

Hope: An Advent/Christmas Journey

Next Steps 12-6-20

Forgiveness & Grace

Welcome - What is your favorite food to enjoy during the holidays?

Introduction

When God's people were exiled, utterly alone and facing economic uncertainty, Isaiah spoke words of hope. The Prophet Micah also foretold of a ruler in Israel whose origin is from remote times. The words of these prophets brought hope to a community that looked forward to better days. In today's times, their words still offer hope to a world filled with chaos. During Advent, as we wait for Jesus' birth, we celebrate the liberation, freedom and hope that He brings.

Discussion

Bethlehem was historically seen as the least significant of Judah's forces. However, the prophet Micah foretold,

*...though you are the least significant of Judah's forces,
One who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf
will come out from you.
(Micah 5:2)*

Bethlehem may not have been one of the most popular locations at the time that Jesus was born. Yet, it had a proud and rich history. Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David. It would soon be home to a new King. It was in Bethlehem that Jesus was born outside in a manger because there was no room in the inn. His outdoor birth connects Jesus to the marginalized community and outsiders such as the powerless, the oppressed, the poor, and the homeless.

1. While society often views outsiders as insignificant, God always views them as precious. Why is this?
2. How does knowing that Jesus was an outsider influence the way that we should look at members of marginalized communities?
3. How is it possible for someone with humble beginnings to advance to a life of influence?

Most may have expected for a Warrior King and Savior to be born into an affluent family. However, from its beginning to its ending, the life of Jesus was counter cultural. The one who was born outside would die between two thieves. He was never embraced as an insider. He was among the underdogs of society. Many underdogs desire to be wanted, accepted, and approved by power holders in society. However, in the battle for equality and justice, they are rarely on the winning end. They often sit and desire to be fully welcomed and accepted. Those who have experienced oppression may find hope in Jesus, because he too was oppressed and marginalized by those who had power.

4. How would it feel to never be embraced as an insider?
5. What can you do during this advent season to embrace those who have frequently been rejected?
6. How can you even up the battlefield for underdogs who are on your job, at your church, and in your community?

Jesus continues to be a source of strength for those who have been denied justice and equality. Jesus is also hope for all people as we are in need of forgiveness and grace. It's encouraging to remember that Jesus knows and cares. He understands what we are going through and is present with us during difficult and painful moments. His presence gives us hope. As followers of Christ, our hope is eternal and unwavering. As we embrace hope, we must also share it with others. The hope that Jesus offers includes forgiveness and grace. Forgiveness and grace is seen in our theme Scripture that communicates the cry, pain, and protest of an outsider:

*The Lord God's spirit is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim release for captives, and liberation for prisoners,
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and a day of vindication for our God,
to comfort all who mourn.
(Isaiah 61:1-2)*

This language reflects not only forgiveness and grace, but also the joy of Advent. Those who have known affliction may be healed. Those who have been brokenhearted may be made whole. Those who have been bound may be made free.

7. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus knows and cares about painful moments we have experienced and difficult moments that we have gone through?
8. As followers of Christ, why should our hope be eternal and unwavering?
9. How do we communicate God's grace to someone who has always been an outsider?

As we acknowledge our sin, we are able to receive God's forgiveness and experience God's grace. It is also important for us to learn to forgive ourselves and others. Jesus was anointed to release us from hurt and pain. This freedom must include forgiveness of ourselves and others and releasing things that were painful to us. We should also thank God for the daily grace that God gives. God's grace lasts for a lifetime and we experience it each day.

10. As the Holy Spirit reveals to you someone whom you need to forgive, what should you do next?

Prayer Journal Entry

- Each day write 1 way that you can extend hospitality and grace to someone who is considered an outsider. Practice these approaches going forward.

Soul-Check/Transformation Question (Everyone Answers)

- How have you experienced God's grace today and in what way did you thank God for that grace?