

SERMON: "HOPE EMBODIED"

**TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT
NEW TESTAMENT**

**JEREMIAH 33:14-16
LUKE 21:25-36**

**December 1, 2024
First Sunday of Advent**

Dr. Dave Kivett

INTRODUCTION

Johnny and I were planning ahead for a sermon series for Advent

We thought it would be good to focus on those four words we hear each year as we light the advent candles – hope, peace, joy and love

Let's not say and do these things just because that is our tradition

Let's focus on each of those four things – one a week

Then Johnny kicked it up a notch (he's good at that) and suggested since Christmas is all about God coming to us in a person, a child, in the flesh how about we talk about these things as being embodied

hope embodied, peace embodied, joy embodied, love embodied

Thinking and praying about that direction for a sermon

Thinking and praying though these passages from Jeremiah and Luke I kept asking myself ... "What does hope look like?"

So I looked it up. Typed that question into my search engine to search for images

You've probably figured out that I like doing that – picking pictures for the bulletin, the screen, pictures for each state

It's like exploring, wondering what I might find.

I found what I've come to expect. With words like hope, peace, joy and love

you're going to get some pretty pictures, what my lovely wife calls "poster art"

So for "what does hope look like?" I found a lot of mountain tops at dawn or dusk people standing with their arms outstretched. Also found some people walking through fields touching the tall grass. Found painted stones too

I usually scroll past those. The one I really like ... not just for the sermon, but for me personally with my own struggle to practice hope in the face of the fears in my face, my mind and my gut is the image on the screen

The image of a tree without leaves and with deep roots

When I saved it to my file, I labeled it "Hope has deep roots"

The image reminds me of my friend Mo, who told me about a lesson she learned from her mom. Her mom wanted her to see the beauty and bounty around her

She taught her daughter to appreciate the beauty of the trees not just in Spring or in Fall, but especially in the winter months, to see the branches twisting and turning, stretching out to the skies

SEE THE TREES

The passage from Luke's gospel includes a parable about a fig tree
Jesus uses the parable to illustrate what he says before and after about
being alert, being on the lookout ... for our redemption is drawing near
Given that tree image from Jesus and from Google, I want to think about
what hope looks like – like a tree, a tree with deep roots

Then He spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

It is a seasonal reference. He says you can see it budding and know summer is near
That works for summer. But this is not summer. Things look and feel different.
We get this passage in the lectionary for this time of year, this season
That's probably why I skipped the sunny pictures and went with this one

In the summer when the leaves are bright, it can be easy to hope
You can see it coming, smell it like the neighbors' grill on a holiday weekend
Jesus' next word about this generation (that one back then) would not pass away
until these things take place fits well in times like that – when things are blooming

But that generation did pass as have many others. So what might that mean for us?
Jesus tells us redemption has come near. It is real ... but it has not come in all
its fullness, not yet. So we wait. And hope. We have some hope
but we want and need more. It is not always summer.

Yeah, we fell for that talk of a 3 season room when we moved here.
Realtor didn't say that one other season lasts about two seasons.
Call that room what it really is ... a half of a year room.

I picked that picture because I want us to see the trees as Jesus tells us
And see what hope looks like in each and every season
My conviction is that the harsher the season, the more helpful it is for us
To learn the lesson Mo's mom was wise to teach her daughter
to find hope and what it looks like in every season, winter included

Hope is not a fleeting fancy blown away by a gentle Iowa December breeze
(about 25 miles per hour – gentle). Hope has roots, roots in the steadfast
and stubborn love of God. Roots that hold, roots that feed the trees growth

HOPE AMIDST

Jesus' words here in Luke are a warning, a literal heads up
Just before he gives us the image of a tree, he says ...

And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; people's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

The signs Jesus talks about include the distress of the nations, with perplexity
Now, as I look at the signs of our times, I will admit that I have not said
to family or friend, "I'm feeling the distress of the nations, with perplexity."
Not how I might put it ... but I get it. My words might not be so polished
But I get it. Hope comes amidst that perplexity and distress

Isn't that when I need hope the most? Hope not just in a distant tomorrow
but hope in and for today? Hope in the December darkness

Jesus tells us a parable about a tree to remind us of what it is we're looking for
With our eyes glued to the distant horizon, Jesus tells us to "look here"
We're looking forward, yes, to Jesus second coming but not so much so
that we miss what God may be revealing right before our eyes
to see hope embodied in Jesus ongoing presence among us

The parable of the fig tree helps us to focus on what it is we need to focus on
Barbara Brown Taylor in her sermon "Apocalyptic Figs" says this

How shall we wait? Jesus' answer about looking at the fig tree sounds like an invitation to pay attention not only to what may happen in the future, but also to what is happening in front of us right now. It sounds like a clue that God may be reaching out to us through things we would not have thought of as "religious," even something as worldly as a fig tree in bloom.

How shall we wait? What a great question.

These stories about being on the lookout can be found in Matthew, Mark and Luke
They have their differences, but the place in the story and purpose is the same
Jesus is telling disciples then and now to be alert
That doesn't mean being all other worldly,
reading the tea leaves for everything but a cup of tea

SUMMARY

The “heads up” and parable of the fig tree here in Luke’s gospel aren’t an alarm telling us to grab our helmet and head to the basement ... duck and cover
Yes, it is an alarm. But think of it more like an alarm clock
A call to wake up and get out into the world
to see what God is doing here and now, all around us

Maybe we ought to be paying attention to the fig trees in front of us
Maybe we could use a lesson on waiting ... on looking for and finding hope

I like the lesson on watching and waiting I found in a poem by Joseph T. Nolan.
It is written with this of year very much in mind.
It is entitled, “*The Whole Earth’s a Waiting Room*”

*We wait—all day long,
For planes and buses,
For dates and appointments,
For five o’clock and Friday.*

*Some of us wait for a second coming.
For God in a whirlwind.
Paratrooper Christ.
All around us people are waiting:
A child, for attention.
A spouse, for conversation;
A parent, for a letter or a call.*

*The prisoner waits for freedom;
And the exile, to come home.
The hungry, for food;
And the lonely, for a friend.*

*The whole earth’s a waiting room!
“The savior will see you now”
Is what we expect to hear in the end.*

*Maybe we should raise our expectations.
The savior might see us now
If we know how to find him.
Could it be that, Jesus, too, is waiting
For us to know he is around?*