

The Thrill of Hope

Christmas Eve

December 23, In the Year of Our LORD, 2007

Gates Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Luke 2:1-20

During this Season of Advent, we used the motif of hope to center our hearts and souls and minds on how we would make our way to this evening and this event we call Christmas Eve. As we traveled with hope, we embraced the other motifs of the season. To hope we added the promise of peace, the embrace of joy and the gift of love. Throughout those four weeks, we moved inexorably closer to this evening, trying our best to be a people of faith, a people who know that Advent is a separate and different season than Christmas.

Here we are, and in some of the words Andrew White just sang, we come full circle and again see how hope moves us, shapes us, encourages us – enlivens us! “The thrill of hope,” is a promise of faith – of the gifts of God. To be thrilled, to be moved in incredibly poignant ways is what we are about as we gather in this Sanctuary on this Christmas Eve. But is not the rest of that line from Mr. Dwight’s “O Holy Night,” what really makes the words of that song poignant? “The thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn ...”

Is our world not weary? I don’t just mean weary of commercials and how many shopping days were left to Christmas and I don’t even mean the weariness that comes from not enough sleep. Is the world not weary of war, weary of strife and dissension, weary of sad news of people hurting in body, hurting in mind, hurting in soul? Are we not weary of people who hold grudges, of those persons seemingly determined to make others as miserable as they? Are we not weary of those who imitate Scrooge and want to say “Bah, Humbug?” Are we not weary of being weary? Are we not weary of being afraid? In this post 9/11 era, do we not need, are we not clamoring, do we not urgently seek the kind of hope that thrills, makes new, ... erases the pain and hurt and loneliness and fear?

And then, when all is said and done, the traveling with hope through Advent comes to an end and it is Christmas Eve. The night is quiet, the air is still, and we can, if we try just a little, ... we can imagine not only that first Christmas when Jesus was born of Mary – but we can imagine the wonder that Christmas can be in the her and now. We can, if for a fleeting moment that then becomes the rest of our days, ... get it right, be reconciled with each other, reconciled with God, be one with all who have gone before – all of those loved ones who are now with God. Hope, peace, joy and love become more than words, they become powerful, real affirmations of who we are as sisters and brothers in faith. They move us in ways that can not be explained, towards a peace that passes all understanding, with a joy that is beyond description and yes, with a hope, planted in our hearts and souls and minds that does nothing short of thrill us.

Praise be to God! Praise be to our Creator and Redeemer Who became human, like one of us, so that God might be able to speak to and share with us in ways that we understand – and, if even for just a fleeting moment, thrill us beyond the imaginable!

Amen.