

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood – Nov 29, 2015

Advent 1

Living in Hope

**Ps 25:1-10 & Jeremiah 33:10-16 (Text Jer 33:14-16)
121, 462, 119, 135**

**The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will fulfill the promise I made
to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.
In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch
to spring up for David; and he shall execute
justice and righteousness in the land.
In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.
And this is the name by which it will be called:
“The Lord is our righteousness.”
(Jeremiah 33:14-16)**



This is one of my favourite pictures of John Duncan.
It was taken almost two years ago,
a little more than a year before he died.
He's 87 year old in this picture.
His body is breaking down –
a botched hip replacement and a number of other ailments.
But he still enjoys his beer from his Armetale mug
and has that lively and impish grin on his face.
I will always remember and be inspired by
the deep, soulful hope in that face.

John was one of the best-read ministers
I have ever known.
And he always wanted to write a book ...

... until he read a book by N.T. Wright called *Surprised by Hope*.
With a certain tone of frustration,
John would say, "He wrote my book."
What Tom Wright and John Duncan both knew,
in the depths of their souls,
was that the God of the Gospel,
the God of Jeremiah and of Jesus,
offered hope for them **and** for the whole of the creation.

This God of justice and righteousness, as Jeremiah describes him,
promised and delivered life eternal for every human being he created
and flourishing wellbeing for the whole of creation.
You couldn't separate these two essential dimensions of God's promise,
though parties in the Christian church
have been trying to do just that
for centuries.

Our hope, throughout the Scriptures as in this passage,
is always founded on God's righteousness –
God's just ordering of all of life.
This is God's intent to the world
and in that intent our hope is founded.

The idea of righteousness occurs three times
in our Memorize and Ponder passage this morning.
Righteousness, in both the Old and New Testaments,
points to the relationship that God wants to have with his creation,
especially the human beings who he created in his own image
and entrusted with the care of the earth.

All the law and the prophets,
as Jesus summarized them,
had to do with relationships of love –
love of God, love of others, and love of self.
All of those loves
flowed from the creative, steadfast, and everlasting love
that God has for us and for the creation.
That is the source – the only source – of real hope in this world.
All our hope, as we sang earlier, is founded on God.
That is the only reliable source of hope in this world.

And yet we are constantly trying to find hope in lesser things.
We may try to find it in physical strength,
in monetary wealth, in military might,
in fervent hatred, in harsh punishment,
in racial superiority, in intellectual domination.

Here's a little exercise to play with over the Advent/Christmas season.

Watch the ads that will bombard us.
What kinds of hope are they selling?
What sources of hope are they selling?
In the depths of your souls,
do these kinds and sources of hope really resonate
with your most profound sense of dignity and worth.
So they really offer the just ordering of creation
that God desires?

Too many kinds and sources of hope divide us from others –
have more, do better, be safer.
They are ultimately rooted in fear.
They have nothing to do with the hope
that is promised by Jeremiah and delivered by Jesus.
They may seem to dominate our ways of thinking these days,
or at least the ways of thinking fill the news media,
but they do not and will not have the last word.

That final word belongs to the righteousness of God,
to God's just ordering of life in all its diversity in this universe,
to the determination of God to save the world
in and through Jesus Christ, the Lord of that universe.
We live in this resilient and robust hope when we live in Christ,
to pick up one of the most central phrases
used by the Apostle Paul.

To live in this hope is to participate with God
in the ongoing ordering of the world
as God reshapes it into his commonwealth of SHALOM or wellbeing.
Our own eternal life with God is part of that,
as is the care of the creation
that will be the focus of the Climate Summit in Paris this week.
From the care of our souls to the care of the earth,
God wants every dimension of our lives
to be filled with his hope
so we can live as his hope.

Living as God's hope in the world,
that is our call as a Christian community.



This is a picture of George Zukerman,
the distinguished classical bassoonist who is the founding artistic director
of our Brentwood Concert Series.

He is a year younger than John.
His body much healthier than John's.
And he has the same lively and impish soul.

I had lunch with George a week ago
to discuss the 2016-2017 season for the series.
He has already lined up three wonderful concerts for us.
He has a few details to finalize before we can announce the names and dates,
so I'll leave you in suspense for a couple more weeks.

But on the way back to his home
from the local eatery we went to in White Rock,
he asked a profound question.

"This is the business you're in," he began.

"Where do you find hope these days
with all the terrible things going on in the world.
I just can't see any hope in the world at all."

After a few moments of silent consideration,
I asked a question back.
"Didn't the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps write some great music?"

There was more silence.

Then George slowly began to nod.

"Yes," he said quietly, "Yes, they did."

God sows hope in the worst of situations,
with their complex causes and complicated resolutions.
There is always something we can do to participate in that hope
by caring for both our own souls and the soul of creation.
That is God's invitation to us on this first Sunday in Advent, 2015.
Are you up to saying 'Yes' to this kind of hope?