

Ser20-46 Sermon: "Hope or Humbug?" or 11-29-20 ad 1
Theme: "The Good News Gift of Advent: HOPE!"
Scriptures: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Mark 13:24-37
Advent Candle: HOPE

A song released in 1983 by the Canadian country music star, Anne Murray, **still today in 2020** stirs in us the desire if not a deep need for "a little good news today" in our lives. In the first two verses and the chorus, Murray sings,

*There's a local paper rolled up in a rubber band
One more sad story's one more than I can stand
Just once how I'd like to see the headline say
"Not much to print today, can't find nothin' bad to say", because*

*Nobody robbed a liquor store on the lower part of town
Nobody OD'ed, nobody burned a single buildin' down
Nobody fired a shot in anger, nobody had to die in vain
We sure could use a little good news today*

These lyrics still to this day paint a pretty vivid portrait of the bad news vs good news phenomena we face today. There are the big huge bad news headlines (With just a few we can see a strong tendency toward the bad news version of major events in the us over the past 50 years.





LIDES...



AND IN THE PAST WEEK ALONE WE HAVE THESE HEADLINES OUT IN FRONT OF FOUR NEWS STORIES: **TAKE A LOOK:** The headlines in 2020: ◇◇ Cases of Covid 19 approach over 90,000 per day; ◇◇ Covid 19 has killed over 250,000 Americans; ◇◇ Another Black man killed by police ◇◇ 3 dead in apparent terrorist attack in Nice, France . ◇◇ Walmart puts guns on sale back in the display cases.

Indeed, "we sure could use a little good news today." To be honest, there are 'good news headlines,' but they are SO OFTEN overwhelmed by the 'bad news.'

How do we respond? How does the church respond? How do we talk about these headlines and challenges as we come to the end of 2020 and as we enter a new Christian calendar in the season called, 'Advent'? Is there any good news to share? Well, yes, there is. Isaiah says it best: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence -- this is the presence of the one, we will call Jesus.

Indeed, how do we have HOPE? Or is it just a time of Bah, HUMBUG? It depends on our response to the situations of our lives.

Well, I want to declare there is good news in Advent and Christmas, and by this theme -- "The Good News Gift of Advent"-- we will explore the reasons, lots of reasons, that we re-claim the power of Advent in our lives. So **What is**

this gift of Advent this year? It is a gift we need more than ever: Hope, hope nurtured by the sense of comfort, Peace and Courage. Drawing mostly on texts from the prophet, Isaiah, we will explore these gifts we surely need as 2020 comes to an end: **Hope, Peace, comfort and Courage.**

"The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof." — Barbara Kingsolver, Animal Dreams

It takes courage...sometimes a lot of courage to "figure out what you hope for, and even more courage to live into that hope..much less to make the hope you desire to come about in real ways. We can talk about setting goals and getting clear about your vision for your life, and making the plans to achieve those goals...but unless you find the hope to make it all happen, hope in yourself, hope in those you choose to be around you...those goals and plans might end up being pretty shallow...just goals and plans without the passion needed to really live into your life.

In our two scripture lessons, I see something emerging that you might not be able to see or hear with just this one reading this morning.

If we look back from our reading from Isaiah 64, to chapter 61 we hear Isaiah, say to the people, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; the Lord has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners....." This was the hope for a hopeless people.

Some people might say to us this morning, "well, all that's well and good but look at my life, look around in the place where I am; look at the times --- where is my hope? It's in those moments we can turn to those around in such a community of healing and love...and of hope.

You see, we can find hope in the encounter we have with each other? Does their hope live in what we are promised during this Advent season? The coming of one who is all love and grace and peace

In Mark's gospel, we read of the powerful image Jesus projects from the fig tree. Jesus says, " ²⁸⁻³¹ *Take a lesson from the fig tree. From the moment you notice its buds form, the merest hint of green, you know summer's just around the corner. And so it is with you. When you see all these things, you know he is at the door. Don't take this lightly. I'm not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won't wear out.*

It seems to me that the ultimate test of our hope—that is, how strong is our hope—is tied directly with how strong is how belief in these words of Jesus: How much do we trust that Jesus' words, indeed, the words of the still speaking God will last..they are here today to overcome any bad news.

Back a couple of years ago, Studs Terkel, wrote a book that he titled: "Hope Dies Last: Keeping the faith in Difficult Times." Terkel's books are always filled with interviews of ordinary people who have a keen sense of the human landscape of the times; and of people who live in particularly intriguing places. In this case Terkel took his title for his book from Jessie de la Cruz, a retired farm worker. "If you lose hope, she told him, "you lose everything." So receive the gift of hope this advent.

I have suggested from time to time that love is the world's most powerful force, but you know, I'm beginning to think that hope rivals the power and force of love in our world. Indeed, if hopes dies, then what are we left with? Just a life of bad news stories. May this advent bring you good news and hope for the days ahead. Even today. Amen.