

“The Season of Hope”

1 Peter 1:2-13

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 29, 2015

Well Thanksgiving has come and gone and we all probably ate too much. Some of you, I'm sure, even braved “black Friday” for some shopping. That can only mean one thing – it's Christmas time. Today is the first Sunday of Advent and earlier we lit the candle of Hope. That got me thinking about this being the season of Hope.

I decided to take a break this week from our study of Hebrews to talk about hope, real hope. Every day, it seems, there is some kind of major violence in the news. This weekend there was a shooting in Colorado. There were the terror attacks in Paris and Mali and Beirut in the past few weeks. Even right here in our own city there have been stabbings and shootings and robberies almost daily. It seems we are surrounded by violence and fear. Where's the hope? It seems to me we need to be reminded that this truly is the season of hope, not because we want it to be but because it is.

Advent is a time of waiting for the arrival of Jesus. I don't know about you, but I can't stand to wait. If there's a line for something, I'm not interested. I don't like to wait in the doctor's office, or in traffic. I just can't stand waiting. As a kid, I especially didn't like waiting for Christmas. Don't get me wrong. I loved the Christmas season and I still do, but my mother would always make us wait to open presents until Christmas day. And if Christmas fell on a Sunday, we didn't open presents until we came home from church. It was agony having to wait that long. Sometimes I would try to explain that my friends were allowed to open one present on Christmas Eve. But the answer was always no. We had to wait.

But you know what? I now understand that the waiting makes us appreciate it even more. In today's instant-gratification society, I think we could all use a little more waiting. One of the things waiting does for us is that it makes us depend on hope.

We hear the word hope a lot. But it seems to me that we often get confused about what hope really means. One dictionary defined hope as “the feeling that things will turn out for the best.” This is what we mean when we say, “I hope the Cowboys make it to the Superbowl this year,” or “I hope we have nice weather this weekend,” or even, “I hope to see you soon.” That sounds more like wishing to me. This kind of hope is nothing more than a form of optimism that things will turn out. It's wishful thinking. And wishful thinking certainly has a place in our lives.

But the Bible gives us a different understanding of hope. Let's take a look at Biblical hope. In Romans 15:13, the Apostle Paul says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Hope is not something we create ourselves but it comes from the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 9:10 Paul tells us, “On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.” So Biblical hope involves being saved or delivered. And in Ephesians 1:12 he says, “we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.” So true hope results in praise and glory to God.

In our passage this morning, Peter explains that Biblical hope rises above being a wish, to the level of a guarantee. Verse 3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” This is the very heart of the gospel. We could spend weeks just discussing these first three verses. But basically what Peter is saying is that because Jesus Christ, who is God Himself, was raised from the dead, we have a living hope, a guaranteed hope. As verse 2 tells us, “we have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.” In other words, this

living hope is entirely the work of God. There is nothing that you or I can do to earn God's favor. As Ephesians 1 tells us, He chose each of us before the foundation of the world. Our living hope is already a reality. No matter how weak we may be, our salvation is not uncertain because it is sustained by God's power, not our own.

In verses 4 and 5, Peter explains that this living hope includes "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" for us, and that we are guarded by God's power through faith. Here Peter seems to be contrasting true hope, which is fixed on the incorruptible Kingdom of God, and transient human hopes. Again, our hope does not depend upon anything we can do. It is guaranteed by God. As John Calvin commented, "If [our inheritance] were not in God's hand, it would be exposed to endless danger."

Beginning in verse 6, Peter goes on to explain that suffering and trials are not only possible for us, but that they are an important part of our life in Christ. He compares the difficulties we each face with the process of purifying gold. Just as gold must be subjected to intense heat in order to separate it from impurities, Peter says that our faith must face various trials in order to test the genuineness of our faith. He's saying that to God, our faith that comes out of trials stronger is more valuable than pure gold.

The Bible is clear that all of us will face trials or temptations from time to time. We face times when things seem hopeless. Maybe you're having trouble making ends meet, or struggling with debt, and it seems like there is no hope. Maybe you're not getting along with your family, or perhaps you find yourself all alone. Maybe you're struggling with an illness or pain or addiction that you just can't seem to overcome and you wonder if there is any hope. Those are the times we most need to lean on Jesus and remember that day 2000 years ago when he was nailed to a cross and suffered and died. On that day it seemed as if there was no hope. But three days later he walked out of that

tomb and conquered death for you and for me so that we can live with him forever. That's real hope.

It's not that as Christians we don't experience sorrow or fear, or that we're not affected deeply by poverty or persecutions. Of course we are. We understand that sorrow does not prevent joy, but rather it gives place to it. We understand sorrow better in light of the joy we have in Christ. John Calvin reminds us that if we regard our troubles as necessary trials for our salvation, we not only rise above them but we turn our struggles into occasions for joy.

So what does his hope mean for us today, especially as we enter this season of Advent? Our passage this morning tells us that because we are God's elect, His chosen people, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, or makes us holy, by "the sprinkling of Christ's blood." In other words, because of Christ's death and resurrection we have been adopted by God as heirs in His Kingdom. But we can't miss the other part of that verse. We have been "sanctified by the Spirit for *obedience* to Jesus Christ."

Where the "sprinkling of the blood of Christ" deals with the forgiveness of our sins, we understand "obedience" to mean newness of life. Peter is telling us that since we are a new creation in Christ Jesus, we need to act like it. And the primary way we show our obedience to Christ is by increasing our devotion to Him. Through Peter's writings we are taught to look at God's actions in the past as evidence of His faithfulness to His people. We see the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ as clinching proof of God's reliability today.

Verse 8 says, "Without seeing Him we love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy." This is the message of Christmas when we sing "joy to the world, the Lord has come." But until December 25 we wait. This Advent season we remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8 when he says, "we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” My prayer for

you is that this season really becomes the season of hope in your life and that you would help bring hope into the lives of others.

Amen