

Luke 21:25-36 The Message

“It will seem like all hell has broken loose—sun, moon, stars, earth, sea, in an uproar and everyone all over the world in a panic, the wind knocked out of them by the threat of doom, the powers-that-be quaking.

“And then—then!—they’ll see the Son of Man welcomed in grand style—a glorious welcome! When all this starts to happen, up on your feet. Stand tall with your heads high. Help is on the way!”

Jesus told them a story. “Look at a fig tree. Any tree for that matter. When the leaves begin to show, one look tells you that summer is right around the corner. The same here—when you see these things happen, you know

God’s kingdom is about here. Don’t brush this off: I’m not just saying this for some future generation, but for this one, too—these things will happen. Sky and earth will wear out; my words won’t wear out.

“But be on your guard. Don’t let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise, that Day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap, for it’s going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once. So, whatever you do, don’t go to sleep at the switch. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through everything that’s coming and end up on your feet before the Son of Man.”

December 2, 2018: The Light of Hope

Will you pray with me? Holy and loving God.
May the words of my mouth and the
meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable
to you, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

A warm breeze rustles through the leaves -- a
sure sign of the coming summer. As Anne and
her father make their way home, Anne pauses
outside the window of a stationary store.

“Father,” she says, “that’s the one.” She
points to an autograph book covered in red
and white checkered fabric. “I’d like that one
for my birthday, please. It will make a perfect
a diary!”

A few days later, on her 13th birthday, Anne
tears open her parents’ gift. The brown paper
falls away to reveal -- Yes! The notebook.

That is June of 1942. By July, Anne and her
family have moved into hiding. A bookcase
covers the door into the small rooms where
the family of four lives for the next two years.
Many of us know at least the bare bones of
this story: a girl’s own telling of her two years
in hiding during World War II; her reflections
on life, family, friendship and love. Does
anyone know who I’m talking about -- yes!
Anne Frank! A young girl whose writing and
reflections shine with the light of hope.

It will seem like all hell has broken loose—sun,
moon, stars, earth, sea, in an uproar and
everyone all over the world in a panic, the
wind knocked out of them by the threat of
doom, the powers-that-be quaking. [PAUSE]

What a strange scripture for the beginning of Advent -- this text about the end times, about chaos and suffering. A text that reads more like a warning than the promise of redemption. Where is the hope? We may wonder. Where's the good cheer? The peace, joy and love?

I wonder the same thing as I think about Anne Frank's -- a young girl locked away, stuck indoors for two years with meager rations and no luxuries to speak of, living always with the risk of being found out, taken away and killed. Where is the hope? Where is the joy?

And in our world today? We need look no further than the news to see tragedy, chaos and suffering. Droughts and fires; earthquakes and floods; shootings and car accidents; hate and fear and distrust of one another that seems to grow with each politically charged news cycle. The ever-widening social and economic divides in our country and our communities. Where is the hope?

I keep coming back to Christian writer Anne Lamott's words: *You would almost have to be nuts to be filled with hope in a world so rife with hunger, hatred, climate change, pollution, and pestilence, let alone the self-destructive or severely annoying behavior of certain people, both famous and just down the hall.... [PAUSE]*

Do we have to be nuts to be filled with hope?
Or wildly naive? Or just too plain stubborn to
recognize and admit the reality of the world
we live in?

No our scriptures tell us. No Anne Frank's
diary declares. No our lives and our faith
confirm.

Where is hope? It is right here. Right in the
middle of the mess. Right in the midst of the
chaos. Right in the midst of uncertainty and
suffering. Hope is right here.

See, the wild thing about hope is that it stands
face to face with the reality of the world.
Hope is not the numb absence of fear or
worry or despair. Hope is not the shallow

assurance that everything is just fine. Hope is
not found when we ignore the struggles and
suffering in our lives and our world – when we
block out the uproar on the earth or the panic
of people.

We find HOPE when we look clearly and
honestly at our lives and the world around us
- that means acknowledging the difficult,
chaotic and painful parts. We find HOPE when
we name our wounds because only in naming
them can we begin to heal.

This is good news! Stand tall with your heads
high! For help is on the way, our scriptures tell
us.

What does hope look like for us and our church today?

It looks like sharing our worries and naming the places where we see God at work, like we did last week.

It looks like talking honestly about our budget -- recognizing that we are running at a deficit and making a plan to change that over the next few years. It means standing tall with our heads high and joining together to give what we can.

Hope for our church looks like acknowledging that we do not all agree on how to move forward. We do not all agree about how to use our building or who we should welcome into our church. AND acknowledging our shared desire to grow in spirit and number.

Hope for our church looks like naming that we have different ideas about what is best for our country and our world. That we are uncertain about our mission here in Loveland and beyond. And that we all want to live out God's call to love the world the best that we can.

Hope for our church looks like admitting that we are on the gray-haired side of things. We do not have a lot of children, youth or young families, AND we adore and value the children, youth and young families that we do have!

Hope for our church also looks like claiming that we already know how to hold our differences. We already know how to stand side by side to lift our voices in praise or to receive communion or to make noodles

together and to be God's body even though we disagree about some things.

Hope for our church looks like remembering that we are not in this by ourselves. We are in this together and with God who makes us one.

Stand tall with your heads high. God's help is on the way! It is here already. The light of hope is shining!

According to Anne Lamott the good news about hope is that when we show *"up with hope to help others, [we are] guaranteed that hope is present. Then [our] hope increases. By creating hope for others, [we] end up awash in the stuff."*

This week, let us show up with hope. Let us shine its light. If, like me, you have not yet made a pledge to the church and you are able to, join me this morning in doing just that. Or stay after church to help make sack lunches for our neighbors who are homeless.

Remember the refugees on our borders, the border patrol agents and law enforcement officers, and pray for them. Smile at the grocery store clerk. Lend a helping hand or ask for the helping hand that you need. Anne Frank invites us to look: "Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness."

Hope is like that candle. Let us shine it for all the world to see. Amen.