

## Colossians 1:24-29

### The Mystery of Hope

In his book [Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms](#), Rolf Jacobson says this about hope, "Hope...The promise of a future worth the trouble it takes to get out of bed in the morning. Intimately related to faith and love, and quite unlike fear, dread, and sarcasm, hope is one of those things that we human beings cannot generate from within. Hope starts to grow inside of us when a promise is spoken to us from the outside."<sup>1</sup>

The first candle of Advent is the candle of hope. Hope is one of those elusive things to define, as Professor Jacobson has said, it starts to grow inside of us when a promise is spoken to us from the outside. Think of your own life. Most of us have been touched by someone struggling with illness, a serious diagnosis, and/or death. It may be that you are the person living with those outcomes. Hope gives us reason to continue. It is based in realizing achievable possibilities. Hope for comfort, reassurance, joy. It may be the hope of making it to Christmas, or another milestone. Hope does not take away the reality that physical or mental decline, or even death will happen. Hope gives us the ability to live into those moments.

The loss of hope can mean faster and further decline for the one experiencing the issue. It can mean that grief takes hold and joy becomes illusive. Hope takes hold of grief, of sorrow or uncertainty and says there is a future, there is life, there is love, compassion, reason to get out of bed in the morning. Often times hope seems fleeting, yet it can be found in the smile of a child, a call from a friend, the understanding of someone who has travelled this road before you.

Dr. [Adam Stern](#), in an article for Harvard Medical School writes, "Bad things — often really tragic things like accidents, illness, and untimely death — happen to people every single day. We know this, yet we are tasked with finding ways of moving forward in a world where nothing is guaranteed...we find ways to oppose the dread of life's dangers with hope: an aspirational feeling that circumstances can improve, that we can persist, that there is at least as much good in the world as bad."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008. P 88.

<sup>2</sup> Adam P. Stern, MD, Contributor. [Hope: Why it matters - Harvard Health](#). Accessed November 25, 2022.

Hope is a big topic in the both the Old and New Testament scriptures. Over and over, we are encouraged, even instructed to put our hope in God. Often, we hope that God will intervene and we will experience a miracle, particularly of healing for a loved one. And there is a place for that hope, but we do live in a world where pain, suffering, and death happen, and it happens to all of us. We do not get to live in this world unscathed. The hope that is from God is one that brings comfort and even joy. Think of the old carol which sings,

God rest ye merry, gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay  
Remember, Christ, our Saviour  
Was born on Christmas day  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray  
  
O tidings of comfort and joy  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy

This is a carol about the hope that was born in that humble place in Bethlehem. The hope we anticipate throughout Advent and specifically Christmas morning. Comfort and joy are promises that God can and does keep that grow from hope. People often speak about quality of life. Going to a more challenging conversation, people who commit suicide see their lives devoid of meaning and hope. When talking with a suicidal person, one of the ways to get them through is to find those things which resonate with them regarding future hope, meaning, and purpose.

There are those who are now considering or have gone through with medical assistance in dying. For them the quality of life has receded. They place their hope in the peace of death. For Christians, it is also about the hope and promise of eternal life with the God who loves them deeply and will welcome them home.

Going back to what Rolf Jacobsen wrote, "Hope starts to grow inside of us when a promise is spoken to us from the outside." The writer of Colossians says, "God chose to make known how great...are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (v27). The start of hope is the mystery of Christ in you and in me, and in every person.

Our hope is one that comes out of knowing Jesus. This is done through reading scriptures, worship, study, and in relationship with others. All of this together teaches us about the hope that is the mystery of Christ in us. It comes in experiencing and living our faith together. It is also about paying attention to the beauty of creation. At this time of year, it may be the sun glinting through a frosty window, or the radiance of the sun on a cold day. It may be the wintery night sky, the softness of snowflakes or even the power of a winter storm. It is realizing that God is God over all of life, our own and that of the world.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 the writer says, "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word." In other words, hope is a gift from God that comes through grace.

Hope is about expectation, the expectation that God is with us. Advent itself is about waiting expectantly for the birth of the Messiah. We know through scriptures that this did indeed happen with the birth of Jesus. Jesus lived, died at the hands of oppressors, but birthed a new creation when he rose as the first born of people with hope for the future. People attested to this experience and shared their stories through the oral and written traditions. We get to experience this hope through the work of the Holy Spirit still indwelling in us.

With Christmas we celebrate that Jesus really is Lord of all...all fullness, reconciling all things to himself. That reconciliation is one of love, grace, joy, peace...and hope. Yet, part of the mystery of hope in Christ is that much of it remains a mystery. Still, we are powerfully inspired to live this mystery, to proclaim the mystery of faith, this mystery of hope, because our lived experience and that of those who have shared it with us, teaches us that it is hope that sustains us.

Romans 5:5 says, "...and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Hope is lived. Hope is experienced. Hope comes from the promise that God goes with us, loves us, forgives us, and lives in us. Hope grows inside us because of love. May the mystery of hope resound in your heart this day and in the days to come knowing that you have Christ in you. All glory, honour, and praise be to the Saviour in whom we place our trust and our hope. Amen.