**Advent: The Church Welcomes Christ**

***Awaiting the Return of Jesus***

***Or, Living Hopefully Among the Hopeless***

Whatever happened to hope? Perhaps a failing economy, loss of job opportunities, the intolerance of the “culture wars,” public injustices, government disinformation, international instability, and more, have combined to create a toxic brew of hopelessness.

Some respond by longing nostalgically for “the good old days,” while others look for a savior from one of the political parties, and still others take what refuge they can in drugs and alcohol. But when these things fail to provide lasting relief, hope itself becomes the victim. And without hope, there is no life worth living. This is why Jesus’ promise to return is so important: It is The Blessed Hope.

 **Titus 2:11-14**

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Here is a blueprint for living hope--not hope in temporary things (politics, sensuality, money, comforts) but eternal ones. Biblical hope is the hope of Jesus, which means that all that is wrong with the world will one day be righted, all of our fears vanquished and our tears dried. So, what is the Hope Prescription?

**The Foundation of Hope:** Grace. God has accepted us in Christ because He has died for our sins. Without grace, there is no hope, only a failure to reach perfection and a promise of judgment. Have your sins been forgiven?

**The Fruit of Hope:** Transformation. God does not merely save us from judgment to come, but draws us

 to holiness and upright behavior through His Word and Spirit. The promise and prospect of Jesus’ return

 are motives to purity and righteousness. 1 John 3:1-3

**The Finale of Hope:** Jesus’ Return. Why is it the Blessed Hope?

1. Because at His return the wicked (those who have refused grace) are judged. We inwardly groan at the injustices of the world, the racial and social inequities, and outright lies of the power-hungry. But on the day Jesus returns, He will deal with them. On that very day. This gives us hope both that evil will not have the last word and that our standing against it is not in vain. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

2. Because at His return we are transformed into His likeness. We fight a constant battle against our fears, flaws, and failures. All of that ends the day Jesus returns. Our bodies will be changed to be like that of the resurrected Jesus, and our spirits made so that we will no longer even be tempted with evil. We have been saved from the penalty of sin, and now, from the power of sin. But on that day we will be saved from the very presence of sin. Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

***So, what do we do to cultivate hope within us?***

***1. Enjoy the world without being enslaved by the world.***

God gave us all things richly to enjoy. He is the Giver of all good things, and our rejoicing hearts praise Him for His bounty. At the same time, we know that one day we leave this world behind, and in the meantime, we do not cling to our possess-ions and power, whatever they may be. Rather, we use them for others and for the glory of God. 1 Timothy 6:6-19

***2. Reach out to others without being intimidated by them.***

We often fail to serve others because we are afraid: fear of inconvenience, fear we will not know what to do, fear that we look foolish, fear of criticism, *etc.*  Faith conquers fear, drawing us to tell others of his love and transforming power, knowing that He will vindicate us and dry our tears when He returns. Hebrews 6:10-12