

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

Sermon December 1st, 2019

God Gives Us Hope When We Face Uncertainty

“No one will know the day or hour” is a very challenging statement for us to hear isn’t it? In all my interactions with people over the years, and within my own experience, I have come to at least one certainty about humanity: We don’t like it much when we face uncertainty in our lives. The wheel blows out on the highway and you spend the first hour or so freaking out wondering what to do. Since you just realized that you had taken the spare tire out to patch it up the other day. Or you have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and feel completely numb. Incapable of processing what the doctor just told you. Struggling to put the pieces of your life back together. Or your marriage breaks up and you feel completely lost. Or you meet someone for the first time and feel your stomach turn in profound nervousness. Pondering all the what ifs before inviting this person into your life. Or something in your schedule gets cancelled and you feel all out of sorts, because this completely changes your day. Or you get out of high school and have no clue of what you want to do with your life. You feel a deep sense of anxiety and stress about your unknown future. Or you retire, and are worried if you will still find meaning in your life. Or you face a tragedy, and feel completely shattered, unable to see what the road ahead will look like.

We don’t like it much when we face uncertainty in our lives do we? Often times our anxiety, our fears, heighten when we are faced with this uncertainty. This not knowing. We feel more comfortable when we have some structure or at least some plan to help prepare us for what is to come. This way we feel more in control of our lives.

Unfortunately, outside of deciding some of the basic aspects of the day like what to eat, when to go to work, and what to wear, most of life comes with some uncertainty. And even in these small things uncertainty could be rearing its ugly head. The food you wanted to eat out of the fridge could have already been eaten by your loved one. Or there could be an accident on the road that holds you up from getting to work on time. Or the shirt you really wanted to wear could have a stain you just noticed. We live with a lot of uncertainty.

In our gospel this morning Jesus is talking about the moment when God will make everything right. Where our uncertainties in life will become certainty in God’s presence and promise. Of course, Jesus says we will not know the day or hour when Jesus will come again to make everything right. So, even with this promise of certainty comes more uncertainty.

This has left some of us in the church feeling uncomfortable. Many have tried to predict when the last day will come to give people a sense of certainty. If we know when the day is we can prepare for it. Or at least find some hope that soon the suffering we experience in our world will end.

Some have become discouraged or even fall away in despair over the uncertainty and long waiting. Many in the early church faced a lot of persecution. They longed for Jesus' return. For us, we face a lot of hardship, and see more and more division and hate expressed in our world. Being patient in the midst of this uncertainty is difficult to say the least.

Well, today is the first Sunday in Advent. Today we lit the candle of hope. In our gospel this morning God gives us a promise of hope that Jesus will come again and make everything right. God also promises us that while we live in this age of waiting we will experience moments of God's kingdom come. Moments of God's healing and redemption in our lives and in the world. Later in Matthew's gospel before Jesus leaves his disciples, Jesus promises us that he will be with us always to the end of the age. Or in other words, God will dwell among us in the Holy Spirit.

So, God's threefold promise that we experience in the ministry of Jesus Christ gives us hope that we will experience new life in the midst of our uncertainty. Or in other words, we will experience certainty in God's love in the midst of our uncertainty.

Throughout the ages, leaders within God's community have reiterated these promises in unique ways to give the people hope in the midst of their uncertainty. Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of a unified world coming together to bask in the presence of God. The people of Israel cling to this picture during the exile when they face division and war. Paul uses similar images to give the early believers hope in the midst of their persecution. In the midst of their uncertainties. In Jesus' ministry Jesus gives us a foretaste of what is to come in fullness.

For us as we continue to face uncertainty in our lives we turn to the stories of our ancestors that we hear in the bible and see God's healing and redemption come alive for God's people. These stories lift us up and give us hope that we too will experience this healing and redemption.

Then when we turn to reflect on our own interactions with God in the midst of our uncertainty we see that indeed God's healing and redemption comes alive for us. We see this healing and redemption when a friendly face stops on the side of the road to assist us with our flat tire. We see this healing and redemption when after a friend prays with us we feel an inner peace that helps us face our terminal illness, our brokenness with hope. We see this healing and redemption when our church community supports us as we adjust to life after divorce. Helping us seek new meaning

and purpose through a ministry like a small group ministry. We see this healing and redemption when those stomach butterflies turn into a joy for life as we establish a loving and meaningful relationship with someone. We see this healing and redemption when a story in scripture reassures us that God will guide us into the future. Calming our anxiety. Turning our fears into excitement. We see this healing and redemption when we bear witness to the cross and resurrection story remembering that even in death God breathes new life into us through Christ Jesus.

It is in this hope, in experiencing God's healing and redemption in the midst of the uncertainties in our lives, that we listen to what Jesus has to say to us in our gospel this morning. We hear Jesus' invitation to keep living out our faith even in uncertain times. To keep loving. To keep healing. To keep redeeming. To keep living out the gospel, the kingdom of God, so others will be touched by this love in the midst of their uncertainty.

And so, Advent is the season where we take a moment to reflect on the hope God gives us in the midst of our uncertainty. To feel reassured in the promise that one day Jesus will come again to make everything right. To feel confident that God has given us the Spirit to help us continue to live out this faith as we wait in this uncertain time. To trust in God. Because God makes good on God's promises. As we hear in scripture. As we see in our daily lives.

Let us pray, loving God. Give us hope as we live with uncertainty. Help us continue to live out your love in your world in the midst of this uncertainty. And open our hearts to trust in your promise that you will turn all our uncertainty into certainty in your love.

Amen.

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