

“The Coming HOPE”

1 Cor. 1:3-9, Mark 13:32-37

Some of you may recall the theme for this year’s Stewardship season... I’m SURE that you committed it to memory, RIGHT? 😊 *“Great is Thy Faithfulness: Today, and Tomorrow.”* The *intention* was that as we recall just how faithful God has shown Himself to be in the **present**, and promises to be in the **future**, we too should show our own faith in the way we use our resources today, and tomorrow. As I contemplated that nature of God’s goodness that is manifest both in the present, and in the future, I was reminded of a Reformed principle known as *“Already, but not yet.”* Familiar? That’s what I thought. One of those ‘deep thoughts’ I first pondered in the ‘cemetery’... er, *seminary*...

In essence, what it is to remind us of that as we read in Scripture of the many references that Jesus Himself makes to the **“kingdom of heaven,”** that ‘kingdom’ can be thought of in TWO ways: the ‘kingdom’ that was ushered in when the “Prince of Peace” came to earth... the ways in which we currently experience God’s presence and providence... and the ‘kingdom’ that we look forward to one day when Christ returns... that reign that is yet to come. That as ‘royal subjects’ of the King of kings and Lord of lords, we are, at the same time, members of kingdom that is *“Already, but Not Yet.”* I came across this blog title that might sum it up for a lot of folks: *“I wish Jesus would come already, but not yet...”*

It is truly that same principle of that which has both **come**, and is **yet to come**, that lies at the heart of the Advent season. That we celebrate with joy the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world some 2000 years ago, but at the same time look forward to the Advent that is still to come... the ‘Second Coming’ of Christ. That time when, in the words of our Lord’s Prayer, His *“will be done on earth, (just) as it is in heaven”*...

And so, for these next four weeks, we will consider how the Scriptures speak to the **present**, and **future**, nature of our Christian faith. How we are *‘already’* striving to live Godly lives, but we are sure *‘not there yet.’* Each week we will consider the historic central theme of

that particular Sunday: Hope, Peace, Joy, Love. Leading us to culmination on Christmas Eve of the 'reason for the season,' Jesus Christ. Today, we will look at how our readings speak to **"The Coming HOPE."**

Now, as we consider what our readings from **Mark** and **1 Corinthians** have to say to us about 'HOPE,' did you notice anything peculiar? Like, the word 'hope' doesn't appear ANYWHERE in either of the two! Shouldn't we be considering ones like **Isaiah 40: "those who HOPE in the Lord will renew their strength like eagles"...** or, like the one a few weeks ago from **1 Thessalonians, "Do not grieve as those who have no HOPE..." (4:13)** Or, that verse that you have heard me quote 'once or twice' from **Jeremiah: "For you know the plans I have for you... plans to give you HOPE, and a future." (29:11)** But NOOOO... we are considering two passages completely devoid of the word 'hope!' But when you think about it, as God's faithful followers, shouldn't we be the very ones who 'look for HOPE where there appears to BE no 'HOPE?'

As we look deeper into these words of Paul and Jesus, I would suggest to you that there are a **number** of 'hope-filled' perspectives contained here. That in these verses we can indeed find **"Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow."** One is the HOPE that we have **TOGETHER**. That we should never take for granted, but always be grateful, for the **strength** and **hope** that we have as the body of Christ that is the CHURCH. As flawed as the Corinthian congregation was, as much as they showed their fallible human tendencies, Paul yet started out his message to them with a word of hope: **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you..." (1 Cor. 1:3-4)**

"Grace and peace to you." Could you imagine the reaction you'd get if you started out an email, or a handwritten letter (you remember those... like Paul did) ... or, if you REALLY wanted a strange look, try using it when you first see a friend: **'Grace and peace to you.'** Go ahead. Try it. Turn to your neighbor and say that to him/her, **'Grace and peace to you.'** C'mon... made you feel pretty good, didn't it? Feel a little more 'hopeful?'

And then there's that next line: **"I give thanks to my God always for you."** When was the last time that you 'gave thanks to God' for those who stand 'together' with you... co-workers, family, friends, church members? I can tell you ONE person whom I think said this just yesterday... our dear fellow church member **Joyce Carr**, whose husband passed away

unexpectedly Saturday morning. From that hospital room to her living room, she was surrounded by her church family. Those ***“friends who stick closer than a brother.”*** Whether or not her lips articulated it or not, as we closed our prayer time yesterday in her home, her eyes most certainly said, ***“I give thanks to my God always for you.”*** TOGETHER, we can offer each other HOPE. Is the Church *Perfect*? NO. **Powerful**? YES!

Another reason that we can be filled with HOPE is that God has given us, and will continue to give us, the **TOOLS** that we need in order to be used effectively by Him. Again, despite the fact that the Church in Corinth was marked by division, disorder, heresy, and moral laxity, Paul would yet remind them that ***“...in every way you have been enriched in Christ Jesus, in speech and knowledge of every kind... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift...”***

(1 Corinthians 1:5-7) I know that we have been talking a lot in our book study about the different audiences that Paul was addressing, and how we must be careful about how we read another person’s letter, but I think that these words could be written to the church in Welsh/LC just as well as to the one in Corinth. **[repeat]** Friends, whether you want to admit it or not, you ALL have been ‘enriched in Jesus Christ’... with the ability to ‘know’ and ‘speak’ how God has blessed you. You ALL have spiritual ‘gifts’... ‘TOOLS’ to be used for God’s glory. But they are just like the ‘tools’ that are stored in your tool shed or toolbox: they are of NO VALUE unless they are USED!

A third way to grow in our appreciation of the HOPE that we are to have is simply to **TRUST in God!** Paul assures the church... then and now... that ***“God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son... He will strengthen you to the end.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:8-9) I think that I’ve shared with you before how rewarding it was to have had the opportunity to pray with clients at the OPFP ministry that this church, and many others, were involved with for so many years. And that one of the verses I found myself drawn to with most every one I prayed with was that God has promised, ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*** (Deut. 31:6) A promise that we can ALL hold on to...

God IS faithful. Even when we’re not. He WILL strengthen you. Even when you feel to be your weakest. You HAVE been called by God. Even if you don’t listen too well. These words of encouragement by the Apostle remind me of some similar words to the church at Philippi:

“He who began a good work in you WILL be faithful to complete it.” (Philippians 1:6) And believe me... we are ALL a ‘good work in progress’...

Sooo... we have all been encouraged by Paul that as we stand **TOGETHER**... as we use the gifts, the **TOOLS** that God has given us... that we simply **TRUST** in God... we can have **HOPE**. So where is the ‘hope’ in those words of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel? ***“Beware, keep alert.” “For you do not know when the time will come... therefore, keep awake.”*** ‘HOPE?’ These sound more like a reason to cry, ‘HELP!’

But rather than see these as words of warning... which they are... I believe that they can also be seen to express the HOPE that we are being given **TIME**. TIME to fix that in our lives which would not be pleasing to God. TIME to heal those broken relationships with one another... and with God. TIME to help bring others to Christ. TIME to prepare ourselves for the time that is coming when the Master of the house will return, and we do not want to be found to be ‘asleep,’ but rather, that we have ‘kept alert’ for His return.

And so, my friends, in this season of Advent let us ponder the ‘Already but not yet’ nature of the Kingdom of God. Of how Christ came into a dark world to give people hope... and will come again to bring light to our current darkness. And until he does, may WE be HIS light to others. Just as we did in our consideration of the Scriptures, let us strive to help others ‘find HOPE where there seems to BE no hope.’ Hope that can only be found in those opening words of Paul: ***“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** And all God’s children said, AMEN!..

CHARGE – **“God can bring peace to your past, purpose to your present,**

And hope to our future.”

Let us be **messengers** of God’s **peace, purpose, and hope** to others... **HOPE** that can indeed be found on this earth: HOW? There’s only ‘one way’... ‘THE’ way, Jesus Christ...