

Live Into Hope Advent 1  
Psalm 27  
Matthew 12:9-21

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. Each Sunday during the Advent Season, we traditionally light a candle on the Advent wreath and consider the word of the day for the 4 Sundays of the month. Those words are: Hope, Joy, Love and Peace. Why these 4 words? Because these are the promises found in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus IS these words!

So, this morning we start with the word “hope.” The traditional dictionary definition of this word is: *“A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.”* However, a more Biblical understanding of this word is the idea that you KNOW a certain thing will happen, at some time and in some way because we believe in the promises of God—and that is called faith. So, let’s consider hope this morning.

Perhaps it is best to imagine what life would be like without hope in order to illustrate what it is. Think about all the evil we see in the world now, and as we think about history and all the evil we know that has occurred in the past. Now imagine that is all that is. Imagine that there is no good, no light at the end of the tunnel, no God. If that is true, all is lost. Evil wins. **But the whole point of Scripture is to tell us just the opposite! The Bible from beginning to end tells us that what God created is good, and that God will win in the end!** And so there is the hope. Without God, there is no hope. With God, we have hope.

To me, Psalm 27 sums this all up so well. Hear it again, in part:

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold<sup>[a]</sup> of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?*

<sup>2</sup>*When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.*

<sup>3</sup>*Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;*

*though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.*

*<sup>4</sup> One thing I asked of the LORD;  
this I seek:*

*to live in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
and to inquire in his temple.*

*<sup>5</sup> For he will hide me in his shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now my head is lifted up  
above my enemies all around me,  
and I will offer in his tent  
sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.*

*<sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.*

*<sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

If that isn't a song of hope, I don't know what is.

I wanted to share a couple of quotes with you to consider on this Sunday of hope. The first is a quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Let me remind you who he is, using information from a newspaper article that was written shortly after his death.

*FLOSSENBURG PRISON April 9, 1945. Today the controversial German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, along with other members of the Admiral Canaris resistance group, were executed here by hanging.*

*Bonhoeffer went calmly to his death. This morning as he was led out of his cell, he was observed by the prison doctor who said: "Through the half-open door I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer still in his prison clothes, kneeling in fervent prayer to the Lord his God. The devotion and evident conviction of being heard that I saw in the prayer of this intensely captivating man moved me to the depths."*

*The prisoners were ordered to strip. Naked under the scaffold, Bonhoeffer knelt for one last time to pray. Five minutes later, he was dead.*

*Bonhoeffer was condemned for his involvement in "Operation 7," a rescue mission that had helped a small group of Jews over the German border and into Switzerland. The 39-year-old theologian had also been involved in planning an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler. His participation in the murder plot obviously conflicts with Bonhoeffer's position as a pacifist. His sister-in-law, Emmi Bonhoeffer, cited his reasoning. He told her: "If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver."*

*Interestingly, Bonhoeffer had safely escaped the troubles in Europe and gone to teach in New York in June, 1939. He abruptly returned less than a month later saying: "I have had time to think and to pray about my situation, and that of my nation, and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of the Christian life in Germany after the war if I did not share in the trials of this time with my people. Christians in Germany face the terrible alternative of willing the defeat of their nation in order that civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose. But I cannot make that choice in security."*

*EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT: In the same month that Bonhoeffer was hanged, on April 30, 1945, Hitler committed suicide. Seven days later Germany surrendered.*

Think about that for a moment. He was in America, safe and could have stayed. But he chose to go back. BTW—there is currently a new movie out about Bonhoeffer, but everything I am hearing is saying that it is NOT an accurate portrayal. If you are interested in learning more about this modern day martyr, I would suggest instead that you look at any of the older movies and biographies of Bonhoeffer that are out there—plus Bonhoeffer himself wrote several books. They are deep but powerful reads. But here is the quote that applies to today. From his tiny cell in a Nazi prison he wrote:

*The celebration of Advent is possible only to those who are troubled in soul, who know themselves to be poor and imperfect, and who look forward to something greater to come.*” His unwavering hope in the face of darkness inspires us to hold on to God’s timeless promises, no matter the circumstances

Another quote I found while researching for today’s sermon is from author James Baldwin, who was both black and gay, and therefore knew about persecution. He wrote: *“I have never been in despair about the world. Enraged. I have been enraged by the world, but never despair. We cannot afford despair. You can’t tell the children there is no hope.”*

**We can’t tell the children there is no hope.** We have to be beacons of hope no matter what is going on around us, or the evil wins.

But think about this. Eventually, in every circumstance you can think of in history, the perpetrators of evil have eventually failed. Rome fell. Napoleon lost at Waterloo. Hitler committed suicide as the Russian army moved into Berlin, and more. It may take a long time in our view, but eventually evil collapses in on itself. There is always hope. Or, to look at it another way—despite all odds the good guy wins---some solution comes out of left field, something no one ever saw coming.... there is always hope.

That’s why I entitled this sermon “Live Into Hope” and why we will be singing that hymn again even though we just sang it recently. That’s what we have to do. We have to live into Hope, live it, be it for a weary world. We have to BE Christ’s hope, joy, love and peace in this world, until he comes again.

As we close today, please say these words, repeating after me:

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.*

<sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD!*

Amen.