

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

December 6, 2020
Proper 22A/Ordinary 27A/Pentecost +18

The readings this week:

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

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Advent is a tradition in the church of taking time in the weeks before Christmas to set our hearts on Jesus and anticipate His coming. Observing Advent is a powerful opportunity in the midst of a busy season to worship Jesus and stir our hearts for Him. This year, as our world seems overcome with weariness, more than every we need the thrill of hope. Each of these short devotionals will guide us as we reconnect with that hope and take a few moments of respite from weariness. Let us pause and rest in hope.

Hope

Christmas season is in full swing with lights on neighborhood houses, trees for sale, and Christmas music on the radio. I love this beautiful and cheer filled season and have so many memories of happy Christmases. One of my favorite Christmas hymns is "O Holy Night", I love this line:

"A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, as yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn..."

In spite of the merriment around us, the world seems weary right now. In these days, we desperately need the hope that this hymn describes: the hope of a new and glorious morning.

Hope is a tricky topic, especially at Christmas time. It's risky to hope after we've experienced disappointments or failures or when we see the hardship in the world. The holidays can remind us of a failed relationship, a missed opportunity, being hurt by someone we trusted, or losing a friend. These experiences tempt us to stop hoping, and instead, to self protect, to risk less. They make us weary. At the same time, a hope that we see come to fruition can bring endless amounts of joy, giving us courage and strength to move forward in life.

This year I've experienced a hope fulfilled and a hope that is still awaiting it's turn. The first, the birth of a healthy baby, the miraculous entry of a little life that has brought 10 months of joy to our household. The other, a best friend in a car accident, leaving her in a coma. And though she's made progress, she hasn't woken up. Some days my hope is full and strong, others it's weak and barely lingering.

I know that my hope needs a landing spot beyond my circumstances, otherwise its wandering and wavering depending on the day. Expecting a joyous outcome is painful when that outcome depends on people and situations. But when the landing spot of my hope is Jesus, hope can fill my heart in a way that is eternal.

Instead of hoping for things to happen how I think they should or how I want them to be, I am choosing today to place my hope in the firm hands of the one who IS hope. When I do this, I draw near to Jesus in an intimacy that is deepest in places of pain. My temptation is to escape, whether that's through entertainment or food or focusing on happiness, it can seem easier to pull away in order to hide from disappointment. But when I really lean in to God, and release to Him the things I am hoping for, it is in that place that I find renewed trust in His will and in His ways.

The unwavering hope we look to is this: Jesus came to bring us hope for salvation and eternal life, hope for His Kingdom in this world as we live between the hope of His coming as a man and the hope of His returning as a King. Jesus is coming again as a King who will bring justice, restoration, and life. A King who will wipe every tear and restore every heart that belongs to Him. That is our eternal thrill of hope. And that is cause to rejoice.

My prayer for us today, in whatever circumstances we face, is this: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."* Romans 15:13

~ Jillian Armstrong, [Antioch Church](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Isaiah 40:1-11](#)

Why do you think the Gospel writers quote this passage of the Old Testament? Do you understand your life as a story of "achievements" or of "miracles"? How do you picture life in exile in Babylon? Would you have found it tempting? How might Brueggemann's description of Babylon describe our culture today? What are the signs that things are about to change? [Weekly Seeds](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13](#)

Why is the writer's personal statement in verse 8 an important one for us to apply to ourselves? Look at verse 9. Have you honored the Lord with your life this week? Describe your response to this question. What math equation occurs in verses 10-12? What is the product of these two things getting together? How does this happen? Imagine and describe the scene of verse 13. What hope do you need to take to heart from this passage? Take a moment to listen (verse 8), to honor (verse 9), and to proclaim (verses 10-13) in prayer. [Ken Castor, A Devotional Palms Guide](#)



The desert wilderness is both a primary and recurring landscape of the soul. A place of danger and unspeakable beauty, of demons, wild beasts, roaming spirits, and temptation, the desert also hosts ministering angels and offers an unhindered sphere for the encounter with God.

John, the forerunner, appears in the desert as a voice in the wilderness, calling for repentance, offering a baptism for the forgiveness of sins and to proclaim the coming of one who will baptize not with water, but with the Holy Spirit.

This voice calls, "Prepare the way! The One is coming!" And where does this voice come from? Perhaps from the depth of the thirsty soul alone in the wilderness of daily living. Somehow the voice communicates personally and intimately within that depth of being. Our very weaknesses and wounds invite the transfiguring power of the Holy Spirit, satisfying us with rivers of living water. "Thus we may irrigate the arid earth of others." ~ [Suzanne Guthrie](#)

3rd Reading: [2 Peter 3:8-15a](#)

How does Peter compare and contrast God's creation of the earth with His final destruction of the earth? In what ways will the final destruction be like the first destruction (the Flood)? What does this have to do with the return of Christ? Have you ever been in a situation in which a scoffer made an argument that seemed plausible, or asked a question you couldn't answer (ex: If God is so good and so powerful, why does He allow evil and suffering?), and you knew she was wrong, but you didn't know what the biblical answer was? Did you feel confused and anxious? That's kind of the situation Peter's audience is in here. How would Peter's answer to the scoffers' argument have set the minds of his audience at ease, brought them comfort, and given them hope? How does that compare to our impatience for the Lord's return? Why is the Lord taking so long – from our perspective – to come back? [Discipleship for Christian Women](#)

4th Reading: [Mark 1:1-8](#)

What is the implication of a human (Jesus Christ) being the Son of God? In verses 2-3, John quotes from Isaiah and Malachi. What are the implications of the words "written", "messenger", and "prepare"? What was the message John was preaching and the response of the people? Why the wilderness? What is repentance? What does it mean to be forgiven by God? How would you describe John the Baptist? What can we learn from him? After our own wilderness, repentance and forgiveness, God offers us the ability to be filled with the Holy Spirit. How can this make a difference in our lives? Are you letting it make a difference? [Community Fellowship Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

silently and gently
falling and failing
changing and resting
seeking you, Lord...

we watch
we wait
we dream
we pray...

for the earth to renew
for our hearts to soften
for your grace to cover us
for your justice to pour out
for time and space to listen
for courage to act

on the edge of Advent,
we sit with you...
we pause...
we hurt...
we repent...
we rage...

*When will it be?
Will it ever be?
Come quickly, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*

~ Rev. Deborah Vaughn, [RevGalBlogPals](#)