

#1 16-17  
Psalm 122  
Romans 13:11-14  
Matthew 24:36-44  
Isaiah 2:1-5

## *Expecting Hope*

**The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!**

What we have here from Isaiah is so beautiful, so full of hope. He speaks of a time in the future which fulfills all the truest deepest desires humanity has ever had. And these desires are ones which truly resonate with us as the darkness of the day takes up more hours, and as we look into the news of the world and are faced with so much anger and war, fear, and sadness. Isaiah writes of nations unifying, peace being brought to the earth, and light filling up darkness – all of which spring forth from a desire to be one with God. And this is the time of year where we so often hear the lovely thought of Peace on Earth Goodwill to all.

We allow ourselves to say those words more at Advent/Christmas time than at any other time of the year. A world of peace. It almost feels somehow wrong to even think of it. Because we all know what is really going on in the world, in our nation, in our state, in our homes!!! There are plenty of enough times where peace is not the main experience in our lives that it just feels stupid to believe in it.

But here we are, yet again a new church year beginning, and the repeated theme of anticipation – waiting – expecting – these are synonyms for Advent. And the theme of the week is Hope. So our first Sunday of the new church year focuses on expecting Hope.

Now, there are some good things that happen as surprises and that is certainly wonderful! But most often, good things happen as a result of wanting and working for them to happen. Like ~ if you want something in particular for Christmas, your chances of getting it are best if you let people know! Thus, the invention of the Christmas list.

Expecting what you desire in life is the first step toward actualizing it. If you can't even dream it, you are stifling most possibilities of it coming true. And that is perhaps more easily done with something you can put on your Christmas list which can be bought or made by human hands, than with such grand, deep, soulful desires such as peace and light and love for all on this earth.

It almost feels painful to hope for peace. And yet, all the Faiths throughout time have continually made that something to pray for – something to focus on God for.

Our first focus this first Sunday in the new church year is: how do we continue to expect hope? There are plenty of scriptures which ask, "HOW?" "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Mary asks Gabriel, "How can that be?" Wonder and mystery are found so often in the life of faith. So let us embrace this mystery and allow ourselves to strive to continually live a life allowing ourselves to hope and to expect this world which Isaiah describes ~ where God arbitrates and creates peaceful humanity. And when I say God ~ I don't mean the limited God that our faith traditions sometimes try to portray - the God who craves power and judges each other. God is the culmination of all that is wise, and sacred, and precious, and tender, and kind . . . it is only through trusting in these aspects of God that peace could actually come to this earth.

We can believe in wisdom, can we not? We can believe in compassion, can we not? We can believe in hope, and love and joy and peace - and we are being asked to believe that these things, these essential parts of God, can change the world. THIS is what we CAN allow ourselves to expect. Right when we thought the idea of hope for the future was foolhardy we are reminded that we can believe in these essential aspects of God. And if we can make them guiding lights in the darkness, then perhaps we can be the hope for the world.

Isaiah wrote: "In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it." According to Bruce C. Birch:

The temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem was . . . the locus of God's presence in the midst of his people. To envision Zion as elevated above all other mountains and the focus of pilgrimage by all peoples is not so much a political claim by Jerusalem as a spiritual claim of God's presence as the true center to which all nations will eventually flow. Nations will always be in conflict unless God's reign is recognized beyond that of Kings . . . Already the prophet Isaiah understands God's ultimate purpose to bring salvation to all the nations and not simply to Israel. A part of that hoped-for future day is that all humanity will also recognize the need for God's direction in their lives.

Mt. Zion is the symbol for a grand, awe-inspiring experience of craving the power of hope and love and peace, and wanting that so much that we are willing to ignore all that is different between ourselves and others, and to live and work for peace. This call for unity in God has nothing to do with some religion taking dominance over all the others in the world and winning the competition of "best religion in the world." It has to do with how we live our lives, and how we can find ways to unify ourselves as bits of Mt. Zion which can be everywhere. Mt. Zion is the symbol for God and through the living God ~ through Christ ~ we claim our inheritance as his body. And as his Body we are called to be unifiers and peacemakers ~ to love without wondering if the other is worthy ~ and to trust in the mystery of no knowing HOW, simply living and watching as miracles happen.

Let us live our lives trusting that when we live as God's presence, we can expect results. We can expect, at the very least, our lives to be transformed. And perhaps we can one day realize that we are expecting our hopes for the unbelievable to be restored! And when our hopes are restored, we are even more and more able to accomplish what we hope for!

So - expect hope this first week of Advent, as we prepare ourselves for the birth of the miraculous child of God! Amen