

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
November 29, 2020
Advent 1

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, 22 years ago today something very special happened.

22 years ago, on November 29th, which in that year 1998 also fell on a Sunday, a momentous occasion took place.

22 years ago today, on a Sunday morning, my wife Kathy and I worshipped at Kathy's home church.

But it was a Sunday morning unlike other Sunday mornings.

For it was Kathy's and my wedding day.

PAUSE

And family and friends from all over converged on St. John's Lutheran Church in Kittanning, Pennsylvania to celebrate with us.

We had decided to be married on the First Sunday of Advent because we figured that the beginning a new church year, was an appropriate time for us to starting a new life together.

It is now 22 years, and two teenagers later.

It is now 22 years, and three churches later, three churches for me, and for Kathy.

We are both in our third calls.

It is now 22 years and a few more inches on our waistlines later.

And here we are.

We are once again gathered on the First Sunday in Advent.

We are once again in worship.

And there is the promise of a new church year.

There is the promise of God's coming.

There is the promise of hope.

PAUSE

I have always liked Advent.

And not just because it marks a special time in my married life...

No, I have always liked Advent because of its promise of hope.

That is why we have our Advent wreath, to mark the passing of time with the lighting of candles, as we wait with expectation and longing, as we wait with hope for the birth of Jesus Christ.

That is why we have blue paraments on the altar, the lectern, and pulpit, because it is meant to remind us of the blue sky, towards which we turn our faces as we look with hope for the coming of Jesus Christ.

That is why we dress up our sanctuary with the hanging of the greens, wreaths and garlands, because the evergreens are meant to convey to us the hope of life when earth's landscape is bleak and dormant.

Yes, Advent is such a powerful season for the message that it brings to God's people.

The message of Advent is hope.

Hope pervades this season.

Hope encompasses this season.

Hope penetrates, saturates, and fills this season.

Indeed, what a gift is the gift of hope.

No wedding present, matching bath towels, crystal decanter, kitchen blender,...no wedding present comes close to the gift of hope.

Indeed, hope is one of three things the apostle Paul regularly talks about in the letters he writes to the churches in antiquity.

Paul writes that faith, and love, and hope abide...these three.

And hope is something that Martin Luther also spoke of.

One of my most favorite quotes from dear old Martin is about hope.

Luther said, "Everything that is done in the world is done by hope."

"Everything that is done in the world is done by hope."

"Everything that is done in the world is done by hope."

Why we go to school is because we HOPE to get an education to have the wherewithal to live good lives.

Why we get married is because we HOPE to spend our lives with that person whom we love.

Why we brush our teeth is because we HOPE not to have any cavities.

Why we pay our taxes is because we hope to avoid conflict with IRS, but also we hope those taxes will be used by the government for the betterment of our society.

Why we do anything in this world is because of hope.

PAUSE

And yet, sisters and brothers in Christ...and yet, our world seems awfully short on hope right now.

Hope is a commodity in limited supply.

Hope is on backorder.

Hope is sparse. It is scarce.

For the human family is weighed down with worry.

People are worried.

We continue to worry about pandemic.

And even though we have heard the news about several vaccines, which is giving many people hope...

Even though we have vaccines that will soon be rolled out, people are still worried about taking a vaccine that seemed to be rushed along.

And people continue to worry, because the vaccine is still going to take a while before the general populace will get their dosage.

People also continue to worry, because the pandemic has affected their income and they worry about having enough of an income to make ends meet.

People continue to worry, because the holidays could become a super-spreader, as family and loved ones gather, as students come home from school.

People continue to worry, because there is still just so much unknown out there.

People continue to worry, because the world has changed so much so quickly, such that we have changed our way of meeting, changed our way of working, of going to school, of worship.

We have changed the entire way in which we go about our lives.

People continue to worry, because we wonder what kind of world we will have post-pandemic.

People continue to worry, because we who knows what normal will look like from here on out.

Yes, in our world right now we are short on hope, and we are so very long on worry.

But our generation, this generation is no different from those which before.

Yes, every generation has their worries.

Every generation confronts its challenges.

Every generation wonders what the future will be.

It was the same for those who experienced the 1918 Pandemic and World War I.

It was the same for those who experienced the Great Depression and World War II.

It was the same for those who experienced the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

It was the same for those who experienced the 1960s Civil Rights Riots, the Vietnam War, and 9/11.

Every generation is unsettled, is troubled, is worried by events of their particular time.

No, we are not special in that regard, we who live in the here and now.

We are not the only people who have ever been beaten down by worry.

No, worry plagues every generation.

PAUSE

And our gospel lesson would seem only to add to that worry.

In our gospel lesson, there is much cause for worry.

For in our gospel lesson, we are told come one day the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light.

Now, that's worrisome.

And we are told that come one day, the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

That, too, is pretty worrisome.

Yes, talk about something to worry about, the very foundations of the cosmos will be upended.

Those things on which we depend, the light of the sun and the moon, the constancy of the stars, these constants will fail.

And that would cause anyone to worry.

But this same gospel reading encourages us to keep alert, keep awake, keep vigilant, keep a lookout.

In short, the Jesus is telling us, "Do not lose hope."

"Do not lose hope."

PAUSE

For it is in losing hope that we stop caring.

It is in losing hope that we give up.

It is in losing hope that we just write off the any glimpse of the future, saying, "What's it matter? What difference does it make?"

But in the face of hardship and tribulation, hope says otherwise.

"Everything that is done in this world is done by hope," so says Martin Luther.

"Everything that is done in this world is done by hope."

"Everything that is done in this world is done by hope."

And that includes, God the Father sending his Son into this world as the child of Bethlehem.

Everything that is done in this world is done by hope.

God has hope for this world, and God has always had hope for this world.

And that is why God created this world in the first place—because of hope.

That is why God chose Noah and his family, and safely ensconced them and the animals of the earth on the Ark, so as to repopulate the earth after the Flood—because of hope.

That is why God established God's covenant with nation of Israel to bless the nations of the earth—because of hope.

That is why God sent prophets to proclaim God's word to keep God's people on the straight and narrow—because of hope.

And that is why God sent his Son Jesus to redeem this world—because of hope.

And even if we question certain stories in the Bible, or even all the stories of the Bible, there is one thing, one thing that shines through all the pages of scripture.

The Bible sees God as hopeful. And says something about the many people over the centuries who had a part in writing the Bible—they were filled with an abundance of hope.

Why people do anything in the world, why God does anything in the world... is because of hope.

PAUSE

And again, it is this gift of hope we celebrate in this season of Advent.

That is why God has given us this season of Advent.

This is why we so desperately need this annual time of Advent.

Because worry, and fear, and anxiety, can over take the human race, can spread through the human race, and can infect the human race, causing more harm than any virus.

This season in the church year exists if for no other reason than to remind us that worry should not get the better of us.

For if we were to forget the gift of hope, we are people most to be pitied.

PAUSE

You know it is funny, but many of the wedding gifts that my wife and I received on our wedding day, I don't remember who gave them to us.

Many of the gifts have long since outlived their usefulness, and so have been discarded.

But the gift that God gave to Kathy and I that day, the gift I most cherish, is that gift of hope, which still lives on in our relationship.

Yes, hope will carry us all, brothers and sisters, through each and every day, no matter how challenging the day may be.

Hope abides in us. God has implanted hope in us, which is why it is so evident in the pages of Scripture.

And I am hoping that this season of hope, renews your hope in the power of God, who is coming, and who will fulfill his promise to redeem each of us, and all of creation.

Thanks be to God. Amen.