

## Seeing a Different Hope

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1 – 4, Jeremiah 29:11 – 14,

& Lamentations 3:21 – 23

Advent #1 – 11/28/21

Here we are again, Advent! Let us open ourselves to a time of expectation. Let us say with all our intentions that we want this Advent season to be different! And let us start by seeing a different hope!

In our reading from Isaiah, he has a LOT to say about how hope is cultivated in waiting. Isaiah reminds us that God appears in unlikely moments of our daily routines. In other words – Get ready to be surprised!

But here's the thing about surprises – they can pass us by if we do not have eyes to see them. We all know the Christmas story and often we 'Yad-Yad' through the Advent season. We are not surprised by the story because we have heard it so often. Let this Advent season be different. Let us not 'Yad-Yad' through this Advent season.

Do not wait until the BIG moment of Christmas Eve to hear the good news that Christ is born. This good news is available now! Let us open our eyes and see – Hope is here!

Though we get caught on the hamster wheel of business during the Christmas season; Though we get caught off guard by how early Christmas decoration come out each year, it seems Christmas decorations come out before Thanksgiving ends; O yes, each of us have a neighbor who has already decorated his front yard or maybe you are that neighbor or maybe you have not done a thing yet - Let us find this Advent different.

There are those people who have already started baking homemade cookies and cupcakes and you barely have made it to the grocery store, let us stop and find a different hope this Advent.

May this Advent have a hopeful pace that calls us to measure our success according to God's plan for us, not someone else's plan for us. Advent is a season for us to live a way of life that helps us remember who we are hoping for.

A Christian bookstore will offer you fine artwork, good decorations, or coffee mugs that have Christmas verses printed on them. We love these things, they inspire us! They give us comfort and promise that something better is on the way.

But the original hearers of the prophetic words of Jeremiah were a community, not a single person. As Israel sought to make sense of its time of exile in Babylon, Jeremiah wanted them to infuse hope within them. They were not going to be exile forever. Jeremiah shared that God would take them home.

And here we sit today, the hearers of the prophetic words of Jeremiah as a faith community, not a single person. We seek to make sense of this time in our history, Jeremiah wants us to infuse hope within us. We are not going to have live like this forever. Jeremiah shares that God would take us home.

Our collective calling is God's restorative work through Jesus Christ that brings us hope, a different hope.

As we tend to the work of seeing hope differently, we can easily encounter roadblocks. These roadblocks maybe that pesky friend from our past who leads you astray. If your past is like my past, you have lots of pesky friends like this! They tell you that we tried that before so do not try it again. They tell you that the last time you tried that, it was a huge mistake.

As we listen to these pesky friends, we stop the God given dream within us before it even starts. Yet Advent reminds us that the way things have always been done simply will not work anymore in God's kingdom. We must lay the past to rest!

God is about to do a new thing. Now is the time for something new to spring forth. Do you perceive it?

God's hope always leads us toward the future. God's hope always takes us to a place where the unimaginable is possible. Our God is a God who makes the way through the wilderness. Our God is a God who tames the wild beast. Our God is the God who gives water in the dry places. Our God can make all things new!

Hope, as much as we cling to it, can easily get lost in our lives. Setbacks come to us and our plans fall short, but the writer of Lamentations encourages us to give hope's work in us another chance. It says in our reading from Lamentations that our love for our Lord should be steadfast and it should never cease.

Let us exclaim this – Great is the Lord's faithfulness to us!

Hope shows up in the community and gives us everything we need. Oh, yes during this Advent season, let us hope differently!

Those appointed to rule over us do not always lead with righteousness. It seems that the wrong people are exalted and we often forget about the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, and the lonely. It seems the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Isaiah tells us what is not right in the world. Isaiah tells us to hope differently. God wants us to be part of the change to open our eyes and see hope differently. God wants us to open our ears and invite a new hearing of the Christmas story. We need to be involved in a new conversation and open our mouths in a way that includes others.

It can be easy to write off hope considering what we have been through during this pandemic. It can be easy to not put hope into action when we live in isolation because of the pandemic. We may want to say – ‘Well, that is nice but it is never going to happen! Hope may seem like a pie-in-the-sky dream! But as people of faith, God gave us work to do, so let’s do it!

Let us see a different hope!

Let us pray:

Loving God, open our eyes to how the Holy Spirit is already moving around us and the Holy Spirit wants to move even more around us. We want to wait with your vision for our lives and this world.

God, we come to you with our weariness and our jealousies. Remind us the hope comes not from our striving to do better, but hope resides in you. Let us have a different hope this Advent.

God, we are hoping not just for ourselves, but for all those in our community and nation who need fresh strokes of your grace. Help us to speak your hope and be your hope to those who feel forgotten around us.

Ever present God, we do not want to be paralyzed by roadblocks. We want to live into your new thing with a different hope. Surround us with teachers who call us out when we feel like going back to the wilderness.

We often want to quit! We have let fear write the pages of our stories. When we find ourselves in those places, may we find a different hope to save us.

Loving God, gives us a clear vision to see beyond what is, to see what could be. Help our steps be aligned with your dreams for all our brothers and sisters. Embolden us with courage and a different hope. We pray all this in the name of the One who brought us a different hope – Jesus Christ. AMEN.

To conclude this message, Emily Swett will be singing ‘O Come, O Come Emmanuel’ with two new verses written by Rev. Kevin Munroe on hope.