



## **Hope: To Wait on God**

**Advent Sunday, 27 November 2016**

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*Isaiah 2:1-5*

*Romans 13:36-44*

*Matthew 24:36-44*

*“The night is far gone, the day is near” (Romans 13:12)*

Those are words of great hope. They are words spoken to us that immediately resonate with our humanity, resonate with our faith; when we hear them hope comes alive within us – we innately respond with hope when those words are spoken over us. As people of God we are called to be a people of hope. Now that sounds very inspiring, but a people of hope stand in a somewhat precarious position! To stand in hope is to stand in a space between where something is and where something is not, which is a place necessarily characterised by impermanence. That disposition is the Advent call. We are to be ready, to be expectant, to lift our eyes to the horizon of what we hope for.

Everyone in the world needs hope, and hope is a language used a lot in our cultures and societies. It a language politicians use a lot. Christians have a distinctive manner and language of hope which is unique. Our hope is messianic. By that I mean that we hope for something (someone) that comes to us from outside of ourselves. Our hope cannot be fulfilled by ourselves. Our hope is not birthed within us. Our hope and our help is in the name of the Living God. Our God comes to us – we need God’s initiative, God’s interaction, we need God for our hope to make any sense. God comes to us and

then with the gift of the Divine spark of life brings to birth the substance of hope within ourselves, but the moment of hope is initiated, given, enlivened from outside of ourselves – that is what defines messianic hope.

So our posture *must* be one of attentive perception, watchfulness. That is why to be a people of hope can seem precarious, because it is out of our control and humans don't always do too well with things that they can't control. It is a recipe for anxiety. So we wait upon God, but we wait not with anxiety but with hope? What's the difference?

Anxiety is the fruit of mistrust. We are anxious because we do not trust. Maybe we do not trust God, maybe we do not trust ourselves, maybe we do not trust the people of God or God's power through God's people. So to turn the reality of impermanence from anxiety to hope, we must trust. To be people of hope we must be people of trust.

We are also anxious when we are uncomfortable. When our flesh, our human longing for comfort, for stability, claws at the precariousness of our position we are drawn into anxiety. To be a people of hope means to embrace the genuine reality of our discomfort and, conversely, the genuine hope of true comfort. "Comfort O comfort my people" (Isaiah 40:1) we hear from the prophet Isaiah. We must not cling to the wrong sort of hope – to cling to a kind of façade of a temporary home made permanent by a mind, heart and body too fearful to own the true liminality of our calling as the people of God. That façade is actually hopeless. To be a people of hope we must own our temporality with courage and integrity.

This space in which we wait, rather than being characterised by a false and shallow substitute of real comfort, should be characterised by purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart", we hear Jesus preach in

scripture (Matthew 5:8), “for they will see God”. Our hope is a waiting and watchful posture and so we prepare our hearts to perceive, to see, to recognise the Living Christ in his coming. All processes of purification, of refinement will have aspects of pain and discomfort – but that reality fulfils rather than discounts hope. Christ is us the hope of Glory. As our inner lives and our community lives reflect the glory of God, the fulfilment of our hope is increasingly realised.

I want to share these words of poetry with you:

*To hope is not to mourn  
It is not empty  
Or never to be born.  
To hope is to embrace God  
Face to face  
And say I will race  
With you along this  
Unravelling of dreams  
That remain unseen  
For to hope is not to mourn  
It is not empty  
Or never to be born*

What dreams we are given as the people of God! Amazing, wonderful dreams! Dreams of the end of violence, the end of quarrelsome community, the end of selfish and self-destructive satisfaction. The dream of being the true people of the holy mountain to which others say, “how did you learn to live as the people of peace? How did you learn to live as a community of health, healing and wholeness?” About whom others will say, “When I look at you, I am filled with

hope – filled with hope for what a community of humanity with God can look like.”

A people of wait upon God in hope are a people who are a light of hope to others.

*The night is far gone, the day is near*

*O house of Jacob*

*Come, let us walk*

*In the light of the Lord! (Isaiah 2:5)*