

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



November 21, 2021

THANKS

a season of gratitude and anticipation

by Drew Downs

As we prepare, gather, and eat dinners over a long holiday weekend or campout for the "best deals of the season" at the annual shopping bacchanalia, we are drawn by the season to an attitude of gratitude.

The funny thing is just how alien thankfulness sounds in 2021. I certainly have encountered people who express gratitude these days. But the mood is generally far more bitter, frustrated, or tired. People are

understandably tired of living in a pandemic and want to be over it.

In seasons like this: season of the year, of life, of pandemics: a posture of thankfulness is most valuable. Thankfulness is both an antidote to our own doldrums and a curative balm to those around us. So we can actually gift each other real, lasting hope. Attitudes are infectious. It's up to us to decide if that is a good thing.

ADVENT

Winter 2021

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

This past Sunday we wrapped up our annual pledge campaign. We invited one another to discern the need to be generous, to share in every perfect gift.



Each year, we set a date to wrap it up because at some point we have to say "it's time to make the budget!" And our treasurer loves it when we all get our pledge cards returned in a timely fashion.

There's something kind of funny about how *normal* this all feels in light of an obviously abnormal time and the abnormal circumstances we are still living in.

It is funny and it is also serious, personal, and emotional.

A big part of the Bishop's address to convention this year was to simply name, not just how tired we all are - tired *of* this and *from* this - but also how traumatic this experience *has been* and *continues to be*.

Trauma isn't a word we use lightly or simply. Precisely because it isn't simply a momentary pain. Trauma doesn't just effect our brains, but our bodies. The trauma of the pandemic, being away from friends, church, and other forms of restorative community has been *traumatic*. And it won't go away tomorrow, even if we wished COVID away.

But we are given to serve one another. In love. For the sake of Christ. We are asked to give of ourselves so that we might live. These offerings are foundational to a life in Christ. And an invitation to more joy and hope right now.

Drew

ADVENT

Winter 2021

FOR SUNDAY

The First Sunday of Advent

November 28, 2021

Collect

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves."

Reflection

Two weeks ago, we talked about apocalyptic imagery. We get it again this week. We shouldn't be surprised that our church's liturgical calendar begins here, even if it doesn't fit the more comfort-seeking attitude we normally indulge.

Apocalyptic thinking is about revelation – for us, that means what God is revealing about the world, our part in it, and even about God in God's self. The irony is how much this scares us. Sometimes we really can't get past the images or what they seem to reveal.

ORDINARY TIME 2021

Unlike the apocalyptic imagery from two weeks ago, when Jesus was warning of wars and rumors of wars; division and devastation; this time, he's offering something else. Or, more precisely, he is offering something *more clearly*: hope.

What we see in the first part of the story is a warning that the signs of God's work in the world will *confuse* people. And in their confusion, they will *fear* what is happening. But what does he say his disciples are to do?

"stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Often we talk about belief as being about the things unseen. That we believe in spite of *not* seeing something. Jesus reminds us that belief can also involve seeing what we see. Not *in spite* of what we see, but seeing what it actually is.

Some are tempted to look for *secret knowledge* revealed to us, God's *special people*. In other words, to fall for conspiratorial thinking. But Jesus isn't saying they need to see what *isn't* there, but to *fear less* what is.

He also says "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap."

There is much to explore in this, but notice that Jesus hasn't talked of any *actually* terrible things. He's spoken only to how we *face* the challenge ahead. Don't get drunk to *escape* the "worries of this life". He's talking about what we have lately dubbed "deaths of despair". The need to escape the struggle of a world that feels stacked against you.

Rather than be weighed down and frustrated, Jesus keeps driving us toward hope. For ourselves and for all of our neighbors.

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