

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Fishing For Hope"
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We live in an age racked with hopelessness and despair. The twentieth century saw the rise of existentialism and nihilism. Both of these philosophies seemed to trumpet meaninglessness, random death and violence as the main realities of life. The dark clouds and storms of the human condition were lauded which ended up in a deep apathy or depression that saw no reason for hope.

In the twenty first century, are we doing much better? While some optimism in this province seems currently to be predominant, nevertheless, the export of persons seems to be our greatest economic activity. Where might we turn to answer the onslaught of questions around our highest values and desires? The government at every level has continually been portrayed as untrustworthy, no matter what party is in power. The police, the RCMP, the Constabulary often have news items which bring into question whether they can be trusted, certainly when it comes to reviewing the questionable acts of their members. Schools and educational institutions of all kinds seem fraught with negative politics, including some teachers and professors who betray the public trust. There seems to be a sense that much more energy is devoted to scandal or conflict than education. The Church has been rebuked as some leaders have committed criminal acts, and the church is portrayed as out of step with the times and generally irrelevant or malicious. The media which "breaks" these stories itself is under constant scrutiny as to whether it properly reports events as they actually happen or rather contributes to the negative perceptions of our society and country.

Is it any wonder that huge numbers of anti-depressants are prescribed every year and that people struggle with why they are alive and doing what they are doing?

[agony](#), [anguish](#), [anxiety](#), [concern](#), [dejection](#), [depression](#), [desolation](#), [despair](#), [despondency](#), [discomfort](#), [disconsolateness](#), [distraction](#), [distress](#), [fear](#), [gloom](#), [grief](#), [heartache](#), [hopelessness](#), [melancholy](#), [misery](#), [pain](#), [pang](#), [sorrow](#), [torture](#), [trouble](#), [unhappiness](#), [worry](#)

Some will say “it’s not that bad...” and maybe it isn’t. But I wonder if it isn’t worse than we suspect. Every once in a while a suicide will draw us back to our desperate condition.

In the midst of any despair we face, however, comes the word of the Lord to us. Isaiah tells us there is hope for peace, and beating our weapons of war into farm implements, transforming our huge need for security into newly risking helping others, and trusting that God will set the nations right.

Isaiah and the Psalmist tell us about how desperately we need a sense of home and belonging, and that that desire will only be fulfilled in the house of the Lord. The peace we seek, the sense of home and belonging we need will often be quite elusive in this life. God wants us to access what He has available to us. Only God can come against the depths of hopelessness. As our hearts become home territory for God’s ways and word, so we become more and more recipients of hope and agents of hope.

The dictionary tells us that hope is simply believing in a positive outcome, but it is more than that in the Christian context. It is believing in the One who brings about outcomes in line with His character of love and compassion. It is believing that justice in the end will come about through His caring hands. It is believing God can make a transformative difference in my life.

Paul talks about waking up from our spiritual sleeps, choosing to live honourably, coming out of the darkness, into the light, and making wise choices. He suggests Christians not party their lives away because although drunkenness and sexual immorality is one way to cope with stress and despair, it is not God’s way. Quarreling and jealousy also do not work against the stress and despair but add to it. So the apostle suggests we look to Christ for his attitudes, for his ways and means of dealing with the difficulties we face everyday. Jesus is to be as close to us as our clothes are, so that we will choose a way in our living which faithfully represents his way, not rebellion, not immorality, not lying, but being changed by Him and His love.

Advent is a preparation for Christmas. But it has several themes, not just Christmas involved in it. For instance, it leads us to prepare for the First Coming of Christ, as a babe in the manger, but it also is a time for preparing for Christ’s Second Coming. The Second Coming is debated amongst

theologians and there are those who written popular books and novels on the subject. While I don't intend to give a full exposition of eschatology, i.e. the doctrines of the end times, I do want you to know that I believe there is only one second coming, and then the judgment. Some would have us believe that Christ is coming back several times, once at the "rapture," once at the start of a 1000 year earthly kingdom, and once again for the last time at the last judgment.

The way I read the Gospel is that when Christ returns, everyone will know He is returning. Many will be caught off guard in the midst of their regular routines. Some will live with God forever, in accordance with the grace of God and the choices made in this life. Others will not live with God forever, but apart from God, in accordance with the grace of God and the choices that person made in this life. Heaven and hell are real places, starting with our spiritual choices here, for God and against God.

And so in the Matthew 24 passage, it is not clear whether it is better to be taken or left, depending on your eschatology. It seems to me that those taken are taken to judgment. Just as death comes upon us not when we suspect it might come, but at inopportune moments. So the Lord says to each one of us, "Don't put off your decision for or against me. Know where you stand today. Choose me and begin receiving all the benefits of knowing me and my love today." Don't make Christianity your retirement project.

Make meeting with Jesus daily your lifelong project.

There you find hope. Sometimes we think we come across hope like we might fish. You throw your line out and maybe you catch something or maybe you don't. But hope comes as we get to know the One who brings hope, peace, joy and love.

Let us pray.