

Hope Born Anew

Advent # 2; *Restore us God*

Isaiah 64:1, Psalm 80:1-7 & 17-19

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After a very long and boring sermon, the congregation filed out of church saying nothing to the pastor. Except one thoughtful person who said, "Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!" The pastor was thrilled. "No one has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why." "Well," said the worshiper, "it reminded me of the Peace of God because it passed all understanding and the Love of God because it endured forever!"

Advent is a season that invites us to become self-aware of our need for God. Advent urges us to pray, "Help us God!" with faith and hope. Isaiah prayed, **Isaiah 64:1** "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." The psalmist prayed **Psalm 80:1-7 & 17-19** "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You, who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth... Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved."

Mark Oestreicher describes the biblical pattern of hope as: Honest and healthy dissatisfaction with the way things are; Crying out to God; Admitting your need for God; and dependence on God for rescue. This pattern of hope is clearly seen in the exodus, exile and Jesus on the cross. **Isaiah 64:1 & Psalm 90:19** "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." **Restore us God let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

Hope begins with honest and healthy dissatisfaction with yourself, intertwined with crying out to God for help. The beginning of hope is woven with repentance. It is being honest with yourself. Admitting your shortcomings. Admitting the ways in which you tend to mess up over and over. Admitting your mistakes. Hope is a healthy dissatisfaction

that does not lead to despair, paralyzing guilt or depression rather a cry to God for help with belief that God will restore you. Hope is seeing the pain around you, reading the negative headlines, while confessing the roles we have played in bringing the world to its current condition. Hope is expressing sorrow over the world's current condition, while praying to God with faith that God will restore it all. In the words of one commentator, "All our schemes for self-improvement, for extricating ourselves from the traps we have set for ourselves, have come to nothing. We have now realized at the deepest levels of our being that we cannot save ourselves that apart from the intervention of God, we are totally and irretrievably lost." Hope trusts that God is working to make all things right, to restore all people. . **Isaiah 64:1 & Psalm 90:19 "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." Restore us God let your face shine, that we may be saved."**

Advent is an awkward time for us. The culture encourages us to be in denial. You can create happiness by buying the right gift. Bury dissatisfaction with sweets, treats, beverages and festivities. Cover the dissatisfaction with decorations of every kind. The culture proclaims have blind optimism, charge it, spend wildly, then the economy will recover and somehow everything will be grand. If one skips over their dissatisfaction, fails to be self-aware, neglects to cry out to God for help then at some point the shine will fade from gifts, decorations and festivities leaving oneself blue and hopeless.

Eugene Peterson points out that what a lot of people call hope is in reality something different. It's wishing, not hoping; and wishing and hoping are not the same thing. "Wishing," Peterson says, "is something all of us do. It projects what we want or think we need into the future. Just because we wish for something good or holy we think it qualifies as hope. It does not. Wishing extends our egos into the future; hope grows out of our faith. Hope is oriented toward what God is doing; wishing is oriented toward what we are doing." Peterson goes on to say that we can picture wishing as though it were a line coming out from us with an arrow on the end, pointing into the future, pointing toward that thing we most want to possess. Hope is just the opposite. It's a line that comes from God out of the future, with its arrow pointing toward us. "Hope," he continues, "means being surprised, because we don't know what is best for us or how our lives are going to be completed. To cultivate hope is to live in anticipation of what God is going to do next." Leon Joseph Seunens wrote, "I am a man of hope, not for human reasons nor from any natural optimism, but because I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in the world." **Isaiah 64:1 & Psalm 90:19"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down." Restore us; God let your face shine, that we may be saved."**

An honest and healthy dissatisfaction with the way things are leads to self-awareness. There is a progression to hope. Perhaps you heard it in the psalm. The psalmist is angry frustrated and blames God. Anger, frustration, blame are symptoms of dissatisfaction without hope.

Recently I was doing a project on our house and nothing was working. I got frustrated, then angry, then started blaming. I blamed the manufacturer. I blamed Leslie who had nothing to do with the project. When this happens I need to stop and be self-aware. Confess that I purchased the wrong material, or I was not installing it correctly. Admit that I need help. It is like the athlete who blames a loss on a call by the referee rather than admitting that they needed to play better throughout the game. It is like the citizen who makes poor lifestyle choices and blames politicians or the economy for their predicament.

The psalmist's anger at God is misplaced. God loves us with steadfast everlasting love. God gives us every good gift. Nothing bad, impure or hateful comes from God. All sin and negativity comes from us. The psalmist becomes self-aware, admits their mistakes, humanity's mistakes, that got us into this mess while crying out to God, trusting that God will restore us, that is hope. Often anger and control are closely related. Anger says if only someone would do it my way then everything will work out. Hope gives God control saying I trust that God will reveal the optimal way to restore everyone.

Isaiah 64:1 & Psalm 90:19“O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” **Restore us God let your face shine, that we may be saved.**” These are forms of the oldest prayer in human history. It is the perfect prayer when the headlines are negative. Help them God! When your life is not as you want it. Help me God! When people you love are hurting. Help them God! When you are dissatisfied. Help me God!

Pastor John Buchanan proclaimed. “It is the deepest yearning of the human heart: the longing, the wanting, the needing, the waiting with which every one of us is intimately familiar. We light the Advent candles and give voice to our longing and say, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down" and plead "Dear God, help me," because somewhere deep in your heart and mine we know that God has answered that prayer, that God does answer that prayer. Somewhere deep in your heart and mine there is not just longing but faith that in the birth of a child in Bethlehem long ago, God did come down; that over a baptism one day in the Jordon River, God did tear open the heavens; and that in a brief moment in time as he walked the dusty roads of Galilee and healed the sick and welcomed the outcasts and restored the unclean, as he taught that it is better to give than to receive and that the highest and best any of us can ever do is give our love and our lives away, and that as he died in humble obedience, God, in fact, did tear open the heavens and come down; and that on the third day, when death could not contain him, when the very love and power of God defeated the powers of sin and death, the powers of violence and injustice, when that child, now a man, rose up and walked into the light of the first day of the week, God definitively, once and for all, answered that prayer, "Help me.””

Have hope. God has torn open the heavens and came down. God continues to tear open the heavens and is coming to you. God is restoring you, shining upon you and saving you. Hope is being born anew. Hope is God dispersing your anger, frustration,

blame and dissatisfaction. Hope is God surprising you with love and blessings beyond your grandest wish. Hope is God restoring the cosmos to loving harmony, renewing all to goodness.

Emmanuel, God with us, the incarnation, God in human flesh, the Holy Spirit in all of us. God's hope is often born anew in our relationships. When I moved here I had a wish for a nice affordable house. God's hope gave me something even better. I experienced grace by many of you freely giving of your time to repair our house. Often I look at our home and give thanks for your support, work and meals. I wished for a better house. God's hope gave me a home built with the love of family and friends.

Head down, unaware of the sunset, I wished for a less difficult day. God's hope caused Spencer, who at that time was four, to exclaim, "Look Dad God painted the sky so you will smile".

I wished for Leslie's sister Miranda to not have suddenly died in an accident. God's hope revealed the power of love that will one day reunite us all in heaven as our friends, within hours worked together to take Leslie to the airport and paid for the flight for her to be with her family.

I wished for happiness. God's hope brings me joy through Abigail's excitement to play together.

I wish for security. God's hope gives me Leslie's hugs and encouragement. In all of these cases I was dissatisfied. I admitted that I needed God's help. I prayed to God. God's hope surprised me with something much better than my wish.

The answer to the psalmist prayer "help me" is hope being born anew with a resounding "Yes." God answers "Yes, I am giving ear to your cry. Yes, I am coming to save you. Yes, I am restoring our relationship fractured by your faithlessness and sin. Yes, I am saving you from neighbors who wish to destroy you. Yes, my hand is upon you. Yes, you will know the strength of the living God."

God has torn open the heavens. God came down in Jesus to shine upon us, to restore us. God continues to tear open the heavens. God continues to come to you, to shine upon you, to restore you, to save you. Amen