**Advent One: Hope. (Jeremiah 33:14-16)**

Happy New Year!

Yes, I know it is still November, but the beginning of Advent is the beginning of the liturgical year.

And I think that is quite fitting for our theme of Hope today.

If you are like me, each new year you write down things that you *hope* to accomplish in the year to come. As we begin a new year, we often take time to reflect on the year that has passed, and we look to the future with hope and expectation, perhaps sometimes with the hopeful prayer that things will get better.

I think this year, this is especially important. After all, 2021, much like 2020, it was a difficult year as we continued to live through a pandemic.

It wasn’t easy.

In fact, it’s fair to say that it was a struggle for many.

* Lives were lost.
* People were separated from their families as they grieved.
* Job security was an uncertainty for many.
* Loneliness, anxiety, and depression skyrocketed.

And these were all coupled with:

* A rising awareness of systemic racism
* The horrifying acknowledgement of lost indigenous lives.
* And grave ecological concerns for our world.

We are in a time when we desperately need to believe in the candle of HOPE that we light at Advent.

Hope matters.

Hope matters, but it might not be the hope we imagine.

Hope often gets attached to emotions and to our own life stories.

* We “hope” it doesn’t storm and disappoint our travel plans.
* We “hope” we won’t get sick.
* We ‘hope’ there will be no more lock downs.
* We ‘hope’ that church can return to normal

We “hope” this or we hope that, and it is often based on our fears or personal desires.

I invite you in the week to take some to think about your hopes, and see if you can identify the emotions entangled in your hope.

Now, don’t get me wrong, those emotions are real and need to be honoured, but hopes like these are simply too small.

There is a bigger hope worth digging into.

The Hope that we celebrate at Advent pulls us into the power of Hope with a capital ‘H’.

The Hope of Incarnation.

The Hope of God with us.

In the weeks ahead, we will speak about the incarnation of hope in the person of Jesus, as we tell the stories of his birth through scripture, and as we sing familiar Christmas songs.

But hope from God was in the world long before Jesus was born.

Hope was part of creation, in the very beginning.

Hope was part of our very beings with our first breath.

Hope was part of the ancient stories of our ancestors.

Hope from God brought our ancestors through times of trials, much like our present-day pandemic.

The book of Jeremiah is all about hope. The people were broken in body and in spirit, and the principal subject of the book is survival. They are trying to move beyond the destruction and death after the various Babylonian invasions, and at times, many had lost faith.

During the period of exile, they had begun to wonder:

* + Had God forgotten them?
  + How could God allow such political, and economic turmoil?
  + Why had so many people needed to perish?
  + What could the future possible look like?

They sound like questions that we might ask today in these times of uncertainty.

The life of the prophet Jeremiah himself is one of uncertainty – he is arrested, imprisoned, left in a cistern to die, and narrowly escapes with his life.

He loses everything, but he survives.

He buys a plot of land to symbolize the renewed life that will come in the future.

And as the people learn about his suffering and survival – they gain hope.

The whole of the second part of the book of Jeremiah is about how the nation, like Jeremiah, will survive.

How God will bring them into a future full of promise and hope.

We read in Jeremiah 33 how the prophet tells the people God’s promise:

‘*The days are coming, when the Lord will fulfill the good promise made to the people of Israel and Judah.* (v14)

The prophet tells them that a new Davidic king will come to rule, and justice will be restored:

*I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;  
     he will do what is just and right in the land.* (v15)

The people of Judah were filled with hope from this news.

They understood the imagery of a righteous branch.

To them it meant that the monarch would be thoroughly righteous in his rule, and his reign would produce good things, like respect, justice, unity, hope, and peace.

It would be a time when love and compassion would be restored.

And this gave the people great hope.

Imagine then, how much more hope it can give us, some 2500 years later.

We have the insight of knowing that Jesus Christ came, born from the ancestral line of David.

We know that he taught and lived in ways of justice, unity, hope and peace.

And we believe, that through the power of the Spirit, God of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love is still with us.

And so, today as we light the candle of HOPE, let digger us deeper in thinking about what Hope means to us.

Let us remember all that Hope represents from the beginning of time.

Hope in the beginning through the mystery of creation.

Hope in God incarnate through the birth of Jesus.

Hope among us through the power of the Spirit.

Hope to come, as we live in ways to restore God’s vision of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Amen.