

Title: The Hope of Salvation

Subtitle: Hope that gives direction and assurance amid chaos and confusion

Video URL: https://youtu.be/rMrKMs-syLo?si=geX_xZbOaXVF_4AD

Our lessons today provide direction and assurance amid chaos and confusion. Jesus tells us that the days are surely coming when ***“People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.”***¹ Yet when his disciples see the signs that precede his coming, they are to ***“straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”***² Hearing the words “straighten up” reminds me of my mother’s often repeated reprimand, ***“You better straighten up and fly right.”*** When I heard her say those words, I knew that my foolish inattention to her express commands had gotten on her nerves. Those words reminded me that I better put aside my ADHD “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” tendencies and focus on what she had repeatedly asked.

Reflecting back on those days, I see that children are not the only ones with that tendency. Adults, in our culture, with all the business of the holiday activities upon us, can also be distracted. Therefore, our opening Collect prayer urges us “To cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”.

In that same spirit, Jesus knew that the cross immediately awaited him, so he wasted no time telling us a few essential things about the days ahead in order to lay a foundation for the hope set before us.

Hope is critical, especially when life’s difficulties begin to overwhelm us. Hope is like an anchor to the soul. It keeps us from drifting with the currents and is meant to make a practical difference in the way we live. It is not just an optimistic “pie in

¹ Luke 21:26

² Luke 21:28

the sky” outlook on life but a down-to-earth, nitty-gritty foundation for troubled times. One Bible dictionary explains that “hope is the expectation of and reliance on God’s blessing in the present life.”³ Therefore, hope is not merely a human anticipation of better days but of the final consummation of salvation at the revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the age.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us that hope is one of the three things that will endure forever. Its theme resurfaces in classic literature and movie genres, for our need for it never grows old. Therefore, themes such as finding a home where we belong or our longing to experience love, even when we know we don’t deserve it, will always have a place we secretly cherish, even if modern cynicism tries to drown it out with repeated messages of bad news.

The Christian message of hope is not an opiate that dulls our senses but brings greater clarity to the reality that confronts us. The foundation of this hope is based on the memory of past events, where Jesus overcame the worst that evil-intentioned human beings could inflict. But in God’s sovereign plan, that very evil was used to bring about a greater good: the forgiveness of sin and the world’s redemption. In the unfolding of God’s plan, we cannot ignore the reality of the evil one who secretly works behind the seen world. In this present world of darkness, good people do get hurt, and God’s righteous servants are sometimes martyred. Therefore, Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that ***“we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our***

³ Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 1, page 809

hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.⁴

Such hope is an anchor for the soul. The voice of the prophets affirms this acclamation and proclaims, ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”***⁵

In Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, Paul urges believers to ***“Put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”***⁶ The hope of salvation acts like a helmet, protecting our minds from distraction and despair. The discouragement that God’s people face is real. Life is often a battle in which we must fight to keep our wits together. Therefore, hope is about remembering who God is, what he has done, and what he has promised to do.

Jeremiah said it best when he wrote, ***“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”***⁷ In this verse, Jeremiah “calls his mind to remember.” The word “remember” comes from the Greek word, which pictures a re-membering, much like a surgeon who sows and puts pieces of the body back together.

We see such action every week in our liturgy when I lift up the bread and cup and say the words, “Do this for the

⁴ Romans 5:3-5

⁵ Isaiah 43:1-3

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:8

⁷ Lamentations 3:21-23

remembrance of me,”⁸ I remember how Christ wants to heal our divisions and work in us in such a way as to make Christ’s body whole and holy.

Immediately after lifting the cup, we confess together, **“Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.”**⁹ This liturgical expression is our way of looking backward and forward, which is what this Advent season is all about.

I once heard a story of a person who woke up between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. When she stepped out the back door, she was amazed to hear the darkness filled with the singing of dozens, maybe hundreds of birds. At that point, she could see no evidence of dawn—the sky was completely dark—but the birds somehow knew dawn was coming and were greeting it with a song.

ISN’T THAT WHO WE ARE AS CHRISTIANS, PEOPLE SINGING IN THE DARK? People waiting, knowing dawn will break even when there is no evidence of it. People who, in the darkest month of the year, dare to light candles of joy and peace because we believe in some inexplicable way that our Creator is in a relationship with us, connected to us, and is for us. Even in the darkest times of our lives, we are not alone. That human history and human life are not meaningless.

But let’s also remember that our **LONGING FOR CHRIST’S** return is meant to purify us and empower us to express the hope of Christ’s love to a world that needs healing and wholeness now.

So, a people of hope, let’s be the salt and the light that Christ has called us to be as we await the fulfillment of all he has promised. *Amen.*

⁸ BCP pages 262-263, Eucharistic Prayer A

⁹ BCP page 263