



Advent 2022
Lapeer Free Methodist Church
Week 1

Day 2:

Hope is one of those words that means different things to different people in different contexts. One of the most common ways we speak of hope is almost superstitious, like we're talking about having good luck: "Let's hope so," "I hope it's better tomorrow," "Here's hoping..." This does not sound like the kind of hope that Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of when he said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope," that Emily Dickinson wrote about as "the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all," or what the Apostle Paul was referring to when writing to the church in Rome, "...May you abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." It's safe to assume that Paul did not desire for the church to abound in essentially wishing for good luck.

The Greek word generally translated as "hope" in the New Testament is pronounced "elpis," and it implies that something is going to happen. The person with hope is anticipating it with confidence. In modern times, this word could be translated as "anticipation" or "expectation." This hope is not merely wishful; it is confident and expectant. It sounds a lot like faith. This is a kind of hope that can really get us through the darkness.

Mary wasn't merely betting on her encounter with the angel Gabriel being a real experience; she was expecting God to follow through with his promise. The shepherds would not have bothered to enter the town, seeking an audience with the promised messiah, if their hope was wishful and weak. The wise men would not be traversing as far as they did just to see if, by chance, they might happen to run into a great, promised newborn king. Each of these people, along with others in the story of Christmas, were holding onto the anticipation that they would find Jesus.

I find it meaningful that we celebrate Christmas just after the darkest night of the year. The days have started so slowly to get longer that anyone who is not carefully noting the time of the sun's rising and setting would not even notice. Yet, billions of people all over the world are celebrating with lights, candles, trees, gifts, and gathering. I find it meaningful that hope is the first candle that we light as the days are still getting darker and will be getting darker for several more weeks. It adds a layer of defiance to our hope: Even though the days are getting darker, we, together, are expecting the light to come. We may not even notice it at first, but, slowly, our world will be warmed and will start to bloom again.

Advent reminds us that just when we are in our darkest moments, we can confidently anticipate that, somewhere, a warm, bright, growing fire is being lit. When we celebrate the coming of Emmanuel, we are not throwing pennies in a pool -- we are declaring our hope that, because of Jesus, God is truly with us.

—Wesley Lawton

Day 3:

Psalm 61

1 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. 2 From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. 3 For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. 4 I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings. 5 For you, God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. 6 Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. 7 May he be enthroned in God's presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him. 8 Then I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

My parents had a rule: Christmas doesn't start until 7:00 am. Didn't matter what time we woke up, we were not to go into the living room until my parents gave the signal - Christmas music blaring through the whole house of a reel to reel system. Of course, as Youngers, we woke up long before 7:00 am. My older brothers, when they woke up, would come upstairs and hang out in my sister's and my room until 7:00 am. We would sit and play games and talk excitedly about the day to come, while awaiting with anticipation for the sounds that meant Christmas had arrived!

Advent is about anticipating, not only Jesus' birth but His return. We anticipate Christmas by preparing our hearts and remembering what the Christmas story means. How Jesus willingly left His throne in heave to humble himself as an infant human to bring salvation to the world and the forgiveness of sin

—Sue Lovelette

Action: Take a minute and write a Psalm of hope and anticipation for what God will do in you and through you this upcoming year:

Days 6 and 7: Selah

The New American Standard Hebrew Lexicon defines the Hebrew word (הִלָּחַף) as “**to lift up, exalt.**” Some scholars believe that Selah was a musical notation possibly meaning "silence" or "pause;" others, "end," "a louder strain," "piano," etc.

During the weekends of Advent this year, you're invited to stop and pause your regular reading and the busyness that surrounds this season, and make a plan to do something that involves an Advent sabbath - rest, meditation, thanksgiving, restoration.

As we end our week with “hope,” find some way that you can either experience or give hope. Maybe it's an extended time of prayer in the morning. Maybe it's a letter (think long-hand or even email works) that is encouraging and a blessing for an old friend or a family member who has had a tough 2022. Maybe it's doing something for a neighbor - baking, taking your family Christmas caroling - whatever.

To help you in your “plan,” here are some scriptures and suggested songs of the season that might inspire you. And on the following page, we have left space for you to mark what you want to do, or you did do, or that happened - whatever you find you want to mark.

It's crucial for us to read, pray, act, and remember. Take this opportunity to really explore the things you've learned about hope this week, and put them into action!

Ephesians 1:18: ‘I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people..’

Hebrews 10:23: “ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

Isaiah 40:31: “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Mark 9:23: ““ ‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

Philippians 1:6 - “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Psalms 33:18 - “But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,

Psalms 71:14.- “As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.”

