



“Stir Up Our Hopes”

Third Sunday of Advent
Saturday & Sunday, December 15-16, 2018

All Services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6;
Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

This month we have been looking at how God might stir us up, how God is stirring up the hearts, the voices, and today the hopes of God's people.

Helen Keller was 19 months old when doctors say she contracted either scarlet fever or meningitis which left her both deaf and blind. And it wasn't until six years later that her family was able to bring in a teacher, Anne Sullivan, herself sight disabled, to try to work with her and teach her the basics of language.

The day that they met Keller called "My soul's birthday." Sullivan immediately began to teach her by spelling words into her hand, but it was a month later that a break through finally occurred spelling out the word WATER on her hand, while cold water ran on her other hand. Writing in her autobiography *The Story of My Live*, Keller recalled the moment. "I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – the thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand." And then she said this, "**The living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, set it free!**"

Hope sees us through the darkness so that we can experience the light. We might have all sorts of talent, we might have skill, or abilities, we might have passion or optimism, and these are all essential characteristics for success, but in the end, it is *hope* that we need the most, and Hellen Keller understood that. Hope sets us free.

Psychologist C.R. Snyder and his colleagues developed something they called the Hope Theory. According to their theory, hope consists both of agency (that is actions) as well as pathways (or directions to be able to get there). In other words, having hope involves both the will to go where you want to go, but also the ability to be able to find various ways to be able to get there. Because having goals is one thing, but the desire to overcome the various barriers and challenges is another. **Hope shapes our future.**

Advice columnist Ann Landers receiver over 10,000 letters a month about people's problems. She was asked one time, what is the number one problem that people

have? And she responded anxiety, people are afraid of losing their health, people are afraid of losing loved ones, people are afraid of losing their wealth, and she said some people are afraid of life itself.

So why ask God to stir up our hope? Well, life is tough! There are challenges that each and every one of us will have to overcome. Obstacles that are put in our either by ourselves or by another, or just by life. There are twists and there are turns.

I was a happy 12-year-old with not a care in the world, life was perfect and then one summer in August my father set me down and told me that he and my mother were getting a divorce. All of a sudden everything was different. Everything had changed. I needed to hold on to hope.

You might have a similar story, maybe it's a child that had to deal with learning disabilities or later with addiction, or perhaps you experienced a job loss and didn't know what the future meant for you. Or perhaps it was retirement and then all of a sudden facing health concerns.

Hope though opens up possibilities even with all of the regrets and setbacks that we might have.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." **Hope connects us to promises.**

In our first reading from the prophet Zephaniah we hear about the Israelites, the prophet promises them restoration, that the exiled will have an opportunity to come home. Many of the Israelites were living as slaves in Babylon, but the prophet proclaims redemption, a release from captivity. And the release you'll notice comes from the outside. We need a redeemer, we need someone who can free us. Redemption is necessary because we are not strong enough to be able to overcome our weaknesses whether they're physical or relational or spiritual.

Like the character Scotty says in Star Trek – "I just can't do it, Captain, I don't have the power!" Thank you for the one laugh out there, I've been working on that all week.

In our gospel reading the people bring questions to John the Baptist as they're confronted with their own inadequacies and sins. "What should we do?" they say. Did you notice that what he told them what they should do is what they should have been doing all along? It wasn't rocket science. He says to them don't lie, don't cheat, be generous, be satisfied with what you have. All very common-sense stuff.

But then notice that John points to the promise of the redeemer, Jesus, who is to come. Redemption is particularly predominant in Paul's writings. Christians receive the promise of the redeemer that release from sin and death where we are offered new life and new hope, and that is to be celebrated!

What he said to the Philippians is particularly poignant. "Rejoice," he said, "In the Lord always; again, I say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Now Paul is writing this while he is under house arrest. In effect he is on death row

for being a Christian and in a few years, he is going to be martyred. And yet he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." He does that because Christ was with him! Even as he was dealing with cranky churches, or false teachers, or even the threat of death, he responds with joy, genuine joy. And you and I need to hear that!

My favorite Christmas movie. . . and no it's not a Hallmark Christmas movie. . .but I want to thank all of you for the emails and letters I received over the last two weeks about that and especially the support group that has been put together for my wife. But my favorite is "It's a Wonderful Life." Now it was made in 1946, it's actually more popular today than it was all the way back then. It tells the story of George Bailey. George had great dreams but over his life he experienced nothing but disappointment. He had wanted to travel the world and instead he was stuck in the same small town that he grew up in. He had great ideas for his life, but instead he works for his father's building and loan. And in the movie, we see that he is just filled with regret, and it finally gets to an important point, but then an angel comes into his life and shows him the value that he brought to other people's lives. The creux of the movie is that George received the assurance that there was more hope in life than there is disappointment. That the people around us, right now, (Look around you right now) the people around you are the people you can touch in a positive way, offering hope and love in a world of regret and trial. You can be the George Bailey to your neighbor.

We live in hope, rather than fear.

Martin Luther wrote "Everything that is done in the world is done in hope." And that's because God is near. He's never very far from you, Jesus is present. He is only a prayer away when you hold out your hand and receive the bread of life, or when you remember your baptism, or when you are joined with your brothers and sister in faith around worship, connection, and service.

God is always close to you and that's why we pray, *Stir up our hopes, O Lord, we want to see Jesus.* Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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