

Hope Rising: Shaped By Hope | 1st Sunday After Christmas | Luke 2:22-40
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As God gifts His Son Jesus to Israel and the world, we continue to live as People of Hope, looking for the redemption of Creation.

In just a matter of hours, it's all gone. All those neatly wrapped presents under the tree turn into a trash bag filled with wadded up wrapping paper and a pile of boxes with tissue paper hanging out. The meal that once graced the table...the prime rib, mashed potatoes, roasted carrots, and, of course, the green bean casserole, it's all been devoured and the leftovers are all in containers and stashed in the fridge. Even the dishes are washed.

The movies are over. The cookies have been eaten. The in-laws are gone. A nap has been taken.

It's the other side of Christmas. You know how it feels, don't you? The celebrations are fantastic, family and friends have fun. But it's always a bit of an emotional let down, isn't it? All that adrenaline coursing through the veins works its way out. All the noise and all the energy have evaporated. It's the other side of Christmas.

In the church we know the predictable cycle as the calendar continues to move forward. Next comes Epiphany and then, believe it or not, Lent and Easter.

But before we get too far down the road, we must conclude the Christmas season and this sermon series we've been in called Hope Rising. Before we just keep on going through our normal routines, we have to ask: what of all this 'hope'? I mean, we've spent weeks on this topic.

I jokingly told Jen I wanted to count up all the times I've said the word 'hope' throughout Advent and Christmas. It seems to have lost its meaning like all words do when you say them enough times. But seriously, what of this hope? Does our hope just end? Has our hope been fulfilled? Do we just put it all aside? Do we simply move on to other themes?

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This morning, I want to offer a suggestion. It's a little crazy. It probably won't be popular. But at least give me a little time to explain myself before you get up and walk out, OK?

This morning, I propose we go back to Advent. No, we're not going to get the blue paraments out again, we're not going to keep the Advent wreath set up. Yes, we're going to celebrate Easter, and Ascension Day, and Pentecost. But because we will celebrate these days, we will forever be Advent People.

We are Advent People because, even though Christmas has come and gone, even though Easter remains the cornerstone of our faith, we remain Advent People because we still wait as People of Hope for Jesus to return.

What Simeon saw, finally, with his own eyes, as an infant brought into the temple to fulfill the law of Moses, we long to see completed as the risen and reigning Jesus returns to raise us up and all the dead.

So what I'm proposing isn't so much that we *go back* to Advent. But what I'm proposing is that we shall forever be shaped by Advent and the hope that we watch and wait in during that season of the church year. What I am proposing is that our Christian faith and life be continually marked with the expectant longing and waiting that characterizes the Advent season.

With Simeon and Anna, we wait. We hope. And we're shaped by that hope probably in many different ways but this morning I want to look at just one way in which we are shaped by this hope. It's simply this: People of Hope endure present hardships to look expectantly looking toward the future.

Endure Present Hardships

As people of hope we are enabled to endure present hardships.

Think of Simeon and Anna. Both endured the state of their people, under the thumb of Rome, waiting for the consolation of Israel. But neither lost hope in the promises of God. Neither saw their present experience as reason to abandon their hope. Rather they continued, day after day, to return to the temple and worship as devout men and women of God.

In much the same way, we endure our present hardships by our continuous return to this place to worship and hear God's Word. The only way we can continue to live as people of Hope, enduring our present hardships is by a continual hearing and reminder of God's promises.

Each week we're reminded of our identity as God's children when we hear the words of the invocation "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit". Each week we're fed with the body and blood of Christ, strengthening our body and soul, allowing our hope to continue to rise in the promises of Jesus.

Just like Simeon and Anna, we continue to return here so that we don't get stuck in our present circumstances. Our time in worship pushes us to look forward. So we look forward to the future expectantly.

To Look Expectantly Towards the Future

Perhaps this is most present in children and teenagers, who continually look toward the future with excitement and anticipation. There is so much that is new, so much that has yet to be experienced that they can't wait for the future to come!

But for others, the future brings on feelings of fear or dread. The future represents not the exciting new but the unknown. It represents the possibility of a repeated past where mistakes were made, abuse was experienced, pain was felt.

But a life shaped by hope helps us to move back to the mindset of the younger generations. Let *them* be an example for you! For a life shaped by hope looks expectantly to the future because we *know* there is something better coming along.

Again, think about the man Simeon. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died. His life was utterly shaped by this hope. No matter what happened, he continued to look toward the future and what was coming. His hope allowed him to keep his eyes on the future. He never took his eyes off that promise revealed to Him...that he would, in fact, see the coming Christ. Simeon's hope allowed him, despite the present circumstances, to look expectantly toward this future.

Conclusion

Even though Advent and Christmas has passed, we are still Advent People. That is, we are people of hope...people who are profoundly shaped by the hope that we have in the promises of Jesus. And this hope allows us to endure our present hardships...in the midst of crises in our lives we continually hear God's Word and the Gospel message that Christ has lived, died, and risen again.

And as we endure our present hardships we look expectantly toward the future. We know that despite the sin and evil we face here and now, we know that the return of Jesus brings the final defeat of our enemies. We know that our suffering and mourning will be gone once and for all.

Christmas has passed. But we are still Advent people! Hoping, watching, waiting for *our* eyes to see the salvation of our Lord. Amen.