

“An Altogether Hope” - Luke 1:46-55 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

In this week's Advent study, author Ingrid McIntyre wrote, “looking back, I see that the hope of my childhood was an “almost hope,” not because it was inadequate or only partially hopeful, but because it only focused on me. When I realized that I was going to be a part of the whole family of Christ, I realized what an “altogether hope” would require. It would require expanding my hope to include looking forward to the well-being of others. Altogether hope means embracing struggle, leaning on God and looking forward to the well-being of others. This is the difference between almost hope and altogether hope one stands at a distance while the other relentlessly pursues; one offers platitudes while the other dives deep into the hopelessness of a situation and offers a light in the darkness - light that grows and grows and grows.

In his sermon, “The Marks of the New Birth,” John Wesley wrote: *“thus St. Peter, speaking to all the children of God who were then scattered abroad, sayeth, ‘blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.’”* (1 Peter 1:3) Yes! God brings this lively hope to all of God's children no matter where they are God breathes new life and hope into us so that hope becomes something people don't have to just be told about; they can actually see it.

Hoping the Advent story comes in the form of a major paradigm shift, with societal norms turned upside down. Most of these norms centered around money and power - who had them and all who didn't. Hope was coming for all people including those who didn't have money and power. And notice, God even sent the message to and through people who didn't have either.

Here in Luke's gospel, we are introduced to Mary, this young girl who probably didn't have much, and yet she was the one bringing Jesus Christ into the world. In the scripture this morning she shares these words about what God has done in what is called the Magnificat:

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors, (Luke 1:52-55)

It was the common shepherd boys who heard the story first from the angels, not the rich and powerful received the breaking news. It wasn't King Herod who identified a sign that a new king of kings was born. It was foreign wisemen who did and who embraced a new story of hope. And Mary's cousin Elizabeth, who had wanted for so long to have a child, had not just any child but the child who became the forerunner of Jesus, the prophet who would help lead the people to repentance and toward justice. So often, people who are in some form of pain seem to hear and see much more easily. Pain often leads to hope because it requires hope - what else can sustain us when life is hard?

Back in John Wesley's day, life was terrible for so many people, and the Church of England wasn't living up to the church John saw described in the scriptures. He wrote, *“If there are so many Christians why are people still hungry and thirsty? Why is there slavery? Why isn't Christ's presence felt in prison?”* Wesley became prophetic hope for the church speaking out boldly and making it known.

Ingrid McIntyre wrote, “The same problems Wesley addressed are still in the world today. We're still working on prison reform, human trafficking, improvements on people's living conditions, poverty, and hunger. We get caught up in systems that marginalize others and become complicit in those systems simply because we can't feel the pain of the poor and oppressed. Without the hope-filled prophetic voices calling us to a greater consciousness, we fail as a church. I know that I am not going to end world-wide hunger or homelessness, but hope is alive in me that I can do my part and that's all God is asking. As we take bold steps in hope for transformation, joining our stories with the likes of John Wesley and other faithful people we know that one day hope will be complete.”

Despair is the antithesis of hope. I have to believe that Mary and Joseph moved frequently between despair and hope as they navigated the reality of the pregnancy and all that it would mean for them and for all God's people. So, if you're going through a struggle right now, just remember you are not alone. And please be sensitive that others are struggling right now too, and you may be at the right time and place to offer them your hope and support.

Over 2000 years ago, hope showed up in a baby, the best symbol of hope there is! Hope was laid in a Manger - literally a feeding trough - assign the generations could feed on this hope to keep going. God showed up in the last place anybody would choose to give birth, showing us that no place on earth is beyond hopes reach. The foundation of hope rests in God and God's people. God has made a place for you at the manger. Hopefully you will come join us on this journey of faith. Alleluia and Amen.

Be Our Sustainer

Jeffrey B. Childs 12/3/2024

Be our Sustainer, O Lord of all Hope.
Help us hang on to the end of our rope.
Give us your strength that we need for today.
Help us help others as we can day by day.

Be our Supplier, O Lord of all Joy,
As in your service our gifts we employ.
Help us help those who have been trod upon.
As we have been blessed, help us pass it on.

Be our Deliverer, O Lord of all Peace,
May the world's wars and hostilities cease.
In our own hearts may your peace reside,
And in your good grace may we always abide.

Be our Redeemer, O Lord of all Love.
May we reflect here what you shine above.
Many beams of compassion shine forth today.
So may it be, Lord, as for this we pray.