

“Redeeming Hope”

1 Timothy 1:15, Matthew 1:1-17, Psalm 23, 2 Corinthians 5:17b-19 & Isaiah 2:1-5

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Prayer for Understanding God of the ages, in scripture we hear stories of people like us—ordinary people, people who longed to know you, people who longed to follow you, people who made mistakes, people who tried to grow—old, young, native, immigrant, new to the faith, lifelong believer. In scripture we hear stories of people like us, so just as you walked with them, help us to hear and remember all the ways that you walk with us. We are listening. We are grateful. We are yours. Amen

It is the first Sunday of Advent, the season of expectation and hope, watching and waiting, chaos and peace, the world is a mess and God is redeeming all, our lives are broken and God is healing us into wholeness; a time of jarring contrasts. What it all leads to, what it is all about, is God’s redeeming grace, forgiving, healing, glorifying every person and the entire cosmos. Advent gives us glimpses of all people at home with God. Jesus came and graciously redeemed all people. We are already redeemed and yet we have not even the slightest perception of the majesty of our fully redeemed life in a fully redeemed cosmos. The redemption once happened, redemption is happening and redemption will happen. All of creation longs for redemption, abundant, complete life, whether one realizes it or not. Advent is the anticipation, waiting, hoping for the promised day of the Lord, the kingdom of God to be fully realized.

The gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus. Nancy Guthrie writes: “Matthew seems to be going out of his way to make clear that God had always intended for God’s blessings, God’s promises, to be for people from every tribe, tongue, and nation—not exclusively for those who had pure Jewish blood in their veins.” Jesus’ genealogy has people from other cultures and religions, pagans, Gentiles, Canaanites, Moabites, Hittites. Jesus’ genealogy lists women, which was unheard of in Matthew’s time. Jesus’ genealogy has broken, sinful people of every kind. Jesus’ genealogy is full of confused, perplexed, wanderers. Jesus’ genealogy has repulsive, scandalous people, murders, liars, thieves, hateful, judgmental, fearful, abusive, enemies, manipulative, deceivers and even mockers of God. Jesus’ genealogy includes people who adamantly reject the idea that God even exists. King David was a liar, adulterer, and murderer. There are prostitutes, people born outside of marriage, stolen birthrights and people who were sold into slavery by their siblings. Jesus’ genealogy reveals that no one will remain an outcast, everyone belongs to God’s family, no one is too sinful for God’s redeeming grace. Jesus’ genealogy is a fulfillment of the original covenant, every person will be blessed by God. Jesus took on the shame of his family tree, every outsider, outlaw, scoundrel, and sinner, so he could redeem all of them and everyone. Jesus came to save both the hater and the hated, victim and perpetrator, murder and murdered, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited, sinner and sinned against. All of this is to ensure you that there is nothing in your story that diminishes your belonging in God’s family, there is nothing in anyone’s story that excludes anyone from the family of God. Absolutely nothing can separate us from God’s love.

Nancy Guthrie wrote: “Has a sense of shame shaped your sense of self so that you think your name will not be found on that list of names of those whom Jesus calls beloved sibling? If your story includes sexual scandal, adultery, or incest—you are going to fit right in to this family. If you have been deceitful or hateful...if you have used or destroyed other people to get what you wanted...if you have touted your religious credentials to impress other people when in reality you wanted nothing to do with God, welcome to the family! If you have taken God’s generous provision to you for granted... if you have doubted God’s promises...if you have presumed upon God’s protection while also ignoring God—we can see the family resemblance. If you have no hope to be accepted into God’s family other than the perfect record of your righteous sibling, Jesus, then you can be sure you have found your forever-family. No one gets into God’s family through good behavior. The only way any of us become a part of this family is by grace. Grace that will pardon and cleanse. Grace that is greater than all our sin.” The Apostle Paul proclaims: **1 Timothy 1:15 “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”**. Nancy continues: “Matthew wanted us to see that the family of Jesus was made up of people who had less-than-perfect records. This means that there is hope, there is a home, there is a future, in this family for people like me and people like you—no matter what we have done or failed to do, or who we have been or failed to be.”

Your genealogy probably includes messed up, broken people who were trying to love. Your genealogy might include awful people who hurt you; and yet, there is goodness in them and that goodness is passed on to you. Likewise, you will pass on goodness to future generations. The goodness of humanity will expand forever. As I read Jesus' genealogy, think of the goodness you have received from your ancestors and imagine the glory of every person redeemed.

Matthew 1:1-17 NLT "This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Ram.

Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asa.

Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.

Jehoram was the father of Uzziah.

Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amon.

Amon was the father of Josiah.

Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).

After the Babylonian exile:

Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.

Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim.

Eliakim was the father of Azor.

Azor was the father of Zadok.

Zadok was the father of Akim.

Akim was the father of Eliud.

Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah."

Even the worst person still has goodness, will be redeemed, and belongs to God's family. Wilda Gafney writes: "All of God's creation is good and beloved; this extends to the earth and her creatures and all of God's children. As Advent prepares the Church to receive an incarnate God, the emphasis on the goodness of creation is a powerful reminder that human flesh is part of that good and beloved creation. God longs for the redemption of the

world as, and more than, creation longs to be redeemed. This is Advent longing. Though we long for the culmination of our redemption, we wait with hope and patience.”

God knows your name. You are beloved member of God’s family. You are a person who is a part of the story of God redeeming the world. Advent is the celebration of God redeeming you, me, and everyone. The psalmist proclaims **Psalm 23:Select “God restores our souls. Surely, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”** The Apostle Paul declares **2 Corinthians 5:17b-19 NLT “The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to God through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to God. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to God, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And God gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.** Since there is room in Jesus’ genealogy for messed up, broken, sinful people of every kind you can be certain there is room for you and everyone. You belong to God’s family that is being redeemed. This is the good news we are invited to ponder and celebrate.

Sanctified Art wrote: “Advent begins with Matthew’s genealogy. In that long list of names, we remember the trauma and triumph of those who came before; each name holds a story and their story gives way to Christ’s story. God works through the unexpected people and stories of the past and present. When you zoom in, you may not be able to see how each character propels the story forward, but when you zoom out, you can see how each story is woven together into a larger tapestry. All of these individual threads over centuries woven together into the story of God’s unconventional inbreaking. And the Christmas story is our story, too. The tapestry God is weaving did not stop in Bethlehem. Our own threads, from generation to generation, weave into the narrative of God’s incarnation in the world that proclaims the Advent promises of hope, peace, joy, and love. Like a tapestry woven throughout time, the Christmas story weaves us in—to remember how God has shown up in the past, to continue the work of collective liberation, to behold the presence of God in flesh and bone.” God’s grace is from generation to generation. “Despite the challenges and vulnerability Mary faced, Mary could glimpse the scale and scope of the good news she was part of bringing forth. This good news transcends time and space. Christ is coming for freedom for all: God’s redemption is at work. Therefore, the promise is meant to be lived out and passed on from generation to generation.” This Advent pay attention to each person and ask: “What did each person pass on or contribute? How did they either participate in God’s liberation and love—or try to thwart God’s grace? What can we learn from them, and what is our role now? What will we pass on to the next generation? The root word of “generation” is “gen” meaning “origin” or “birth.” This is a call to action: what are we being called to generate or bring forth? What have your ancestors and those who have come before you passed on for you to continue? Who are the spiritual elders in your community who planted the seeds for the things that are now blooming? What seeds are you planting for the future? From Generation to Generation... reminds us of the ways our lives, histories, actions, and stories are interconnected and woven together. The work of God is always unfolding—in and through us. This Advent, may you remember that you belong—to a story etched into the wrinkles of time, to generations that have come before and will come after, to a love that won’t let you go.”

Pastor Sarah Speed wrote: “I can vividly remember a conversation between my 13-year-old adolescent self and my mother on the way to church one wintry morning. I asked her, “Mom, what if I don’t want to be a Christian?” She told me how this story of God has changed her life. She told me how she couldn’t imagine her world without the church. She told me how she so deeply believed in a better day, and how she felt called to help be a part of that. From the back seat of the car, I could tell that she was serious. Her joy, her hope, her conviction—they were so pure and so authentic that they left a lasting impression on me. It was a generation to generation moment. The Christmas story, of a love that came here, that walked among us, that was born in a humble manger to uncertain parents with shepherds nearby, is a story that we pass from generation to generation, because without fail, it continues to change us. It reframes the way we hope. It centers the way we love. It shapes the way we live. So, this Advent, may we tell this story that has spread like wildfire from generation to generation. Let us remember the generations who waited for that promised day. And let our generation be so influenced in joy and love that future generations can’t help but pay attention. This Advent, let us tell the story of good news.”

Advent signals the sovereign majesty and personal unique love of God transforming every person, every generation. The Holy Spirit is always with us. Jesus is always coming in forms and ways we have not yet experienced to transform the world. Our task is to create spaces of grace to cultivate hope, healing, and love. The happenings of the world often put us to sleep spiritually, resulting in partial living. Advent is a time to wake up, be hopeful and live fully. Advent is a time to image how every goodness will be magnified and every form of hate and death will be transformed causing hope to flourish.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims: **Isaiah 2:1-5 MSG “There is a day coming when the mountain of God’s House will be The Mountain—solid, towering over all mountains. All nations will river toward it, people from**

all over set out for it. They will say, ‘Come, let us climb God’s Mountain, go to the House of the God of Jacob. God will show us the way God works so we can live the way we are made.’ Zion’s the source of the revelation. God’s Message comes from Jerusalem. God will settle things fairly between nations. God will make things right between many peoples. They will turn their swords into shovels, their spears into pruning hooks. No more will nation fight nation; they won’t play war anymore. Come, family of Jacob, let us live in the light of God.”

Hope is imaging how all that diminishes life will be redeemed into enhancers of life. Sanctified Art wrote: “The Isaiah passage illustrates a convergence of opposing groups and identities coming together. Instead of the way of the past—of war—they learn a new way by transforming their weapons into gardening tools. What are the old paths that we have followed, and where will we diverge into a new way? Isaiah’s prophecy paints a powerful illustration of regeneration—of weapons of war becoming shovels that break up soil and shears that prune away dead branches. Within your life, church, and community, what needs to be unearthed or dug up? What needs to be pruned away? What steps are required for this work to take place? Where is God regenerating a new path forward?” Hope gives us glimpses of the larger Mystery that draws us into a future that is more than we can ask or imagine.

Did anyone ever see through the present reality of your life to the potential of what you could be with a little love and encouragement? Did a teacher ever let you know that you were a talented person, perhaps seeing through your silly, disruptive behavior, your feelings of inadequacy or adolescent self-consciousness, and tell you something of what you could become? Did a coach ever expand your joy by developing your play? Do you have a parent who loves you unconditionally and encourages you to develop your talents. All of that is a form of Advent, God’s relentless love polishing our goodness.

Advent is about our God who sees what the human project is becoming. A God who keeps reminding us that today’s mess will be cleaned up, today’s tears will be wiped away, today’s broken relationships will be mended, that today’s dull, tarnished, broken world will become brilliant, magnificent, and whole. The God of Advent, the God of possibilities and potentialities, the God who knows who we are becoming is present to encourage and lead us into our glorious future. Awaken, watch, wait, perceive and perhaps this advent you will be illumined with hope to imagine a more complete picture of who you are becoming and what the cosmos is becoming.

God is working through every generation, every person, to redeem the world. Advent is a reminder that we wait for a future that is fully redeemed, that in each person there is goodness that will enhance the glory of the cosmos, that every form of death will be transformed into an agent of life, that the sin, the failure to love completely, will be washed away by God’s grace, setting everyone free to love extravagantly for eternity. God knows who you are becoming. You will be glorious. God knows how the cosmos will be redeemed. All will be spectacular. Advent is a time to imagine your coming glory and imagine the majesty of a cosmos fully redeemed. May your imaging fill you with hope. Amen