

Sermon followed by Service

How do you like my “Hope-meter”? A 100 is a heart full of hope; and a 0 is nothing but hopeless. How would you score on my “hope-meter”? In many ways it’s been a bad month for hope. I think we could put together a mean list, couldn’t we?

And hopeless is not good, is it? Hearts that are hopeless can turn really ugly. How ugly? I’ll let you fill in the picture. I want to talk about “why?” Why do hearts become hopeless?

Perhaps we’re thinkers. We’re supposed to be thinkers, aren’t we? But somehow our thinking gets short-circuited. We look at our problems, at how life isn’t treating us right, and we think about our problems, and how many our problems, and we think about our problems and how big our problems, and how impossible our problems, and soon all we can see are ___ our problems.

Or perhaps we’re pointers. We don’t just sit and think about our problems; we do something about our problems - we blame people for our problems. We point our finger at some people; we wag our fingers agt other people; we sometimes let ourselves get so worked up we have angry fingers, angry at the world, angry at ourselves.

And this time of year can be the worst - the worst because of all our busy stress, and worst because this time of year is supposed to be the best with peace and hope.

So what’s the answer? What can we do when hopelessness has its fingers around our heart? Paul has God’s answer for us - 1. Look back at God’s Track-Record. 2. Look ahead with God’s Prophecy.

When hopelessness has its fingers around our hearts, here's why we can dare to hope! Look back at God's Track-Record! In the Garden of Eden, God promised a Champion to crush the devil's head. And God kept his promise. In Isaiah, God promised: **"A virgin will conceive and bear a Son and you will call him Immanuel."** Impossible. But God kept his promise. In the town of Zarepheth, there was a widow with a son and food enough for just one last meal, but God promised, "I will provide." And God kept his promise. In our Bibles we have a thousand more pages of that. Why all that Bible History? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; Rahab, Ruth, and Deborah; Shalmanezar, Nebuchadnezzar, Tiglath Peliezer and a bunch of other names I can't spell or pronounce - why would God tell us about them? Paul tells us – **"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."**

So why do we have Sunday School and Family Bible Hour? It's not for families who have nothing better to do. Why do we have 1000 pages of Old Testament? It's not for Bible trivia games. We have ... God had given all this (Old Testament) to us so we can see God's track record - no matter how big the problem, no matter how big the promise - God keeps his promises.

My financial planner brother says, "Past performance does not guarantee future results." But God says the exact opposite – "Look at my past performance. I keep my promises."

Now for a tough question. Is our performance indicative of God's past performance? In other words - God keeps his promises, do we live that way? Do we live like God has a track record of keeping his promises? Or do we live like God has a track record of

breaking his promises? Let me get specific - when you're looking for hope and for help, how quick and how often do you go to God's Promises? Does Bible Class and Sunday School and home devotions make it onto your schedule? A different question - when your family and friends are looking for hope and for help, how often do you point them to God's Promises? Is our performance indicative of God's past performance? If it's not, what are we saying about God?

That's why we have Advent - to point us back to God, back to his track-record, to give us real hope - God keeps his promises. And when we feel hopeless and helpless and even faithless, what is God's most important promise, his most important track record? Jesus. When Adam and Eve were hopeless and helpless and dead with the devil, God promised Jesus to crush the devil's head. When generation after generation of people were hopeless and helpless in their sin and guilt, God promised Jesus to take their sin away. When God's people felt hopeless and helpless to get it right, God promised Jesus to make it right for them. And God kept his Promise. Jesus came and put the devil in his place; Jesus came and took your sins to the cross; Jesus came to give you life made right.

That is why we can hope! Instead of dead with the devil we have life with Jesus. Instead of God against us - we have God for us! Instead of being on our own - we have God with us! Instead of having to base our hope on our track record, we get to base our hope on God's track record.

That means, instead of basing our hope on what we think we can do, we get to base our hope on God's "Look what I did!" With God all things are possible! God can! And his track record proves it! That means, instead of having to base our hope on "maybes" (maybe it'll work out ... maybe I'll be alright ... or even, maybe God'll take

care of me ...), we get to base our life on God's "yes's." "Yes, I have forgiven you. So yes, I will take care of you. Yes, I will keep you safe with me. Yes, I will make your life work right with Jesus."

Yes, we can dare to hope. We have God's track record from the past. And we have God's promise and prophecy for us today.

Do you remember Jacob's dream with the stair-case to heaven, where God promised Jacob - "I will be with you"? Or how he promised Moses from the burning bush - "I will be with you"? God didn't just give that promise to his Old Testament people, Jesus promises you - **"I will be with you always even to the end of the ages."**

Do you remember Daniel in the lion's den or the three men in the fiery furnace and how God kept them safe? God's promise is still true for you -- **"Call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you! ... Nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus."**

Do you remember the trouble and heartache in Joseph's life - being sold into slavery by his brothers, being thrown into prison for being faithful to his master - and how God used Joseph to save his family? Or how God used the heartache in Ruth's life to bring her into the line of the Savior? God wasn't just keeping his promises then; he's working his promise for you today -- **"In all things God works for the good of those who love him."**

One more – Do you remember the promise Jesus made on the night he first served his Lord's Supper - **"Because I live, you also will live."** Life with God forever in heaven – that's God's promise for you.

I know we are in some difficult times, difficult times for hope. But we can dare to hope. Why? Look at God's track record. And look at his promise – we've got a better life coming. Amen.

December 3 & 4, 2022

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we hear holiday songs of hope and cheer and "good will."

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we hear better than holiday hope. We share Holy-day Hope. We have a new life coming that's even better than Christmas or a thousand Christmases.

OPENING HYMN

"Prepare the Royal Highway"
Hymn 302

Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near!
Let ev'ry hill and valley a level road appear!
Then greet the King of glory, foretold in sacred story:
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's Word!

God's people, see him coming: your own eternal King!
Palm branches strew before him! Spread garments! Shout and sing!
God's promise will not fail you! No more shall doubt assail you!
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's Word!

Then fling the gates wide open to greet your promised King!
Your King, yet ev'ry nation its tribute too should bring.
All lands, bow down before him! All nations, now adore him!
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's Word!

His is no earthly kingdom; it comes from heav'n above.
His rule is peace and freedom and justice, truth, and love.
So let your praise be sounding for kindness so abounding:
Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's Word!

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.

**If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

Holy God, gracious Father,

I am sinful by nature

and have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions.

I have not loved you with my whole heart;

I have not loved others as I should.

I deserve your punishment both now and forever.

But Jesus, my Savior, paid for my sins

with his innocent suffering and death.

Trusting in him, I pray: God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

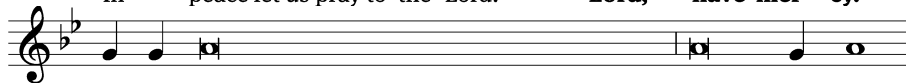
Silence for meditation and reflection

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY



In peace let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mer - cy.**



For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.



Lord, have mer - cy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of
 God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.
Lord, have mer - cy.
 For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and
 praise, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mer - cy.**
 Help, save, com - fort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord.
A - men.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming, give us strength in our conflicts, and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 11:1–11

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.

The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 130A

Refrain

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD,
Lord, hear my voice.

Out / of the depths

I / cry to you, O LORD;

Lord, / hear my voice.

Listen closely as I / call on you for help.

LORD, if you kept / track of sins,

O / Lord, then who could stand?

But with you there is for- / giveness,

in order / that you may be feared. *Refrain*

I wait for the LORD, my / soul waits,

and in his / word I put my hope.

More than watchers wait for / morning

my / soul waits for the Lord.

Israel, put your hope / in the LORD,
 for with the / LORD is faithful love;
 with him is complete re- / demption.
 He will redeem Israel from the / guilt of all their sins.

**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
 and to the / Holy Spirit,
 as it was in the be- / ginning,
 is now, and will be for- / ever. Amen. Refrain**

The musical score consists of three systems of music. The first system is a single melodic line in G-flat major (one flat) on a treble clef staff. The lyrics 'Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD,' are written below the notes. The second system continues the melody with the lyrics 'Lord, hear my voice.' The third system is an accompaniment consisting of two staves: a treble clef staff with chords and a bass clef staff with a simple bass line. The lyrics are aligned with the notes in the first two systems.

SECOND READING

Romans 15:4-13

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name.”

Again, it says,

“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.”

And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him.”

And again, Isaiah says,

“The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope.”

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.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 3:4,6

Alleluia. Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. And all people will see God's salvation. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’ ”

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"

Hymn 316

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh;
come, then, and listen, for he brings good news about the King of kings.

Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin and furnished for a Guest within,
and let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.

We hail you as our Savior, Lord, our refuge and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away like flow'rs that wither and decay.

Stretch forth your hand, our health restore, and lift us up to fall no more;
O make your face on us to shine, and fill the world with love divine.

All praise to you, eternal Son, whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore and Holy Spirit evermore.

SERMON

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Eternal Father, throughout the centuries you repeated and affirmed your promise to send the offspring of the woman to crush the serpent's head. Through your prophets of old, you continually directed the eyes of your people to the advent of their Savior.

C: **We praise you, O Lord, for keeping your promise and sending your Son to destroy the works of the devil.**

M: As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our King, use your mighty Word to shatter our pride and to rouse us from spiritual slumber and apathy.

C: **Move us to take to heart the words of John: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."**

M: You sent your Son to redeem us from sin. Let this good news be our joy and strength. Use it to cheer the lonely, encourage the fearful, and give hope to the despairing. In these days before Christmas, spare us from the stress of deadlines and the frenzy of commercialism.

C: **Fill our lives with the message of your peace and the music of your grace.**

M: Direct our eyes not only to the manger but also to the skies, where we will see your Son coming again, not as a lowly child but as the Lord of lords.

C: **Lift up our hearts in joyful anticipation of that day.**

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

Silent prayer.

M: Come quickly, Lord Jesus, in your grace, in your power, and in your glory.

C: **Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.**

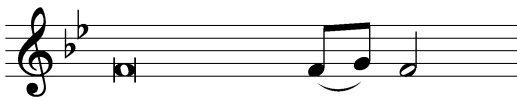
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



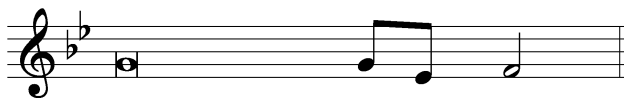
The Lord be with you.



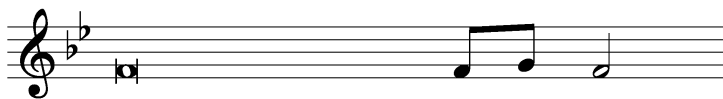
And al - so with you.



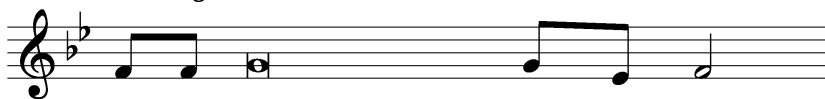
Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock until he comes again in glory. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my τ body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"Comfort, Comfort All My People"

Hymn 312

"Comfort, comfort all my people; speak of peace," so says our God.

"Comfort those who sit in darkness, groaning from their sorrows' load.

Speak to all Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;

tell them that their sins I cover, that their warfare now is over."

All their sins our God will pardon, blotting out each dark misdeed;

all that well deserved his anger he no more will see or heed.

They have suffered many a day; now their griefs have passed away.

God will change their aching sadness into ever-springing gladness.

John the Baptist's voice is crying in the desert far and near,

calling people to repentance for the kingdom now is here.

O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;

let the valleys rise to meet him and the hills bow down to greet him.

Then make straight the crooked highway; make the rougher places plain.

Let your hearts be true and humble, ready for his holy reign.

For the glory of the Lord now o'er earth is spread abroad,

and all flesh shall see the token that his word is never broken.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love.

By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"What Hope! An Eden Prophesied"

Hymn 304

What hope! An Eden prophesied where tame live with the wild,
the lamb and lion side by side, led by a little child!

A shoot will sprout from Jesse's stem, a branch from David's line,
a Prince of Peace in Bethlehem: the fruit of God's design.

As banner of God's love unfurled, Christ came to suffer loss,
that by his death a dying world would rally to the cross.

Come, Jesus, come, Messiah Lord, lost Paradise restore;
lead past the angel's flaming sword— come, open heaven's door.

OFFERING

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