALK IN EVEN NOW.

HE IS THE TRUE AND ETERNAL LIGHT WHO CAME INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE SIN INFESTED WORLD TO LIGHT THE CANDLE OF HOPE FOUND IN THE SALVATION HE PROVIDES.

ADVENT IS MEANT BRING TO THE FOREFRONT OF OUR MINDS THIS REASON WE CAN HOPE IN GOD NOW AND ALWAYS.

THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH, WHO ONCE SPOKE TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE ABOUT A FUTURE KING, BECOME NEW AGAIN FOR THOSE WHO SEE JESUS AS THE ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHET'S VISION AND MESSAGE.

SO LET US REFLECT SOME MORE ON WHAT THE BIBLE TELLS US ABOUT HOPING IN GOD, AND THE REASONS WHY HE IS OUR TRUE SOURCE OF HOPE.

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE DRAWS ATTENTION TO THE TIME THE MESSIAH WILL COME FOR THE SAKE OF NOT ONLY THE JEWISH PEOPLE, BUT ALSO FOR ALL PEOPLES.

ALL ARE DRAWN TOGETHER TO BOTH WORSHIP THE ONE TRUE GOD AND TO LEARN GOD'S WAYS.

BUT SADLY, HIS VISION MAY SEEM TO STILL BE A FAR-OFF THING, SINCE NOT EVEN ALL CHRISTIANS, LET ALONE THE WORLD, IS IN AGREEMENT ABOUT THE BIBLE AND JESUS.

NOR IS EVERYONE INTERESTED IN REALLY LEARNING GOD'S WAYS, ESPECIALLY WHEN GOD'S WAYS DO NOT FIT IN WELL WITH OUR OWN HABITS AND DESIRES.

AND YET THIS HOPE BECOMES MORE REAL WHEN WE REMEMBER HOW IT, IN PART, HAS ALREADY BEEN ACHIEVED.

THINK BACK TO PENTECOST AND THE DRAWING OF PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER TO PETER'S SERMON AND THEN TO FAITH IN JESUS.

THEN, WHEN CHRISTIANS WERE SCATTERED DUE TO PERSECUTION THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION SPREAD WITH THEM, AND MORE PEOPLE WERE DRAWN TO THE LORD.

ADVENT INVITES US TO REMEMBER HOW THE GOSPEL SPREAD AND PEOPLE CAME TO SAVING FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

IT ALSO INVITES US TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CONTINUING WORK OF THE CHURCH TO BE CHRIST'S LIGHT IN THE WORLD AND THUS DRAW PEOPLE TO HIM.

THEREFORE, ADVENT IS IMPORTANT NOT JUST AS PART OF OUR PREPARATION FOR THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS, BUT BECAUSE IT ALSO CALLS OUR ATTENTION TO THE REASON WE CAN PUT OUR HOPE IN GOD.

THIS IS A SEASON OF HOPE, LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE. IT IS A TIME OF WATCHFULNESS, ANTICIPATION, WAITING, AND PREPARATION.

ADVENT DRAWS US BACKWARDS TO WHAT HAS COME TO PASS, AS WELL AS FORWARD TO WHAT IS YET TO HAPPEN IN GOD'S PLAN FOR THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD AND THOSE IN IT.

ADVENT IS POWERFUL BECAUSE BY REMEMBERING GOD'S LOVING ACTION IN THE PAST WE MAY FIND HOPE FOR THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS, BRING HOPE BECAUSE THEY ARE A RENEWAL OF THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE WILL AND WORK OF GOD.

AND SALVATION, AS WE SOMETIMES FORGET, IS NOT MEANT FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE AN ESCAPE FROM THE WORLD.

INSTEAD, IT IS GOD'S REMAKING OF THE WORLD., ONE PERSON AT A TIME, AFTER IT WAS MARRED BY SIN

ONE FINAL THOUGHT ON ADVENT, AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CANDLES WE LIGHT, IS FOUND IN THE FEASTING ON THE WORD COMMENTARY.

IT SAYS: "WE LIGHT THE CANDLES OF ADVENT AS A FORETASTE OF THE LIGHT THAT IS TO COME IN THE CHRIST CHILD.

THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD WILL NOT PREVAIL. CONFLICT IS REPLACED BY COMMUNITY. AND THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE ARRIVAL OF GOD'S REIGN WILL BE JUDGED AND OVERCOME. GOD'S LIGHT WILL NOT BE DENIED."

YES INDEED, GOD'S LIGHT WILL PREVAIL AND THAT IS OUR HOPE AND THE HOPE OF THE WORLD, EVEN IF MOST OF THE WORLD IS UNAWARE OF IT.

BUT LET US NOT ACT AS IF WE ARE UNAWARE, BUT INSTEAD CHOOSE TO BE AS FAITHFUL TO CHRIST AS IT IS POSSIBLE FOR US IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

REMEMBER JESUS SAID HIS FOLLOWERS ARE MEANT TO BE HIS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD, SINCE HE, THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT SHINES THROUGH US.

IN A WAY WE ARE LIKE LIVING CANDLES OF HOPE, LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE.

THIS IS A WAY WE CAN HEED ISAIAH'S CALL TO "WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD, SINCE WE ARE MEANT TO SHINE THE LIGHT OF JESUS NOT ONLY DURING THE SEASONS OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS, BUT ALL YEAR ROUND.

A CHRISTIAN PROFESSOR, NAMED DR. MORRIS WEE, OFFERS A POETIC REFLECTION ON THE FIRST ARRIVAL OF JESUS, AND THUS OF THE HOPE WE HAVE IN GOD.

"GOD CAME DOWN THE STAIRWAY OF THE STARS WITH A BABY IN HIS ARMS, FROM THE VERY TOP STEP OF THE HEAVENLY STAIRCASE SO VERY FAR AWAY.

AND GOD CAME DOWN AND DOWN...CLOSER AND CLOSER, NEARER AND NEARER TO YOU AND ME, WITH THE BABY. AND FINALLY HE STOPS WITH THE CHRIST CHILD IN HIS ARMS BEFORE YOU AND ME.

AND WE LOOK INTO HIS ARMS AND SEE THE FACE OF THE CHRIST CHILD, AND AS GOD COMES NEAR TO US, WE CLEARLY SEE THE FULLNESS OF GOD IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS."

EACH WEEK DURING ADVENT LET US PICTURE IN OUR MINDS THE FATHER, CARRYING BABY JESUS NEARER AND NEARER TO US.

THEN ON CHRISTMAS EVE LET US GIVE THANKS THAT HE ENTERED THE WORLD AS GOD IN THE FLESH, ONE OF US, AND ONE WITH US AND THE FATHER.

LET US ALSO REMEMBER THE HOPE WE HAVE IN THE CHRIST CHILD IS NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE ENTERED THE WORLD, BUT THAT HE DWELLS, OR CAN DWELL WITHIN US.

AFTER ALL IF JESUS DOES NOT LIVE IN US AND WE IN HIM; AND IF HIS PRESENCE DOES NOT TRANSFORM US, THEN HIS LIGHT HAS DONE US LITTLE GOOD.

THEREFORE, THE BEST WAY TO LIVE IN HOPE AND CELEBRATE THE SEASON IS TO PREPARE A SPACE FOR JESUS IN OUR OWN HEARTS. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: ISAIAH 2:1-5 & MATTHEW 24:36-44

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