

## **THE GIFT OF HOPE**

### **Mark 13:34-37**

Today starts the season of “Advent”, the four Sundays before Christmas. Most of us wait until Christmas Eve or morning to open our gifts that were purchased to celebrate this season. Well, today I am telling you that you don’t have to wait. Starting this morning, each Sunday during Advent, we will be opening a gift and today’s gift is HOPE which is typically wrapped in the colors of blue or yellow.

Did you ever look up here and wonder why we have different colors in our sanctuary at different times of the year? We have blue paraments during this Season of Advent and blue symbolizes HOPE. The color blue is part of the cool or colder colors. This is the only time during the year that you will see the color blue. This morning yellow was chosen for the color of the flowers because yellow is also a color of hope. Yellow, the opposite of blue, is one of the warm colors. It is rather interesting that 2 colors from the opposite side of the color wheel represent HOPE. Anyway, for years yellow ribbons were worn as a sign of hope as women waited for the men to come marching home from war. Even today, they are still used to welcome home loved ones. How many of you remember the song “Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree?” It was a song about a couple who had been parted for 3 long years. The young man wasn’t sure if the young woman would still want him after their long separation so he told her to give him a sign. If she still wanted him, a yellow ribbon should be tied around the old oak tree, and he would know to get off the bus that would be bringing him home. Can you imagine the anticipation of him riding on this

bus waiting to see if a yellow ribbon would be tied around this particular tree? So what happens? In his words: “The whole darn bus starts cheering and I can’t believe I see, a hundred yellow ribbons round the old oak tree.” In other words, he has a place to come home to.

Home is part of who we are, a part of our culture. Last Wednesday I was at the airport waiting to pick up my daughter Kristen who was coming home for the long Thanksgiving weekend. I was early so I sat and watched as many people greeted friends and family who were coming home for the Thanksgiving holiday. The smiles and hugs witnessed were heart warming. That kind of greeting is a gift and homecoming we all long and hope for.

There is a commercial on television with a grandfather sitting on the front steps of his home with his grandson. His grandson looks at his grandfather and asks him if he will have a home like his grandfather’s someday. His grandfather replies, “I sure HOPE so”. The commercial then states that this may be the first generation that will not experience home ownership. In our American culture each generation has surpassed the former generation in how we live. I can’t help but think about the modern day conveniences or stuff I have that my parents, let alone my grandparents, never had. So when watching this commercial and realizing that yes, this is a present day reality, my children may not have what I have or even less than what I have is sad since we always wish better for those we love, don’t we? Yet how we answer the question is probably dependent on what we define as better.

Jesus said something that might help us answer that question. He said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In other words, don’t get your heart set on material things. Material things aren’t permanent. They wear out, they break, they go out of style, they can be lost or stolen. Rather build or find your home on things that are independent of the chances and changes of life or culture.

The poet Robert Burns once wrote a poem about how fleeting things can be and how quickly they can get away from us. He wrote:

But pleasures are like poppies spread –  
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
Or like the snow falls in the river –  
A moment white, then melts forever.

Any of us whose life and happiness depend on material things will surely be disappointed because material things do not last.

Instead scripture reminds us to find our home in something that will last or is eternal. This is our hope. The figures of this Advent season in our readings, radiate hope. Isaiah, John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph, and, of course, Jesus, the long-awaited one who is hope for all the nations. They are all intent on reminding us of who we are and the promises that call us back to God’s dream of us, his own people, his children. We live in hope in

these days, act in hope, pray with hope, and are a source of hope for others in the world, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The dictionary defines hope as “a feeling of expectation and desire combined, a desire for certain events to happen or a person or thing or circumstance that gives cause for this,” and the verb means “to desire, to expect and feel confident about.” Emily Dickinson writes, “Hope is the thing with feathers which perches in the soul and sings the tune without words and never stops at all.” It is the song we sing this season that announces the incarnation and the birth of Christ in our hearts and communities.

Joan Chittister in her book “Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope” calls memory the “seedbed of hope”. Hope is not “in spite of” struggle and pain, she says. Hope is born in the midst of struggle and pain from the memory of goodness and the beauty and truth. “Biblical hope sees the present circumstance with the eyes of memory.” The memory of the stories and songs of the Bible gives us hope.

The Bible instructs us to be “prepared” to “give reason for the hope that is in you.” Did you hear it? There is an assumption that disciples of Jesus are known as those who have hope. Our home is not made of wood or bricks, but our home is built on the foundation that we are a people HOPE.

Dan Schutte has composed song for this season titled “A Time Will Come for Singing” that sets the tone for us:

A time will come for singing when all your tears are shed,  
When sorrow's chains are broken, and broken hearts will mend.  
The deaf will hear your singing when silent tongues are freed.  
The lame will join your dancing when blind eyes learn to see.  
A time will come for singing when trees will raise their boughs,  
When men lay down their armor, and hammer their swords into  
Plows,  
When beggars live as princes, and orphans find their homes,  
When prison cells are emptied, and hatred has grown old.  
A time will come for singing a hymn by hearts foretold,  
That kings have sought for ages, and treasured more than gold.  
Its lyrics turn to silver when sung in harmony.  
The Lord of love will teach us to sing its melody.

Daniel O'Leary reminds us, "Loving someone wraps invisible blankets of blessing around both people." Sometimes the wrap is the gift. Home is where we are constantly wrapping gifts, blankets of blessing that keep us warm in a very cold world and in the wintry seasons of life.

What if home is more than a place we go? What if home is something that vibrates within our hearts and souls summoning us to a space or place that is beyond ourselves?

Jesus is offering a gift, a way home, an invitation from God to return to God's presence and dwell in God's kingdom. It is an invitation not just

to “come home for Christmas” but to “come home, come home ... Softy and Tenderly Jesus is calling, calling all sinners come home.” Amen.