

Harbingers of Hope

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church November 28th, 2021 – Jeremiah 33:14-16, Isaiah 11:1-8 & Luke 1:26-28)

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. The Christian calendar sets aside this month to wait, to ponder and prepare ourselves for the Christmas season, to meditate on the child who is born and grows up to be our Lord. Each week we follow a theme – hope, peace, joy and love. Today is hope.

We live in a world that needs hope, so many people it seems to me are living without hope. Hope that in a world of unrest, of pandemic, of violence, of denial of climate change, of corruption there might be truth and peace, there might be justice and righteousness, there might be a future for our children.

This is the hope to which both Jeremiah and Isaiah refer. Jeremiah looks forward to the day when God will fulfil his promise of raising up someone who will embody justice and righteousness, to a day when people can live in safety and peace. Isaiah paints a picture of what this might look like – wolves and lambs together, leopards and young animals, calves and lions, cattle and bears – all sharing, all co-existing, a sense of mutuality, a place of unity and of peace, a place where no harm comes to them, a place of harmony.

Christians believe that God, in Jesus, ushers in such a reality.

In our other reading Mary is visited by a messenger of hope – an angel. A messenger of hope to both her and her people. Once her fear and confusion subsides, she begins to embrace the idea that God might use her to bring to reality the hopes of her people. Sure, this will bring her both joy and pain and much heartache but she is able to hope that soon God will put things right, will turn the world upside down, lift up the lowly and raise up the Saviour for which her people waited. She expresses this beautifully in what we know as the Magnificat or Mary's song.

Hope says Archbishop Desmond Tutu – is being able to see that there is light despite the darkness.

Henri Nouwen¹ in an advent reflection speaks of waiting in hope from his observations of the Christmas Story. Christmas is full of characters that are waiting in hope – Elizabeth and Zechariah wait with hope, Anna and Simeon have spent decades waiting with hope, Mary waits and hopes and they all represent Israel as she waits in hope for her Messiah of which Jeremiah and Isaiah speak.

Nouwen says waiting in hope means:

1. Waiting with a sense of promise
2. Waiting actively
3. Waiting patiently
4. Waiting with an open-ended attitude.
5. Waiting trusting that something will happen
6. Waiting in hope together

¹ 'Waiting for God' by Henri Nouwen in Watch for the Light – Readings for Advent and Christmas, The Plough Publishing House

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What do you hope for this Advent?' [leave some silence]

What hopes do you have for the world and the church? [leave some silence]

With me will you offer back to God you prayers of hope for this world.

- Hope that peace will come to places of conflict, especially in Myanmar, Afghanistan and the Solomon Islands.
- Hope that people don't have to live in fear.
- Hope that kindness will dictate our actions both individually and corporately.
- Hope that this current pandemic might recede.
- Hope that as a nation we might offer sanctuary to those fleeing their homelands and unjust regimes,
- Hope for the unexpected and surprising.
- Hope that we will have the courage to follow the Christ Child into difficult situations and speak words of comfort and peace.

This Advent, may your waiting be active, done with a sense of promise, be open-ended, patient, done together and be hope filled.

As we approach Christmas may each of you be filled with expectancy, joy, peace and hope as you ponder the great gift that God gives us in Jesus the Christ who was, who is and who will be. Amen.
