**Living with Incredible Hope**

**By Jeff McDowell**

**12-1-24, Horseheads First UMC**

**Communion**

**First Sunday of Advent**

**Sermon theme:** No matter what is going on around us and the bleak picture of our daily world news, God is not giving up on us and God will make it all right in the end. We must not give up hope, even if we face danger, illness or death. God’s promise came true in Jesus first and foremost as Savior of all the world. We are simply in a waiting time for God’s timing to fully fix our broken world. Do not despair, and do not give up your joyful living in this troubling world. Christ is alive and He will make all things right, in God’s time.

**Jeremiah 33:14-16**

*14“‘****The days are coming,’*** *declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.*

*15“‘****In those days*** *and at that time
    I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;
    he will do what is just and right in the land.
16****In those days*** *Judah will be saved
    and Jerusalem will live in safety.
This is the name by which itwill be called:
    The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’*

**I Thessalonians 3:9-13**

*9How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. 11Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

**SERMON BEGINS**

Church in December can be stressful. We want everything to be just right. We want to welcome all the newcomers to our church. We want to get our dinners and services and programs just right. But it can stress us out.

Here is a real notice from a New Jersey newspaper:

*"The* ***Children's Choir*** *will sing for this later service. The* ***Chancel Choir*** *will sing* ***"Let Us Love One Another"*** *with a flute solo by Linda Richardson. The church's* ***Health & Wellness Committee's*** *nurses will offer free* ***blood-pressure checkups*** *at this time."*

Psalmist writes: “In the midst of the congregation I will praise you, Oh Lord!”

Easy to say this, as the Psalmist writes it. But it is more difficult to feel this uplift every day. We get bogged down in the waiting, waiting for God’s justice to be seen in our day. In fact, sometimes it looks like God has forgotten us.

**Today is** the beginning of the Christian Season of Advent. Today begins the Christian Year in the Church. This tradition began in the fifth century with Monks fasting every day leading up to the Christmas celebration. Advent literally means “The Coming.” This refers to 3 promises related to the Messiah, or Savior of the world. **First** is His coming into the world as a baby, born in a manger. **Second** is His presence in the Communion Bread and Wine. “As often as you eat this bread and drink this wine, remember me until I return.” **Third** is His promised return to the world to rule and reign, and the final setting everything right.

Advent Calendar: Check.

Advent Wreath: Check.

Advent Sanctuary Decorations: Check.

Advent is a tool we can use to bolster our hope when we feel that “God has left the building.”

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being you are full of hope and therefore, have complete joy every day, ***what is your hope level***? Give yourself a number and let’s talk. What is your blood pressure like today?

What comes to your mind and heart as I simply say these phrases from today’s news feed?

 Hezbollah.

 Israel.

 Mass Deportation.

 China and Taiwan.

 Russia.

 North Korea.

 Smart Bomb.

 Sustainable Energy.

 Our economy.

 Inflation.

 Famine in Gaza.

Do you ever want to shut the news out and just think about peace and beauty?

For the Christian, this is more than the Power of Positive Thinking, as great as Norman Vincent Peale was.

His working theory was that when we change the thought patterns of our minds toward the positive, we change everything in our lives, including our success in our heart’s desire.

In fact, St. Paul write to Philippi:

*8Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* (Chapter 4)

Jeremiah, from Prison, tells his nation:

*14“‘****The days are coming,’*** *declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.*

*15“‘****In those days*** *and at that time
    I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;
    he will do what is just and right in the land.
16****In those days*** *Judah will be saved
    and Jerusalem will live in safety.*

**Still, we wait.** Israel is under attack today. Israel is lashing out to quell their enemies and killing countless attackers along with countless innocent children and their families. These realities **are not** a fulfillment of God’s promise that *“Judah will be saved.”*

The Savior is the only hope for Israel, the One whom God promised. As Christians we know this Savior long hoped for is Jesus of Nazareth. And we say about Him:

***“Christ has Come, Christ has Risen, Christ will Come again!”***

We just learned yesterday that a longtime friend, and a member of Bath Centenary church died suddenly. Debbie was a great advocate for Diabetes Education. She was funny, smart and the wife of a Presbyterian Minister, a brother in Christ. Her death is such a shock and surprise that it causes me to wonder: “What is the hope that we have, as Christians?” In fact, 3 members of that church died this past week. We are praying for that church and for Pastor Leanne Zeck, that God will surround them all with grace and energy for helping the church there say goodbye.

We do not know from each day to the next, what it holds for us. But we know who holds us safe and secure, even from death itself. Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and that more abundantly.”- John 10:10-*

Do you believe this, even in light of all that is difficult, challenging and even wrong with the world?

At this church, we realize that sometimes each of us needs help finding hope. I will offer two pieces of help for you this month.

1. The *Longest Night Service*: Sat. Dec. 21, 6 p.m. in Chapel.
2. *Stephen Ministry.* This is a one – to one Christian caregiving from a trained, confidential member of our church. (see brochures)

We must not give up hope, even if we face danger, illness or death. God’s promise came true in Jesus first and foremost as Savior of all the world. We are simply in a waiting time for God’s timing to fully fix our broken world. Do not despair, and do not give up your joyful living in this troubling world. Christ is alive and He will make all things right, in God’s time.

 *Dear Lord, as we embark yet another year on our journey to Advent, remind us why we are here and what we can do for you in the world. Help us to remain alert, always looking for the signs of your coming again. Give us such faith that by day or by night, at all times and in all places we will worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.*