

Advent 1 (and 2) 2019 Waiting Well - With Hope

I love Advent, I love the anticipation of it. I have an Advent book that I read every year, one chapter a day. I have at least three Advent calendars. It is a crazy busy time of year, but I love it. The downside is that because it is my busiest time of year, I don't often have time to stop and really think about what it is all about. Yes, we remember the Jewish people waiting for the longed-for Messiah and celebrate His birth, but more importantly, as our two readings have reminded us, we are waiting for His return. Waiting for him to come again in Glory to take us to be with him forever. With all the terrible things that are going on in the world and the Armageddon type predictions coming from the environmentalists, with the wars, rumours of wars, floods famine, raging fires, and droughts we might be forgiven for thinking that He may be returning soon. The bible is clear though, as our Matthew reading says, "about that day and hour, no-one knows". So, we wait, and how we wait matters. We have to wait well, apart from anything else there is always still work we have to do and in what can at times be a dark world we are the bearers of the light of Christ, literally - the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us and so if He is the light shining in the darkness, then we are the vessels through which He shines. Jesus is not only the light of the world, but He is the hope for the world. We have to wait with hope because we have to proclaim that hope, share that hope with others. What evidence is there that this is what is expected of us? Well it is there throughout the scriptures.

Lamentations, the book that begins so pessimistically, talking in the first 2 chapters about just how terrible things are, goes on in chapter 3 to promise us that no matter what, God's steadfast love endures. Reading from verse 22, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,

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His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him.”

And these are just a few of the many more verses that assure us that we can place our hope and trust in the Lord as we wait for Him:

Isaiah 40:31, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint”.

Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Hebrews 10:23, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful”.

Psalms 31:24, “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord”.

Micah 7:7, “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me.

Romans 5:5, “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”.

Trust me, that is just a small selection of the many verses which call us to wait with hope. Is it easy? Honestly - not always. We are all vulnerable at times. We all have things going on in our lives that can seem overwhelming at times. We all suffer loss and grief and heartache. But that is why we are given to each other, so that when one is weak others can be strong and support them. We can stand in

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the gap for each other as well as standing in the gap in prayer for the world. How is it possible that despite everything we can always find hope and peace and joy? Well the reading from Romans 5 gives us a clue. God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. We haven't had love dripped in, or given sparsely or grudgingly - no the love of God, the creator of all things, the redeemer of all things, the very Saviour of the world, who is pure love, has poured His love into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit so that as we heard in the Romans 15 reading, we may overflow with Hope by the power of His Spirit. God's love is extravagant, the Holy Spirit is powerful, our hope is not in vain. And it is not just for us. The point of us overflowing with hope is so that we can bring hope to others. We should be ready for Jesus to return, but we are not hanging around waiting for pie in the sky when we die, as we are sometimes accused of. No, we must live very much in the present. Not only enjoying all the good things that we have been given but fulfilling our purpose and calling. We are all called to reveal the love of God to the world. As we pray at the end of our communion service, as we shall pray together in a little while, may we who share Christ's body live His risen life, we who drink His cup, bring life to others, we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Let's think carefully about these words as we pray them this morning, think about what that means about how we are living our lives. And we might add, may we who are overflowing with hope share that hope with others. We can be confident in the promises of God. So, this Advent tide and always let us remember that Jesus has promised that He shall return, He has promised never to leave us as we wait for His return, He has poured His love into our hearts and given faith, assurance and Hope.