



Middle Spring Presbyterian Church (USA) ~ 2020 Advent Devotional

We are Middle Spring Presbyterian Church, called together by God to worship, grow, and serve.

Members and friends of Middle Spring offer this Advent Devotional to you in the hope that it brings even more meaning to your watching and waiting as we anticipate our celebration of the birth of Christ. In pausing each day to reflect on what is shared in these pages, we hope you will experience opportunities for worship and growth, together with those who offer them and who pray out of them each day. We chose to focus on the Advent themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love; we could use a little more of each of these in our lives right now! One of our ruling elders leads us into this season of reflection with these words:

"May our *Hope* in Christ, sustained by His unfailing *Love*, bring us great *Joy*,
through which we can experience *Peace*"

Writing these words is easy, living into them is the real work. My desire, this Advent, is to be more thoughtful, prayerful and purposeful in embracing the season's gifts; in doing so, drawing comfort, trust and assurance from Christ, as I draw closer to Him. May this be your desire too.

~ Jeannie Chamberlin



Sunday, November 29, 2020

Hope

Jill Corwin

“Be strong and take heart all you who hope in the Lord.”

~Psalm 32:24

As we stopped to take this photo it struck me that as much as we’ve enjoyed taking pictures of beautiful locales across our country, that here, on a route we travel constantly during the golf season was a beauty as great as any we have seen. Then I considered our own little country church. To me it is as beautiful as any of the grander religious edifices I’ve been in. This year we have not been able to worship together in our church building which I am sure many of us have felt was a hopeless situation, yet due to the marvels of modern technology we have been able to continue having a worship service in our own homes. We live in hope for the day we can resume in worship together with our church family. As we venture through advent together, even while physically apart, we take hope in the knowledge of the birth of our savior, whose birth brought hope to a needy world. We are all these centuries later still living into the hope the birth of Christ gave us.



Monday, November 30, 2020

Hope

Pat Mahan

Finding Hope

We wait. When days seem endless and the future uncertain, we stumble blindly.
We forget how to walk toward the light.
But God doesn't forget us.

It had been a gray day. The sky was overcast, the news was discouraging, and the chores awaiting me were the routine mix of necessary but not especially appealing. Escaping the house for a ride up the mountain seemed like a good idea.

And driving through the woods did help, but not quite enough to lift my mood. Coming home an hour later, the sky still appeared gray, until I looked more closely at that far corner beyond the farm fields. . . . The cloud cover seemed to be breaking up somewhat, and I could see blue sky emerging. *Stop!* I said to my husband. *Look!*

We pulled over, and I grabbed my camera. The heavens were telling the glory of God.

Psalms 19.1

Holy and loving God, you are ever present in our lives, and we are grateful. When the gray sameness of a discouraging day blinds us to your love and protection, break through with your glory! Give us eyes to see and hearts to remember that you are there. Amen.

“And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” ~Hebrews

9:27-28

My story starts in a gift shop in England, it was there when I saw the perfect gift. It would do nicely - retell the salvation story and my father's love for them through his love of gardening. A few days before I had heard the bad news. Dad had a heart problem that couldn't be operated on - I had just lost my brother and this laid heavy on my heart. I was reminded of his life and love of gardening when I saw, “the gift.” I quickly turned to my husband and said, “this is perfect.” I'm going to buy one then we will have the information when we need it.

The idea I shared with him was this, when Dad died we would bring these little matchbook seed planters to give to the mourners. It would do two things, remind them of God's love through His gift of salvation and Dad's love of flowers. Later, when the seed sprouted it would remind them that God is faithful and life is eternal...They would of course then remember my Dad and give thanks for the life he had lived. - perfect!

Several months later as I was planting bulbs - I turned again to my husband and proclaimed I had a better idea. Bulbs! My husband and Dad both loved bulbs and they were easier to get and give. As it turns out my husband died first and those bulbs were a real hit. I still today get acknowledgements when those tulips bloom. God is faithful, He loves us so much He provided His only son to show us how much He cares for you. Bulbs come back to life every year - multiply and bring us love and light and beauty and the reminder of someone special and the gift of eternal life found through Christ.



Bog cotton, a wildflower blowing with the wind in the fields of Ireland.

Sometimes we feel like this bog cotton, tossed around by the wind currents of life. As with this wildflower, we hang on with our roots. A study of Christian roots reveals a long history of tumultuous times, but nonetheless the hope of Christ has prevailed through the centuries. The photo on the next page shows the inside of St Machar's Cathedral in Aberdeen, Scotland. A church was founded on its grounds in 580 AD. The magnificent structure that stands in this photo was built over many generations between 1131 and 1530, all while serious conflicts engulfed the people and surrounding nations. Despite this "blowing in the wind", their hope for honoring God prevailed and this glorious stone cathedral with towering arches, rich stained-glass windows and colorful heraldic shields was built at last. Standing inside this ancient church filled me with awe and gave me the same hope in Christ that I am certain the people that worshiped here felt in 580 AD, 1131 and 1530.



St Machar's Cathedral, 12th century cathedral in old Aberdeen, Scotland

HOPE

Isaiah 9:2-3

When there seemed no way of traveling to Bethlehem,

HOPE was a donkey.

When there was nowhere to rest from the long journey,

HOPE was a stable.

When the sounds of the city outside created a cacophony,

HOPE was the lowing of animals.

When there was no place for a king to be laid,

HOPE was a manger.

When there was no one to announce the royal birth,

HOPE was a chorus of angels.

When there was no one to welcome the King of Kings,

HOPE was the shepherds.

When there were no gifts fit for a king,

HOPE was the wise men.

And when the people who walked in darkness

needed a great light,

HOPE... was a baby.

*On this blessed and most joyous day,
may we who walk in darkness
see the Great Light and follow wherever it leads.*

Dorina 11/3/10

What Brings Me Hope

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done.” ~ Psalm 78:4

Last December I retired after 50 years in the workforce. I felt that I was ready for retirement, but I was not prepared for my sense of lack of purpose and self-worth. I didn't really know who I was without my defined daily routine. I also realized that I am getting older. When faced with far less years ahead of me than behind me, I had to focus on a new purpose for my life. I decided to use my new-found “down time” to spend more time in meditation and Scripture.

And that's where I found a very important purpose for my life. One of the best retirement benefits is being able to spend more time with my grandchildren. I always tried to set a good example of a disciple of Jesus in the work place, but I realized that I had four little lives that are in the process of growing and discovery and, yes, spiritual formation. If I could help shape my grandchildren's character and see them grow into caring, compassionate, responsible adults, that could become the most important job of my life. Proverbs 20:7 states, *“The righteous walk in integrity—happy are the children who follow them!”*

As Jesus came to bring hope to the world, I am going to spend the years I have left trying to bring hope to the generation who will follow me. I will tell the stories of my life and all the ways that God has led me, protected me and guided me through good times and bad. I want to be a shoulder to cry on or a lap where conversations flow easily. I may not be able to change the world but, if I can have a positive effect on a few little ones, perhaps others would join me and together we can bring hope to our world.



This photo was taken from my deer stand. The gray strip in the middle is a bank of fog in the valley below, which made driving in that morning somewhat challenging.

In high school my brothers and I played basketball. After most games, win or lose, my dad would cook hamburgers on the stove. Dad wasn't a great cook and he wasn't much into sports, but he always gave good advice, particularly after a loss. We boys would be sitting around the kitchen table replaying a particularly difficult loss and he would often end the evening by saying "Boys, the sun is going to shine tomorrow, it's time for bed". In what we believed to be our darkest moment, this man who only had a sixth grade education provided us with hope for a brighter future and a better tomorrow.

2020 has been a particularly challenging year for many of us. As you might have guessed, a couple of hours after I took this photo the fog lifted and God presented us with another beautiful day. As Christians we are blessed each Advent season with the assurance that the Baby we celebrate on Christmas Day is Immanuel, God With Us! HOPE Abounds!