

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE MESSAGE?

As we prepare for Advent the verses seem to be a strange mixture of warnings and signs of an end time. No doubt we have heard sermons, read books or even seen movies about ending times or related subjects. The most immediate reactions to this subject are ones of fear, skepticism, maybe resignation, or anxiousness. For some there is a sign around every corner to be interpreted. Yet for others they are almost frozen in place because there are varied and numerous outcomes to the situation that is brought to light here. Just as the original disciples on occasion missed the meaning of Jesus' words, so we too, can miss the real meaning because of our reactions to them. We can lift or pull from these passages a meaning that applies to us today and can be an encouragement and assurance in troubles times.

Several verses that can provide us with a real firm foundation on which to stand is found in Matthew 24 "however, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows". It is found in verse 32 of today's reading, and in acts 1:7 "it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." That settles it for me, in Jesus' own words He tells us that He does not even know, only the Father, so who are we to think we know the time or date or spend time worrying about it?

Yes, many words have been written or spoken and movies made, but it is all guesswork! God did, as His creation, make us some pretty curious creatures, but there are times when such curiosity ends up in a dead end and nothing is definite one way or another! The other point is, we can miss an important message in those words. In today's reading there is a very bleak picture of what is to happen "in those days", but there are also words of encouragement and assurance.

In the latter part of today's reading we find words that can guide us in this season of Advent, which we have started today by lighting the first candle, the candle of prophecy that ties directly to our beginning verses of the Gospel. The candle as was read is also the known as the candle of hope. That too, ties into today's readings from the Gospel, the Epistle and the Psalm. The ending words of verse Psalm 39:7 are "and now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in thee"

Frequently people point to the Bible and say it is a book of no, discouraging because we can't live up to it, and a real fun-killer as many of the younger generations would say. For those people I would dispute such accusations by pointing to the words in these verses today. I would say go back and read the Bible more carefully. Not as a race to be won in the fastest time but like a marathon, something to slow down at times with a steady pace taking in all it has to offer. The words – "and the truth will set you free" are never more appropriate than in this season of Advent and the birth of Jesus.

What exactly is the message in today's readings? As always, we ask the question – how does this apply in our daily walk? All this talk of sun becoming dark, the moon not shining, stars falling from the

sky!!! Then there is talk of watching the fig tree, good grief! We don't have fig trees here in Iowa unless we grow them in a container!!!

Indeed we all would admit the times we live in appear to be unsettled and discouraging times. I could point out many such things, and each generation has had them for sure. However, for us as disciples we should be people of hope. I referred to earlier that candle we lit to begin Advent, the candle of hope and the verse in the Psalm.

When we say we are believers, isn't that to mean we believe in those words, written by men, inspired from God that are in the Bible? If not, we are in the wrong pew!!! What makes these words so special? Because they are the word of God and **that is truth**. If there is anything we can put our trust and hope in, it is the truth. It will set us free to be who God intended for us to be. Those are not just empty words; otherwise all the promises God has given us are just words and nothing else.

Think of a book you have read and the affect it had on you – mentally and maybe even physically. You may have wept, laughed or contemplated silently. Then how much more the words of a God-inspired book, the Bible affects us?

I mentioned John Wesley last week and the words, the truth in Ephesians 2 about grace or Luther discovering justification by faith in Romans. These men armed with the truth changed the world as they knew then. These words have changed many of us here today and given us that priceless quantity we call hope.

When we process hope based on a Godly foundation then it overflows into a life of hope. We of all people should live a life of hope, hope for our children, our grandchildren, our business, our health, and much, much more, for it is that future God has created for us – if we chose to follow, there is no forcing or demands from God about it!!!! In Esther we find a conversation between Esther and Mordecai that ends with him saying “who knows whether you have come to the kingdom **for such a time as this?**” We as disciples are here “for such a time as this” and must live with zeal and zest to spread hope among those who so desperately want it.

We frequently sing songs of “giving thanks for what He has done for me” if we mean it, then share it!!! As I have said before to share it we have to be connected to the source - by relationship with God, and how do we do it? Read His Word to know truth and know Him and His character. We pray, coming together in worship and praise, because the Holy Spirit is with us and will guide us and give us the words as promised in Luke 12:12 “for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what needs to be said.”

At the beginning of these verses the heading in bold states “concerning the future” words devoted to the time when Jesus comes again. Here is an interesting thought – do we get “lost” in worrying about when

he is coming and miss the ways in which Jesus comes to us in so many ways **now**? Advent will give way to His birth, coming to us as we relive the hope of Christmas.

Jesus comes when we share gifts of kindness, love, and compassion just as the Wiseman gave Him gifts. He comes every time we relive His resurrection at Easter. He comes through the word every time we hear it or read it. He comes through His church as we His disciples imitate Him to one another. In our daily walk He comes in mysterious and wondrous ways such as healing of relationships and more. Today He will come in the bread and juice! And we can count on it!!! **Remember too in today's reading Jesus tells us to be alert, stay awake, but he never tells us to worry!!!!!!**

Hear the verses from Hebrews 10:23-24 *"let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."* **As we have said many times before, faith is active, love is a verb, hope is a verb and that implies that we are deliverers of hope.** It is not something we keep to ourselves. Don't we share with others when our child or youth gets all "a's", finishes first or whatever positive result it is? Then it is purely logical to share the hope you have!!! And I am not saying we have to "beat" people over the head with the biggest Bible we can carry.

Think of this, how many negative conversations do you hear in a day? Complaining, blaming, how bad things are and life is. What an opportunity to talk about hope!!!! When we spend time listening and bring hope into the conversation, *reminding people that good things are happening* and the future God has created for us is something better than we have now. Light will shine into their life and yours.

It is up to us to live that life, a life with purpose no matter when he comes! After all, our example, our teacher said in John "for I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me." We are his disciple and we are to do that which he who sends us out did. He promised we will never be alone. It is our hope.

What does hope do for mankind?

Hope shines brightest when the hour is darkest.

Hope motivates when discouragement comes.

Hope energizes when the body is tired.

Hope sweetens while bitterness bites.

Hope sings when all melodies are gone.

Hope listens for answers when no one is talking.

Hope climbs over obstacles when no one is helping.
Hope endures hardship when no one is caring.
Hope smiles confidently when no one is laughing.
Hope reaches for answers when no one is asking.
Hope presses toward victory when no one is encouraging.
Hope dares to give when no one is sharing.
Hope brings the victory when no one is winning.

What exactly is the message?

It is the message of Advent – that of preparation and of hope.

It is a new church year – happy, no, have a hope-filled new year!!!

Amen.