

DECEMBER 4, 2022

# Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## SERMON November 27, 'Hope'

This week we begin our Advent series. We will be pretty straightforward this year, using the traditional themes of the Advent candles to guide our messages. This week is the candle of hope.

For Christians, the idea that Jesus is the "hope of the world" is pretty common. It also can become very tunnel visioned. Jesus is the hope of the world because of His redeeming work on the cross. Yes, this is true, however distilling the hope of Jesus that broke into the world with the birth of the Christ child does a great disservice to the fullness of hope revealed in Him.

There is hope that the Ruler of the universe would choose to break into creation not as a mighty king, but as a humble, vulnerable child. The least suspecting is used of God to accomplish the most profound of tasks. For Jesus it was more than the cross, but we'll get to that later. The hope here is for all of us who doubt ourselves. Will I be enough for what God has in store for me? Am I good enough? We know that if we are the unlikely candidate for whatever we are called to, our doubt may be groundless. If we are the unlikely, we may be exactly who God wants. If He did it with Jesus, God can do it with us as well.

There is hope that Jesus would become the example for the rest of us what it looks like to honor and live before God. Before Him it was passed on through people interpreting God's Word and often sadly mixing in their own agenda which led people astray. Romans 3 reminds us that part of what it meant for Israel to be God's "chosen" was that they were chosen to be a light to the world of what it looked like to faithfully follow God. Sadly too often they failed at this task.

Here there is no need to translate. Jesus walks with humanity and shows them in real time and action what God desires from us. In the Sermon on the Mount we saw that He clarified misunderstandings about what the Law was driving at. In Jesus we have the hope that things won't get lost in translation because it is Divinity itself that is doing the teaching not just in writing or speaking, but in living it out powerfully and graciously.

Of course we have the hope that we no longer need fear death or the hold sin has over us. On the cross Jesus' poured out His grace, forgiving us for all our sins. All we need do is accept the free gift. How do we know we've accepted it? One of the markers we've already noted. We know how Jesus lived. If we have accepted the gift of salvation, we will be inviting the Holy Spirit to change us to be more like Him.

But it doesn't end there. There is the hope of being raised to eternal life. This hope is one that encourages us to live out our best walk before God in this life. Living out that evidence of salvation. In that we have assurance that the end of this world for us is merely a transition to God's heavenly kingdom. Living out hope here and now gives us hope that there is a grand eternity waiting for us.

If we are frustrated with the direction the world is heading, we have yet another hope. We believe that one day Jesus will return once and for all to reconcile and redeem all creation to Himself. There is hope that whatever mess is made of the world, it won't always be that way. Justice will be meted out and all things will be made right.

The scripture from this morning contains yet another layered, comforting, and powerful hope. That the good thing God has started in us God will bring to completion. The first hope here is that God has indeed started something good in each of us. Our giftedness, our callings, all of it are good things God has begun to work. And if God began it, God will stick with us to see it through. We are never alone, nor do we need to wonder or worry if we can continue moving faithfully forward with where God is leading. We can. The hope is always that if God begins us on a path, there is a good end in store.

But there is one more hope that we need to remember, particularly in our present day and age. Why on earth did we pull this scripture from Titus? It's about generational roles, and about Titus' responsibility to remind the people of those roles. Today we hear so much complaining about this generation or that. Each has its own axe to grind with the others. This kind of chatter can get very dark and gloomy. Rather than seeing the fault in each generation, what if we saw the hope inherent in their position?

The youngest among us hold the hope of new beginnings and being shaped into the men and women of the future.

The young have passion, creativity, and haven't had the world yet squelch them. They are the ones who look to change what is broken, and so we pray they fight for what is the better.

Those in the middle are building. Working, parenting, and so forth they hold the hope that the world is still a work in progress and there are those in the thick of it who see both forward and what's behind as they live it.

Those who are older have the hope of wisdom hard earned over years of living. The hope of faith honed through a lifetime to pass along.

Yes, it's true that as generations age, they have more teaching to do. But at the same time, as we age we continue to have learning and listening to do. In that is the continual hope that no matter how old we get, we always have room to grow.

When bitterness grows at what the generations behind us are doing, we do well to remember that those of us in the generations beyond are the ones that raised them.

And in that too is hope. We have the hope that we all have influence over one another. If something seems wrong, together if we do more than complain and truly humble ourselves and do the work needed, that wounds can heal, bridges can mend, and the future can be better than the present.

Seeking all of this in the light of Christ, knowing that if God begins a good work God will finish it, assures us that whether we see it in our lifetime or not the hope we rest in that ultimately God will have God's way is not a fool's hope. It is hope well invested. And it came home to us with the hope that came to us on that first Christmas