Introduction
“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” I Cor. 13:13  The Advent wreath contains four candles that represent these three theological virtues—faith, hope, love along with peace. Each Sunday another candle is lit as we approach Christmas day. Our emphasis for the first week will be on hope.

Isaiah 2:2-4
In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Romans 13:11-14
Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.

Matthew 24:36-44
"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man . . . Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Reflection
Hope is often viewed as a future promise or wish. In secular terms, it is an optimistic mantra breathed with crossed fingers and an upward glance towards the universe. What does it mean to “think good thoughts”? Will our thoughts somehow converge into a best case scenario? Or are we simply holding our breath waiting for the final report, and breathing a collective sigh when the patient lives? By chance alone, fifty percent of our “hopes” will be affirmed, unless we hope for small certainties, like snow in the winter or rain in the spring. But Christian hope is far more daring. It is believing that the promises God made to Abraham and the prophets will somehow come true, in spite of evidence to the contrary.

Consider the hope that “He shall judge between the nations and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, neither shall they learn war anymore.” This was spoken at a time when the Jewish people were under constant threat of annihilation. To think that their God would somehow be the Lord of all the earth was a monumental hope, an impossibility. Yet when Jesus came the angels declared, “Peace to God’s people on earth!” Similarly, we are asked to believe that Christ will return, two thousand years after his resurrection. To have hope in this promise seems foolish and impossible, no matter how hard we “think positive thoughts”. It will take divine intervention to bring it about. It requires the “Deus ex machina” of the Greek tragedy, when God arrives in a machine at just the right moment, to save mortals from irrevocable harm.

At Advent we look forward to the future hope by remembering God’s ability to fulfill his promises in the past. Abraham and Sarah had a son in spite of their old age; The children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land; David slew Goliath with five smooth stones; Daniel survived the lions; God became flesh and dwelt among us. These are extraordinary events—singular events that will never happen again. They are evidence that the God who created the universe continues to be interested and involved in this world. He is the purveyor of hope.

**Prayer**
“Lord we have unfulfilled hopes for ultimate peace, justice and love in this world. Hope that is fulfilled is no longer hope. During Advent we
remember your faithfulness in fulfilling promises in the past and have faith to believe that you can do it again with the future of our world. We wait with anticipation.” Amen
Advent – December 2nd
Hope is Personified

Introduction
“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. . .
Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God. (Ps. 146:3,5) The probability of having your hopes fulfilled is directly dependent on the object of your hope. Trusting in human wisdom, wealth, or superheroes can result in disappointment as one generation gives way to the next. Populist ideas are recycled in each generation, giving way to the latest trend. Jesus is eternal; our hope is in him.

Matthew 21:5-11
5 “Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” 11 The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Reflection
My university degree is irrelevant. Forty years after graduation, quantum mechanics, the superego, the population explosion, and hot pants have disappeared from common discourse. Computers that occupied entire floors have been replaced by hand-held phones that even infants can manipulate. Cold war paranoia has been replaced by climate change hysteria, and the women’s liberation movement has been displaced by gender identity politics. Strong leaders of the past have been forgotten, everywhere but in the history books, and few ideas last more than a year or two before they are challenged and debunked by the latest authority. Placing our hope in human ideas and
personalities will ultimately be challenged, creating cynicism as hope dissolves.

“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” (Matt.22:32) Jesus declared. In so doing he made himself one with the eternal who is timeless. Our world may change, but He remains constant. “Who is this man?” they asked. The crowds wanted to convert him into a political leader when he entered Jerusalem on a donkey. But kingdoms pass away; his plan was more universal—he came to save the whole world for all time.

Our hope is in God, the maker of heaven and earth as found in Jesus Christ. When we rely on Him to keep his word and fulfill his promises, we are accepting a living hope that does not change. True hope is made flesh in Him.

**Prayer**

“Jesus, we are disappointed when we trust new ideas or charismatic leaders who promise us hope for the future. We rely on your eternal hope as found in Jesus. Your words and the act of redemption are immoveable and trustworthy. When you promise never to leave us or forsake us, and to be with us to the end of the age, we know that it is true. We put our trust in you.” Amen
Hope is Prophetic

Introduction
“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Mt. 24:35) Jesus spoke of the end times as the culmination of all our hopes. Heaven and earth shall be one. All will be restored. Death will be swallowed up in victory. This is a certain hope based on the words of Jesus.

2 Peter 1:12-21 (NIV)
12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying,
“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. 19 We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Reflection

Before I face a new challenge or visit a different place, I like to speak to someone who has first-hand experience. While the internet or books can give me an idea of what may be encountered, being able to ask questions and listen to their stories give me confidence. When we hear the words of Jesus speaking about the future, we are hearing from the one who has been there. "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." (Jn. 3:15) On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James and John were eyewitnesses of his majesty. They had a glimpse of the glorified Christ along with Moses and Elijah—who were not rotting in the ground but were present with God. The three disciples had living proof of the truth of the Old Testament prophecies that “the dry bones” would live.

Prophecy about the end times or a description of life after death is incomplete and inadequate. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, so it’s difficult to transpose our life experience into the future hope. Jesus gave us a glimpse of what was to come. He has been there and because we have his words in scripture, we have a hint of the future glory.

While I can prepare for a future trip by researching and interviewing those who have already been there, when I actually experience it for myself, it always surprises me. I will never forget the joy I felt when I saw the Eiffel Tower for the first time or walked into the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona or gave birth to my first daughter. Nothing can prepare us for those moments of transcendence. While the event is a certainty, our experience of it will be unique. We trust in the words of the one
who has come from heaven and live in the hope that we have a future with him, and it is indescribably good.

**Prayer**

“Jesus, you spoke of the end times and our future hope of the resurrection. We can’t begin to understand what it all means, but we know that you are trustworthy and “if it were not so,” you would have told us. We await the fulfillment of prophecy with confidence.” Amen
Advent – December 4TH
Hope is Patient

Introduction
20 We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. 21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. 22 May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you. (Ps. 33:20-22) In the daily pattern of our lives, it may be tempting to believe that nothing will ever change. But when we look back, we can see that our lives have been shaped by extraordinary events. If we have the patience to wait, we know that God can do it again.

2 Peter 3:1-10 New International Version (NIV)
3 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. 3 Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, “Where is the ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Reflection
How often have I missed God’s best for my life by being too impatient to wait? I’m not alone. People rush into relationships because they don’t believe that anything better will come along. They short-change themselves and minimize their potential by choosing the easy career path, unable to commit the time to long term goals. I once worked with
troubled children in a treatment facility, teaching grades one to eight. We had daily goals and awarded points every time they were able to achieve them. At the end of the week they would take their points to the store and exchange them for small prizes like candy or pencils or small toys. These penny items gave them the instant gratification they craved. There were also a few more pricey items that required students to save their points for several weeks. Very few chose this path. Everyone would try it for a week or two, but they gave up when they watched the others enjoying their small rewards while they waited.

Like those children, we become impatient with God, certain that he has forgotten our heart’s longing, and try to do it ourselves. There is a difference between taking initiative and making things happen, and accepting second best because we don’t have the faith to wait. When God gives a gift, it is very good, but it doesn’t always come on our schedule. Hope is a certainty, but it may require patience to be fulfilled. We long to have deep joy and peace and love instantly, but it may mean walking through a dry patch when God seems absent. Winter comes before spring.

**Prayer**

“Lord we know that all things work together for the good of those who love you, but it’s hard to wait. We want to help you along by choosing a shorter route; one with fewer obstacles. Yet, when we hope in you and pause to consider your best plan for our lives, often the outcome exceeds our expectations. Help us to wait.” Amen
Introduction
"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Rom. 15:13). Hope is the anticipation of something good. It is the opposite of dread. It allows us to see life through a positive lens.

Job 1:21; 19:25-26
“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” . . . 25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.

2 Peter 3:13-18 (ESV)
According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, . . . 18 Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Matthew 21:42 (ESV)
42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Reflection
It is easier to live in the moment than to worry about the future. When you are young, you believe that you will live for a very long time and don’t have to worry about sickness or your own mortality. It is the time of optimism perpetuated by the myth that if you eat right, exercise more, and stay active, you will somehow stave off catastrophe. From that vantage point, seeing the aged, sick or dysfunctional places them in the category of “that will never happen to me because. . . . “ Bad habits are easily dismissed or justified; the effects of aging are camouflaged or
ignored; and looking after your own wants and needs is the first and only priority that matters.

Then life happens. Interpersonal conflicts, job challenges, financial constraints, shattered expectations, or an unexpected diagnosis creates depression, pessimism, or false hopes. Some blame others or rant against fate; others become cynical or self-destructive. Often there is a makeover of some sort—starting new relationships, changing jobs, buying new toys, or taking up self-soothing habits. These distractions avoid the true underlying issue—the existential angst of our own mortality.

Until you have faced your own death, you’re not ready to live. It is the unresolved question that few dare to ask. Rather than living with dread and fear, hope is the anticipation of something good. The old gives way to the new. Even our aging and death are not diminishment, but part of the process that draws us closer to God. Only when we begin to see ourselves not as an accident of fate but chosen by God to experience life to the full, can we see each day as a gift. The beauty of creation and the assurance that God knows us personally and loves us, helps us to relax, like a young child in his mother’s arms. Hope assures us that there is nothing we face that God has not seen before, and we can trust him to hold onto us. This world will be redeemed in the end as Jesus, the cornerstone that the builder’s rejected, puts all things right. This is our glorious hope.

**Prayer**

“Jesus, you came to assure us of our ultimate redemption. We see love and hope in your life as you came and made your home with us. You understand our fears and limitations. You walk with us as a fellow pilgrim, leading us through life to the end. Let us learn to rest in that hope with confidence and joy.” Amen