

Jordan Station United Church

November 28, 2021

Advent 1: HOPE

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Sermon based on Luke 21:25-36

Have you ever been homesick? People get homesick at different times and for different reasons. If you have ever traveled you will know what a joy it is to finally be back in your own bed after nights of being away from home.

If you have ever had to stay in the hospital, for any extended period of time, you sure know what it feels like to miss a home cooked meal.

I remember the first time that I felt as an adult.

I fell in love, married and had my own home, responsibilities, bills to pay and felt at times overwhelmed with adult life. I suddenly felt very homesick for bills to magically get paid, food to always appear on the table at meal times and someone else around to take care of the cleaning, upkeep and general maintenance of the house that I lived in free of rent!

Of course, not everyone has the same memories or feelings of home that I do. Some homes are filled with hurt and pain, danger and despair. Some homes, like many of the homes in Merritt, British Columbia are under water right now. Roughly 7,000 people who lived in the city of Merritt, BC have been evacuated to surrounding areas. Imagine if you will, being evacuated from your home that is now underwater, six weeks before Christmas, a time when you are hoping to be home and invite others into your home.

I wonder, what does it mean to go “home” for the holidays when you don’t have a home?

What does it mean to be homesick for something you have never experienced before?

These are the things of reality that Jesus speaks of in our apocalyptic (end of the world) scripture for this, the first Sunday of Advent, a time when we look to HOPE to get us through the difficult days. All this, perceived doom and gloom from Jesus at a time when the pain, the suffering, the struggles, the fear, the heartache are felt so acutely by so many across the globe...merely weeks before Christmas. What gives Jesus? Tell us, show us, where is the hope?

I listened carefully and heard a faint whisper...
Stand up. Raise your heads.
God is near. God is here!

Perhaps Jesus was merely painting a picture of what *he* was going to be facing, his corrupt trail, persecution and death. But perhaps, he was also speaking about the struggles his followers were experiencing. And then again, if you listen closely, I think you will hear that he is also speaking to our present day experiences as well,

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

I think we can agree that we see these types of signs all around us. There is a lot of roaring of the sea, and the waves these days. And there is an ominous foreboding of what the future will bring....a lot of uncertainty. “The times they are a-changin’” Bob Dylan sang out in 1964, but we are not sure what they are changing to. Or how to help them change.

All we know is that forest fires have been raging, roads are being washed away, people are fainting from fear...and the powers of the heavens are being shaken. All we know is that our struggles with the pandemic, with political unrest, racial divisions, the injustices around our Indigenous brothers and sister, as well as the unjust systems that continually oppress many other vulnerable and marginalized persons, are signs, pointing, to what? What in this Advent time are we looking toward? Waiting for, on the edge of our seats, in anticipation?

If **hope** is what we are to hold onto, what are we hoping for?

But hang on....Jesus is also saying,
Stand up. Raise your heads.
God is near. God is here!

I have never experienced a natural disaster first hand. I have never been close to a forest fire, extreme flooding, an earthquake or a tornado. I have spoken to people who have been. But still, it's not easy to imagine what that is really like. But *I do see the signs* of the climate emergence we are

facing...in significant ways. I "hear" the earth as it groans, and cries out and struggles....and adapts. Even as it causes chaos for humankind.

Earlier this week I read this story that I want to share with you.

(Seasons/Advent/2009)

"During a sudden tornado, the staff and children of a Canadian summer camp took refuge in a shallow ravine. They huddled there through driving rain, lightening, and a howling wind that twisted the branches every which way. The children were calmed by the staff who sang silly campfire songs and eventually worship songs. Later that evening, when the storm was over, that same staff was treated to one of the most achingly beautiful sunsets. The next day the children were asked about their experience and one said, 'I was so scared I couldn't even cry, but I knew we would be okay because the ravine made me feel like I was sitting in God's hands.'"

God said,
Stand up. Raise your heads.
God is near. God is here!

What signs of despair do you see around us now, in this time?
And where do you see signs of God amongst us? Signs of hope?
When have you feel the hands of God cradling you?

Advent is a time to take out, hang up and enjoy the comforts of traditions, to nurse the pangs of homesickness and hold onto the warm and fuzzy feelings as we long to go home, find a home, stay safe at home, or invite others into our home. But let us not get so caught up in the hustle and the bustle, the planning, the tree decorating, the baking, the cooking, the shopping and the inviting, that we forget to slow down and notice the small signs as well. God invites us to be watchful.

Look around you and see God's hope right here in this sanctuary. The Christmas tree, and evergreen greenery is a reminder of the hope Jesus speaks of in his parable. "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the KIN-dom of God is near.

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, *but my words will not pass away.*"

Look to the circles of hope, the Advent Wreath, a symbol of God's love that has no beginning and no end.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Jesus encourages us in these difficult times of distress:

Stand up. Raise your heads.

God is near. God is here!

We have heard it said that Home is where the heart is. Although we cling to our earthly homes, our houses, our farms, our churches, our familiar places that make us feel like we belong, God calls us to another home. One that God has promised...that is not an outward home but an inward home. A home in God's hands, a home in God's love, a home in God's way. By finding home in God in our hearts, we are able to create that home out in the rest of the world.

This Advent, God is calling us to stay alert in this time of distress and uncertainty, because there are signs. Signs that we need something different from what we have been holding onto here in this reality.

God calls us to an alternate reality. God calls us to not fear the destruction and the dismantling as if these are signs of an ending, but to see them as signs of hope and a new beginning. A new beginning of hope. Let us not get weighed down by the things that separate us from the hope of God's promise...that God is here, has been here, and always will be here, with us. We are not alone.

But living in hope is not something to be done passively.

Living in hope calls us to action!

Stand up. Raise your heads.

God is near. God is here!

God calls us to: "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

And so, we gather. We gather every week. A community of caring, loving and hopeful beings. And why? Because we can't do this alone, it takes a community of believers. We keep gathering in hope, week after week, year after year, gathering, praying, singing and encouraging each other, reminding each other that Jesus, God, is near. God is here!

Jesus comes to us as a baby, in a manger. Jesus comes to us in the future, but also, very much so, in the hands and feet and hearts of all who gather, Jesus comes to us now! Jesus is here.

What we DO matters...not just in solving huge global problems, but all the little things that are signs of God alive and well and working in this world also matter.

When we reach out to a lonely neighbour.
When we call a friend that we had a falling out with and say sorry.
When we build bridges of understanding and care between ourselves and those around us who seem different. These people, that we often see as "the others," come from a different reality than the one we experience, but maybe when we build bridges out of the many things we have in common, we will finally realize that they outnumber the differences.

We are homesick, homesick for a world, for a reality, we have yet to experience. We are homesick for the reality of God's promise.
And so that is the hope, that is the hope we live *for* and live *into*.
God is alive and well and working in this world...and we are called to go out and meet God out there, and to help bring into reality God's blueprint of hope for the healing of God's creation.

"And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be **wed**ded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give away to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young

And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again."
(Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for the United Church of
Canada, Page 217)

May it be so. Thanks be to God. Amen.