



Sunday November 30, 2025

First Sunday of Advent

So today, we have entered the season of Advent. Advent is often depicted first and foremost as our time of waiting, preparation, expectation. It points us in one way to the coming of Jesus, both the first time at His birth and then the promise that He will come again in the last days. There is a theme in each week of Advent that we are called to reflect upon as we prepare our hearts for Christmas and this week, the theme is hope. Hope is the foundation of our Advent discipline. Without hope, Advent is just a passive, distractive time of waiting, but with hope that waiting comes alive and it is meaningful and it is grave. So today, we light the candle of hope. Our readings today give us two important pictures that help shape what hopeful waiting for us looks like. It reminds us that God's promises are real, promises spoken long ago before Jesus was born and that Jesus spoke Himself and these promises still matter to us.

The prophet Isaiah who incidentally will be guiding us as we make our way throughout the weeks of Advent gives us a vision today of transformation and learning. Imagine this high mountain where all people gathered together, all the nations. Mountains in the Bible were symbols of God's presence. So, this is the highest mountain, the greatest place for God is residing. So, the people in Israel in Isaiah's reading are deliberately coming into the presence of God to learn a new way of living, holy living, godly living. The symbols are striking. The tools of war are transformed into tools for life. Swords become plowshares, spears reshape into pruning hooks. The energy once poured into violence is now redirected to feeding and tending and building. In that image, hope gives us a picture of a world where resources and skills and power are redirected towards flourishing instead of destruction. What an image that is for us today. This is God's hope for us that all nations learn God's vision to live in harmonious coexistence where war can be a thing of the past. Amen? Yeah.

Now the second picture of hope today we hear from Matthew's gospel and it's a call to be ready. It tells us the moment of change, the time of Jesus's return will arrive unexpectedly like a thief in the night. And Jesus uses everyday



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images, people busy with daily tasks, all of a sudden facing a turning point. But the moral of the story is clear. None of us know that day or the hour, so we must live with alertness and with lives shaped with what is expected to come. And this state of alertness is created and maintained sustained by hope. So, what is hope? What does it really mean? Hope is not the same thing like wishing God, I hope I win the lottery this week. Hope for many people on this Black Friday weekend is scoring a big deal, right? A big sale like those poor Walmart shoppers who wanted to wait for hours. Do you know, did you hear this story? They waited for hours to get a Mac Friday box. A craft mac and cheese designed to look like a 65-inch flat screen TV featuring 65 boxes of classic mac and cheese on sale for \$1,939. But guess what? I've sold out in seconds. Let a lot of people very angry. Can you imagine waiting for that? Maybe I should just take that. Maybe there are some of us that would wait for that. I don't know. Hope is different, isn't it? It's a confidence in a future that God has promised us. It is a trust that what God has started, God will complete.

When we hope properly, we're not denying the hard things around us. We're choosing to believe in God's promise in the midst of those hard things. So, our readings today describe this Advent hope that is both patient and active, prophetic and practical. It imagines a transformed world for us and urges us to live like that world matters to us now. So, hope means that we prepare. We live in a world of sudden and unsettled surprises, a storm that arises faster than the forecast, a job disappearing overnight, another mass shooting. An honest hope does not pretend these things won't happen. Rather, it trains us to respond but without fear. Think of that airplane seatbelt sign. You don't know when the turbulence is going to hit. They call it rough air now, right? You don't panic. You just fasten your seatbelt and follow the crew's instructions. That's a small habit of readiness when following instructions is an act of hope. So, Isaiah again reminds us that God's hope turns tools of harm into tools for life. That image, profound image of beating swords into plowshares sounds distant until you see modern examples of how we can treat little things can change. Vacant lots, have become gardens. The same energy



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and resources directed towards exclusion and warfare and profit can be harnessed to repair and feed and educate. Really, the choice is ours to make. So, hope guides us to take that prophetic stance and make the choices for light that bring peace to us in life.

What are some of the simple acts of seeding hope in our world? On Black Friday, the start of the Christmas Buying season, the #RackFriedAge movement was up and running. #RackFriedAge stands for #RAK Random Acts of Kindness Friday. Simple things like making a commitment to smile to 10 people, like letting someone get go before you in the line. Genuinely thanking the store employees. Add an item to your cart that you can give to someone in need. Holding the door open for someone with full hands or buying a cup of coffee for the person ringing the bell of the Salvation Army. The pot there, yeah. Complement someone saying thanks for being awesome. Little things like these may seem like nothing, but they begin very slowly to till the ground, to make for happiness and out of that hope brings possibilities for better times.

As we hope we are reminded, hope is contagious. One humble act can rewrite a whole neighborhood story. There's a group of teenagers who started a community cleanup who inspired a whole block to invest and create a park. A simple local business that began hiring folks who had been marginalized, shifted the whole local economy and changed stereotypes. Hope spreads like this when people see it lived out in small, persistent acts. A town that once decided to become a light town during the long dark winter and each family was asked to keep on their porch light. So, people in this town began to notice their neighbors more. Children walked a little slower and they waved to each other. People who were isolated began to be remembered. The town didn't fix every problem there was, but it built a habit of hope. Isn't that why we love Christmas lights so much when we drive around at night? In the midst of the darkness, light shines. Isn't that what Isaiah tells us today to walk in the light of the Lord? Jesus who is light of the world.



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So, may that vision that once drew people to the mountain inspire us in our Advent season to build, to learn, to transform for the good of others. May our readiness become steady, our hands skilled to repair, our hearts open to whatever surprises of grace that come to us in every ordinary day. And may this Advent season be a time when our hope grows strong and steady like a house built on a firm foundation. And let us climb that mountain and be alert so that we too can find hope and in that hope be the light that shines for the world to see. Amen.