

November 28, 2021

**“The Hope in Rule Breaking”  
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

*Romans 15:12-13*

*And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even the one who arises to rule the Gentiles; and will the Gentiles hope.” 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.*

*Matthew 12:9-21 He left that place and entered their synagogue; a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, “Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?” so that they might accuse him. He said to them, “Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.” Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.*

*When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, and he ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,*

*my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.*

*I will put my Spirit upon him,*

*and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

*He will not wrangle or cry aloud,*

*nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.*

*He will not break a bruised reed*

*or quench a smoldering wick*

*until he brings justice to victory.*

*And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”*

**Sermon “The Hope in Rule Breaking”**

Welcome to the season of Advent. This month was intended to help us mark our time of waiting and preparing for the arrival of the Christ Child. I’m afraid that like many, this time ends up as a time of preparing for the arrival of Christmas for me not necessarily for Jesus.

But I do believe we can do both. We can follow our usual holiday traditions of shopping, gift giving, and decorating, and preparing for Christmas while at the same time preparing our spirits and our hearts for God.

We aren’t going to stem the tide of the commercialization of Christmas. Those three ships went a’ sailing by a long time ago. I have complained and moaned for years about shopping beginning on Thanksgiving, but nothing has changed.

I tried to make sure my kids knew the true meaning of Christmas but it's hard for a little baby in a straw bed to compete with Super Santa that flies in a sleigh and brings toys. The point is I don't think we can really try to stuff Christ back into Christmas.

Now it would be hypocritical of me to criticize consumerism and over-consumption because I certainly participate in both with great Christmas Glee. So for me the question is how can we simultaneously prepare for the holiday and participate in the spiritual practice of advent, the making ready of ourselves for the spirit of Christ.

The symbolic nature of the advent wreath gives us some clues. The candles symbolize hope, love, joy, and peace, in that order. If we cultivate these things in ourselves in these next four weeks then we will indeed be making ready for the arrival of our God.

But none of these things are just words... when we are in a pandemic, when the world seems just a little bit harsh right now, when we are grieving, these are things that we have to work at. They are words describing inner actions that lead to outward behaviors.

When Matthew quotes Isaiah in his gospel, he isn't talking in sappy words about the coming of Christmas, this passage isn't like the plot from one of my favorite hallmark movies. He is ascribing powerful words and deeds to Jesus who just broke the rules, broke with tradition and healed on a holy day.

“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,  
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.  
I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.  
and he goes on to say that he brings justice to victory.  
And in his name the Gentiles will hope.” (Gentiles was a word for anyone that was outside the Jewish faith at the time)

So hope isn't something, like “oh, I hope I get a particular gift” or “oh, I hope we have a white Christmas”. Hope, in this case is brought by the restoration of Justice for all people, hope is connected to the act of healing and reconciliation.

And hope is brought by someone who is going to break the rules, break with tradition, go against authority and do what he was called to do. Minister to those outside of his religious tradition. Those who were not pious, or believers. God's chosen people became all of us because of Jesus.

Jesus was called to bring hope to the hopeless, the outcast, to break the rules and heal people on holy days because they were suffering, break the rules and eat with people it was against the rules to eat with, touch people it was against the rules to touch, love people and bring them into the fold among those who would exclude them, who would not share the love of God, who would not heal them nor break their made up rules.

So to cultivate hope in ourselves we have to believe in the coming of the realm of God again. We have to have hope that if we truly follow in Christ ways we too can bring hope to the hopeless, if we work for Justice in our land, include those that others would exclude, heal those in need of healing, reach out to people, and love people and yes even sometimes break the rules. We are doing the work of God.

We have to remember like the Psalmist, where our hope comes from. Our hope comes from the Lord, our rock, our salvation, and our fortress; And we shall not be shaken.

Hard to do during a week where the news cycle went from our justice system failing in Kenosha, then working, eventually, in Georgia as well of us all witnessing, in horror, the unfolding of events in Waukesha. We can't just throw up our hands and say what's this world coming to and just hope the politicians will fix it.

We can't give up hope for humanity because we ARE the hope for humanity. God is counting on us to step up, to follow the traditions of Jesus of speaking up for Justice and breaking with traditions that cause hurt and harm and reforming systems that keep us stuck on the brink of our own destruction.

I want to point out that in Georgia it took a tremendous outcry from the public, including many of our own ministers and churches, for the police to even arrest the three men that murdered Ahmaud Arbery in the streets while he was out jogging.

And they weren't arrested until 74 days after the murder and only because a horrific video of the incident went public.

The law enforcement in that area, that was already under investigation for being corrupt, had dismissively stated that they didn't see any wrongdoing. If the people hadn't demanded justice, if a video didn't exist, Ahmaud would just be added to the list.

Rule breaking, authority questioning, tradition ignoring Christians that find their hero in Jesus are needed to aid God in truly reconciling this world. If we just follow the usual story of Christmas, that we celebrate the birth of Christ because he came only to be the human sacrifice so we all get in heaven then we are really missing the point.

When we do that then our hope actually lies in our own death and heaven, not in the gift of our Life and the gift of living and doing the work that Jesus showed us how to do in the right here and right now.

I encourage you to take some time this week to let your soul wait in silence for the Lord. Like the psalmist wrote "to pour out your heart before the Almighty." All our worries, all our busyness, to let go of our little, fragile human egos that will tell us we are not enough one minute and the center of the universe the next.

Empty yourselves in order to make room for those stirrings from the Holy Spirit, for that inspiration for what hope as an action word looks like for you, clear out your souls' closets of the clutter your resentments, regrets, any preconceptions, prejudice and any self doubt and make room for love, joy, peace and make room for finding and being hope AMEN.

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