

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Hope

Scripture: Mark 1:1-8

December 6th, 2020

### Holding on to Hope

Last week, we began the season of Advent with our theme of Peace. We discussed peace as a way of being and a presence of stillness. Our gospel lesson, from Mark 13, reminded us to find peace as we awaited our Messiah's return, we looked at the lesson of the fig tree, and we talked about being alert and watchful. This week our theme shifts to Hope as we look at the opening chapter of the Gospel of Mark for our reflection.

Being from Appalachia, an important aspect of Appalachian culture is storytelling. In storytelling, a great story usually has some semblance of hope for the characters and whatever journey they are about to embark on. In storytelling, we, the readers and storytellers, are always looking for hope to be inspired that our character is going to make the wisest decision or save the day, but hope is something I believe we actively seek in our lives. We seek it for the desire to see whatever we are facing through to another day. We hope all the time, even if we fail to recognize the hope we are seeking and expressing.

As I said in my reflection Thursday, hope is always leading to something. In our gospel lesson for today, hope is the setting of our story of Jesus. In Mark's gospel, Mark's Jesus is all grown up and about to begin his ministry. He goes to meet with John the Baptist, a radical zealot living out in the wilderness baptizing people in the Holy Spirit. Hope is the setting of this story we read today. Hope is assuming its reader anticipates and anxiously awaits the revelation of the gospel as hope pushes Jesus and the disciples to unknown places and people to spread love, justice, peace, and hope throughout an Empire laden with greed and corruption. Hope is always there if we choose to see it.

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; <sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

**4** John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

This section of Mark always reminds me of the song, "Down to the River to Pray," as people gathered around in an act of repentance to be baptized in the river in the countryside. The quotation from Isaiah reminds us of our lesson from peace, which hope, just like peace, is a process of being in the world. We can see this because we are called to prepare the way. Preparation requires us to look within ourselves and examine what we need. So I hope we ask ourselves not just if we hold hope in our hearts and actions, but what are we hoping for? We often say in the midst of the pandemic right now, "I wish things would go back to normal!" However, "normal" for so many in our world was not working, because normal was them barely surviving.

Hope is not about holding on to hope only for ourselves. Hope should be about us, not me. Hope should be about inspiring each other and learning to grow together in the Body of Christ. The hope of the gospel is not something just for oneself, but the hope of the gospel is that the freedom and liberative message of the gospel is meant to transform our lives. We hold on to hope knowing that change in perspective, attitudes, institutions, governments, and people take time, which is why we as Christians are people of Hope. We must never give up on each other. Hope is a process and takes time to cultivate, grow, and develop. Never give up hoping for something that will transform your life.

On Communion Sunday, we are reminded of this hope. We are reminded in hope through our lectionary scripture readings, but most importantly we are reminded of hope by the smiles, concerns, and love of those around us. In every good story, the protagonist always finds a way to overcome a situation or decision filled with hopelessness. Beloved community, I assure you we will find hope in the midst of the destruction and chaos surrounding us now. It may not leave us feeling inspired or leave us wanting to move mountains, but hope is a process and it will lead us to places we cannot even imagine. Believe in hope this Advent and cultivate hope in your life. Amen.

## Welcome & Announcements

### Opening Prayer by Bruce Prewer

Loving God,

be to us as a bulldozer of the spirit.

Clear your road in us;

clear a path through the detritus of possessions and obsessions.

Thrust aside our divided aims and devious games.

Topple the ramparts of pride and the doubts that deride.

Make a highway on which Christ may come

and take possession of the whole territory of our being.

To the glory of your name we pray.

Amen!

Opening Hymn

O Come, O Come Emmanuel 211

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2,8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a

Sermon

“Holding on to Hope”

Holy Communion

Blessings of Our Offerings

Selection from [umcdiscipleship.org](http://umcdiscipleship.org)

Almighty God, as John the Baptist identified the arrival of the Messiah, this Advent season, that role falls on us. As we bring our tithes and offerings to you, we pray that our giving continues to point to the Christ who comes in love and compassion, with more concern for those who don't have enough and little concern that those who have so much will get more. May our giving in this season reflect our hope for a new kind of kingdom to reign in our world. We pray this in the name of the Messiah, Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Joys & Concerns

Silent Prayer

Pastoral Prayer of Confession

The voice of one comes

crying out in the wilderness

... prepare the way of the Lord.

A messenger prepares the way,

transforming us like the refiner's fire

... calling us to account.

For the prophets of old have spoken,

announcing the breaking open of the dawn

... guiding our feet in the way of peace.

Merciful God forgive us...

Forgive us when we are quick

to point the finger at someone else.

Forgive us when we put our heads down  
and ignore the cries of injustice.

Forgive us when we presume to understand  
the complexity of issues that divide and distract  
the peoples of the land your feet once walked. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

Merciful God...

forgive us, heal us,  
encourage us and speak through us,  
that we may be transformed through the refiner's fire,  
and the offerings of our hands and our hearts  
may prepare the way for the Christ child  
to be welcomed among us in peace. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

### Prayers of the People/Prayer of Assurance

Your season comes, Lord.

Come once again,  
and feed your flock like a shepherd.

Come once again,  
and gather up the children, the oppressed,  
the sick, the lonely, the humble,  
and the rejected of the earth.

Turn our hearts to the least of your children,  
for if we lose them,  
we become lost.

Reconcile us to you  
and to those we have hurt.

At this Advent,  
join us together with neighbors, with strangers,  
and especially with our own household.

Bring us to your light  
in our time of darkness,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Benediction

Traditional Celtic Blessing