

Advent: Hope Luke 21:25–36

Advent means “coming” or “arrival,” Advent begins four Sundays until Christmas Eve. It is a season of preparation and anticipation for the coming of Jesus. Advent is marked by themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. This Sunday’s theme is hope and I want to talk about the message of Hope.

We often associate first advent time with the sweet image of the baby Jesus, but today we encounter a different aspect of Christ’s coming. In our Gospel reading from Luke, we meet a grown-up Jesus, who shakes up the universe and turns it upside down.

This text might feel heavy, perhaps even unsettling, especially during a season filled with cheer and festivity. Yet, I soon realized that, despite its intensity, this message is ultimately hope, and calls us to attention as we await not just his first arrival but his promised return at the end of time.

Vincent van Gogh’s masterpiece, **The Starry Night(1889)**, captures the essence of this Advent message beautifully. The painting depicts an apocalyptic sky, like that described by Jesus. There are swirling clouds in bold yellows and white on deep, dark blue and black. There is a bold and bright yellow moon and very bright stars. In the background is a small town, with the church steeple as its most prominent feature. In the foreground, a fiery flamelike image connects earth and sky. Art historians take it to be a cypress tree, which in van Gogh’s time would have been associated with graveyards and mourning.

Some see it as a daunting image of a frightening sky, others as something bold and beautiful, others as a glimpse of God. Like van Gogh’s great painting, Luke’s apocalypse(end of the world) leads to different reactions from those who admire it. Frightening, bold, and beautiful glimpses of hope in God’s promise— this is what Jesus offers on this First Sunday of Advent.

Advent is not merely about anticipating Christ’s coming; it’s about **recognizing that his coming brings hope**, even when our lives and our world seem to be falling apart. We see glimpses of God’s kingdom— peace, grace, and healing, but we still endure pain, suffering and sorrow. This two parts is something we must learn to navigate as we await the day when God will fully restore creation. * already-not yet God’s kingdom, liminality (In between space)

In the following verses, Jesus offers us an illustration from nature—the fig tree, which loses its leaves in winter only to bloom again in spring. This serves as a reminder of the cyclical nature of life and the promise of renewal. Just as the earth is subject to change, so our world is too. So in the face of devastation, we can stand confidently, trusting that God’s faithfulness will bring about our liberation.

In the Bible, hope is expressed by the notion of promise. The Bible defines the characteristics of the covenant God using two Hebrew words: *hesed* (e.g. **Exodus 34:6; Psalm 25:10; 40:10-11;**

85:10). In general, these words are translated by "**steadfast love**" and "**faithfulness.**" They tell us that God is love, good and kindness, who is taking care of God's people. God will never abandon God's people. That is the source of biblical hope. **Our source of hope is not from circumstance, our ability or our security, but it is in God's steadfast love** so that we continue to hold hope in Christ no matter our current situation are.

The Israelites had endured a long period of suffering as they waited for the Messiah. They didn't know when the Messiah would come and restore them. But they chose to wait, hopeful in God's promise that God would deliver them from their suffering and restore them. This hope does not come from their own imagination or dream but is based on God's word. **Christian hope is based on God's steadfast love and God's new promise in Christ.** We trust that God is a God of love even when we see hatred all around us, and God is a God of life even when we see death, destruction, and agony all around us.

What does it mean to have hope living in the liminal space in the midst of human suffering, chaos, disease, and war? Are we waiting passively for Christ to come one day and performs magical power to change the world in the future? Do we blame the circumstances, the broken world, and accept it as our fate?

Hope in Christ is not giving up to fate. It is a call to take charge of our lives, to respond with hope, and to bring about change in a world that desperately needs it. Hope is resistance to all kinds of *determinism(*everything that happens is the result of earlier events and conditions, leading no room for chance or free will)

Pondering quote from Viktor E Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning.

“Between stimulus(An event or situation that triggers a reaction) and response(our reaction or action to the stimulus) there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way"

Your life is not what happened to you, it is what you do with what happened to you.

Hope give us liberation and freedom. When you are given a choice, if you choose the right attitude, you will be given more freedom.

Today, as we light the first candle of Advent, let us embrace this **active hope. It is not a fearful thing, but a joyous anticipation of God's coming into our lives and our world.** May we be watchful and alert, prayerful and humble, as we prepare to receive Christ anew.

Amen.