

Hope



Discerning God's *kairos* in the midst of our daily *chronos*

ADVENT DEVOTIONS – WEEK 1
NOVEMBER 29–DECEMBER 5, 2020

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SUNDAY | TIMOTHY 4:6-10

We use the word hope frequently, perhaps even flippantly. We hope not to get stuck in traffic or to get tickets to the game. The word hope gets thrown around and employed for wishes or desires. But the hope of Advent, the hope of our faith, goes much deeper than our likes and wants. The hope of Christianity entails nothing less than the redemption of the world — and this hope, while often difficult to maintain in the face of evil, is nonetheless certain. Paul instructs Timothy, his young apprentice in the faith, to train in godliness and focus on that which is true and worthy of full acceptance. He reminds Timothy, “For to this end we toil and strive because we have set our hope on the living God who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe.” Our hope encompasses all of creation. Imagine that scale of expectation.

Our hope in this world of pandemic and war, poverty and disease, is set on the living God, the Savior of all people, who soon will become incarnate and dwell among us, who promises to return and set all things

right. As we begin this liturgical year and look to the end of the calendar year, we do not take hope lightly. The year 2020 does not afford us the luxury of cheap hope. Too much has been lost, altered or upended for us to hope for anything less than redemption, salvation and God for and with us. If we have learned nothing else this year, we have learned the limits of our own power. We cannot save ourselves. Our finitude cannot be denied. Our need for divine strength and intervention feels obvious this Advent. This year when we sing “Come, Lord, Jesus” from behind masks while we are physically distant from one another, I suspect we will do so with palpable longing, with a yearning hope to know without question that God is indeed with us.

As we eagerly anticipate the inbreaking of God’s kingdom this Advent, hearing Paul’s words to Timothy — that young disciple attempting to shepherd a nascent flock living in the middle of a threatening context — could guide and encourage us, too. Focus on godliness. Remember the teachings of Jesus, the commandments of God. Emulate those people of faith who are admirable, wise and stalwart. Think about the good doctrine learned from the Word of God and faithful people. Ignore irreverent and silly myths. Hope in no one less than Jesus Christ and nothing short of the salvation of all people.

Lord of all that is seen and unseen, we set our hope on you, our living God who comes to save, not condemn, the world. This year we feel battered and weary, ready for your inbreaking, longing for a sure awareness of your presence. We know you are true and worthy of full acceptance even on days we doubt your providence and wonder when you will set all things right. Help us to set our hope on you and live as people of hope who point to your light and enact your love in a world too often awash in hopelessness. Amen.

MONDAY | HEBREWS 11:1-3

Hebrews tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. As you begin the Advent season and reflect on the year, what are your fervent hopes for yourself, your community, church and the world? Write those hopes down, envision them and pray about them. Can you be convicted and assured of their coming to fruition, even if you do not yet see them?

Gracious God, align our hopes with yours so that our dreams and visions participate in your good and certain future for all creation. Do not let our fear overtake our hope. Do not let us capitulate to lesser desires or false teachings. Grant us the faith to hope for nothing less than the redemption of the world that Jesus comes to bring. Give us the courage to participate in the new, good, life-giving thing, your near kingdom, present and coming. Amen.

TUESDAY | 1 PETER 1:13-16

Set your hope fully on grace. This, Scripture tells us is how we prepare our minds for action. Focus and anticipate and hope in grace — not efficiency or power or intelligence or even wisdom, but grace. Hope in grace runs counter to our culture obsessed with righteousness or winning, consumption or acquiring. What would it mean to set your hope fully on grace today?

Gracious God, grace seems like a risky bet given the state of our hearts and the state of our world. Won't those who hope in grace get exploited in the face of evil and sin? Besides, we take delight in seeing people get what we think should be coming to them. Help us to desire grace not only for ourselves, but for everyone. Show us again the unmatched, transformative power of your grace. Amen.

WEDNESDAY | ROMANS 8:18-24

The whole of creation groans together in the pains of childbirth. When we survey our world, where do we hear it groaning? Paul insists these groans lead not to death but to new life in Christ. This is the hope in which we are saved, for which we wait in patience. What difference does it make if today you reframe present suffering as birth pangs? What new life is God ushering into the world?

God of new life, you send your Son to usher in redemption. Nothing can separate us from your love. We confess that our waiting for suffering to end is not always marked by patience or hope. Despair creeps into our consciousness and we doubt that creation can survive, let alone thrive. Send your Spirit to intercede so that we might live in and act out of the hope of our faith. Amen.

THURSDAY | 1 CORINTHIANS 13:7,13

This most familiar of Bible passages reminds us of the intimate connection between hope and love. Love bears, believes, hopes and endures all things. The love of God made manifest in our human relationships tethers us together and binds us to one another in ways that will not be undone by life's myriad challenges. Consider those you love this day, those you are called to love, those you struggle to love. What are your hopes for them?

Loving God, you unite us in Christ. Such intimacy is not our doing and we cannot undo it. Nonetheless, we often test this oneness and fail to bear, believe, hope and endure in love. Knowing your unfailing love for us, we pray to exhibit a love that hopes all things even for those we find hard to love. May our stalwart love bear witness to your love for the world. Amen.

FRIDAY | JEREMIAH 29:10-14

God has plans for us, plans for our welfare and future. God promises to hear us when we call out and be found when we seek our Lord. When have you struggled to believe that God had plans — good plans — for you? Can you recall a time when you could not discern God's providence in the moment, but could see how God's good plans were evident in retrospect? Can this remembering give you hope for today?

God of our past, present and future, when present circumstances baffle and challenge us, test and upend us, we struggle to see your good plans and we worry about the future. We know you promise to hear us when we call. We know your word is trustworthy and true. When we cannot yet perceive your providence, sustain us and give us hope until that time when we see your good plans for us come to fruition. Amen.

SATURDAY | LUKE 24:21

This verse comes in the middle of the discourse between several of Jesus' bereft disciples and the risen Christ. They voice their dashed hope to the One walking with them who fulfilled it. They cannot yet see that their hope is not lost, but found and present right in front of them. How often is this true for us? Today prayerfully ask God for the vision to see God's fulfillment of promises right in front of you.

Lord of all that is seen and unseen, even when we hope for that which you promise, we often fail to see your present and coming kingdom despite the fact that you are walking alongside us. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the holy in our midst. Do not let our human expectations blind us to your divine inbreaking wherever and whenever it comes. Amen.