

Pre-Advent Advent Sermon / It's Always Advent
Romans 15:4-13
November 26, 2017

SI: Why this passage?

After T'giving, you are thinking about getting ready for Christmas. Many of you have decorated your homes.

Ah, At last! Christmas time is here.

The Church calls this Advent. What is Advent?

The word is derived from the Latin and means "coming" and it celebrates Christ's first coming and looks forward in anticipation to His Second Coming.

Listen to the Word of God for us and hear of the fulfillment of past promises and future assurances.

Intro: It's always Advent, b/c there is always a waiting. We are always waiting based on the fulfillment of promises in the past. Mark what it is not: It is not a wishful thinking. It is not a hope in a politician or a system that will finally get it right. It is not a 50/50 tossup as to whether this will happen. The Church celebrates this season b/c the first coming of Christ has happened in fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. And we celebrate Advent still as we await the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world and bring to fulfillment the reign of Christ on earth forever. So in a sense, then, it is always Advent.

The fruit of Advent: Joy, peace, in believing, based on hope. What is this hope? Why do we need it? How do we put it to use?

1What is Biblical Hope? 4 times in the passage.

It is a belief that good will win. It is an assurance that good will win.

That there is a Ruler, a King who is good and right, merciful and just. The defeater of evil and the rewarder of good.

It is of the Spirit / **Supernatural** / spiritual / un-natural / un-human / other-worldly because God is the author of hope. Where else could it come from?

The passage is bracketed by the Supernatural, otherworldly nature of this hope.

It is a fool's hope > The word translated "Gentiles" is sometimes translated pagans, or nations. It's the Greek word "ethne" – it means outsiders. Outsiders to the covenant promises. Outsiders to the promises given to Abraham's descendants: The Jews.

But Paul's whole life and ministry are again on display here.

Why God saved him through the Damascus Road experience > So that he could be the apostle, the messenger, to the Gentiles, the outsiders.

Paul glorying in God's promises given to the outsiders! This is a fool's hope. What? How could? Doesn't make sense! Yes, it is a fool's hope. Against all odds.

In LOTR *Return of the King*

Eve of Battle –

Little Hobbit Pippin has conversation with Gandalf, the White Wizard.

Gandalf, tell me, is there any hope?

Gandalf replies: “There was never much hope, only a fool's hope.”

From the perspective of worldly reason, Christian hope is utterly foolish. Think about it. A God who humiliates himself, who degrades Himself and becomes one of us? And then empties Himself in servanthood all the way to dying naked as a condemned criminal?

Paul admits as much when he says, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” ([1 Cor. 1:18](#)). It is folly b/c the world traffics in success and doing whatever it takes to advance your own cause, not die to your own cause.

And v. 8-9 here > He did it to show His truthfulness and His mercy out of love!

Another preacher says this (Brad Gray): “To the world, it appears foolish, silly, and nonsensical to find hope in the execution and death of Another. It's absurd to the unbeliever that the admission of hopelessness is the beginning of true hope, but that's exactly what faith in the gospel is: it's built upon an illogical one-way transaction.”

It is a world-wide, **all humanity** hope > see v. 11 – quote of Ps 117 and GTB notes

Illus of Dave Katz – holding on to his ethnicity as a Jew – the chosen people, the chosen ethnicity, class, color, race, tribe, club...

2Why We Need This Hope

For congregational/church unity > welcoming one another, receiving one another. Don't underestimate your propensity towards flocking towards those who are like you and make you feel more comfortable. Paul goes back again to Christ's welcoming/receiving of us, the undeserving, the vile, the foreign.

Go back to why Paul is writing like this – the underlying issue of the weak and the strong, which was likely based on the continuing applicability of the Jewish law, something that arose regularly in the NT era b/c Gentiles were becoming Christians

before becoming Jews first and didn't abide by the Jewish food laws, for example. (Moo, 874).

... Paul is then implicitly reminding the 'weak' (primarily Jewish Christians) that the 'strong' (primarily Gentile Christians) are full members of the people of God. Yes, they are 'wild olive shoots' that have been 'grafted in' (11:17). He also reminds the 'strong' that their status as Christians is dependent upon a Jewish foundation – they are supported by the 'root' (11:18).

How would this apply to us? The more mature among us (the strong) should defer to the weak (the less mature). This is something that is a strength of Altadena that we should do much to protect and prosper. Entry-level welcoming as well as strengthening the strong through discipleship courses. Non-intimidating 101 level and upper level 300 courses that all may be welcomed and all edified.

Why we need this hope:

For the Glory of God > v9-11 > Unity has the greater goal. Not unity for unity's sake. How can people get along like this? The death of divisiveness. The death of division. No camps, no politics.

Why we need this hope:

It is **personally electrifying**

Darkness threatens, evil hunts, pursues, preys on the sheep. Terrible things happen.

Frustration comes, cynicism, pessimism, anger.

In the dark, in the shadows, light has come.

Look at what God is offering: Hope based on His Rescue plan. Do you need rescuing?

These longings of the soul that every human being is born with. That God promises to give you as you die to your autonomy and receive God's loving rule.

To fill you with faith, joy, peace. B/c it is the fulfillment of the longing for mercy. The longing for salvation. The longing for afterlife.

3How to Apply This Hope

So what? What gives? Why should this matter to me?

Multiculturalism in the Church > The Church should be leading the world in diversity, opportunity, leadership development, minority representation. Why isn't it? B/c of sin, b/c of comfort.

Paul says then to **welcome** one another – who is this one another? It is Jews and Gentiles together in the voluntary society of the church. And what is the church? Remember it is the “called out ones” – the ekklesia – ecclesiastical community – the called out ones, the rescued ones, the redeemed ones, the bought back ones, the purchased ones.

When you know what you have been rescued from, then skin color and culture and musical tastes matter less and less and less, but what matters more and more and more is your common identity of Rescued.

ILLUS of people who form survivor clubs. 9/11 survivors. Shipwreck survivors. Earthquake survivors. Hurricane survivors. There is a commonality that they share that no one else understands but those who have been through it. ... And that is who the Church is, that is who you are, if indeed you have a story like this.

B/c look at Paul’s emphasis – he points over and over to the promises given to the Gentiles. The outsiders. Those who shouldn’t even consider being brought in, are brought in. The least likely are given not just a seat at the table, but given a seat next to the King.

Apply it to your fears of being alone, rejected, battered and defeated:

Oli and Constance Smith in London: “Experiences like ours are no fun, they hurt, they test faith. But they also refine faith and create currency and solidarity with those who share the same experiences. I think, in the long run, all of this will help us to get deeper into people's lives, to tackle and deal with the anti-gospel forces in our city and community, and to have further open doors with the people we serve and seek to build a church with. That is the hope.

However this week it’s hard to look forward to that; this week we need your prayers. As we are pounded by the storm and as we seem to keep losing more and more, we need you to pray that we would hear the words of our God to whom we belong that we would not be paralyzed or owned by our fears but that we would continue to journey forward in faith.”

Communion:

How to apply this hope: the sacrament of communion. Feeding your faith. Can I make it through this? Can I turn away from such strong temptation to sin, again? How will I? There are so many bombardments against my soul's happiness in Jesus alone! So here is Jesus presented to you. "Unless you eat His flesh and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Not to be taken literalistically, but spiritually as your soul feeds on something for your happiness, b/c you will feed on something!

Tie in to "It's Always Advent" > waiting with anticipation for the Day to arrive... Communion is opportunity to receive Jesus' promise of being with us. I am with you, here, at the Table. My spiritual presence is real, tangible, life giving, nourishing, sustaining. It is one of the ways I feed my people as they wait on me to return bodily from the Heavens and again fulfill my promise.

