

Advent 2018: Hope - To Boldly Go

12/02/18

2 Timothy 1:7

For God did not give us a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline.

Another translation:

1:7 God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible.

This is the first Sunday of Advent, the Sunday when we focus on Hope. The Sundays follow a pattern: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, or Love then Joy. Some churches use the sequence of Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. There is no right or wrong way to celebrate these virtues of the Christ as reflected in this season.

The word 'advent' means "coming" or "arrival". The focus of the entire Advent season is to prepare us for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, and the rebirthing of the Christ within our hearts. Advent is marked by an attitude of expectancy, preparation, longing, and anticipation. We yearn for the awareness of Christ to raise our hearts, minds, and being beyond that of the world.

Advent is about being freed from the shackles of doubt, fear, timidity, hatred, superiority, envy, lust, intolerance, disrespect, bigotry, and all other temptations of the mind, body, and ego that the world enticingly waives in front of us.

Advent begins with our hope in the deliverance from our darkness by God, who hears our cries and provides the Light of the Christ.

Hope is the power that separates the survivor from the victim. As long as we can cling to hope, we can endure anything, recover from anything. Hope often lies dormant until we need it and call upon its power, and then it whispers to our hearts that we can persevere; we can bear the burden until the challenge has been met.

Hope is the belief that circumstances will change and get better. It is Hope that tells us, “This too shall pass.” Hope is not a wish or a frivolous reverie, but an actual belief, the knowledge that God’s good is on the way. Hope is the knowledge and unflagging belief that despite the results of a surgery, or a disappointing outcome, we are still here for a purpose, a reason, and an aid to others.

Hope is what taps on the mother’s heart that although she has lost her job another one – the right and perfect one – is just around the next corner as long as she keeps looking. Anyone who has survived an ordeal, endured the pains and trials of this life, or has experienced the withering of their resources physically, mentally, and emotionally, will point to Hope as their champion for survival.

The character Captain Kirk in the original StarTrek series spoke the same words every week when I was a teenager. Even the most recent renderings of this story use the same thought: “To boldly go where no one has gone before...” I would like to think of myself in those terms, as being bold. God wants us to be bold, loving, and sensible – not timid, uncaring, and foolish.

What is bold? We know the word to mean dauntless, confident, faith-filled, hopeful, and courageously forward-looking. Here is an acronym that can help us understand being BOLD.

The letter 'B' stands for Belief, hope, and faith. We are to believe in things that the mind does not always comprehend: God, Truth, doing what is right, treating others as we would like to be treated, and loving our neighbors.

Jeremiah 29: 11 tells us: *For I know the plans I have for you, " declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* Although life can suck the wind out of our lungs at times, hope is knowing that God's plans for us are good. Even the pain we endure and the challenges that we face are intended for our good. If we can look past our little selves, we can see that our trials are strengthening us, increasing our faith and capabilities, and are making us more 'bullet-proof' to the world.

The 'B' of bold points to believing that with God all things are possible, and that there is only One Power and One Presence in the world and in our life: God the Good, the Divine One of All.

The Christ within whispers for us to believe in ourselves: that we are worthy, capable, lovable, and that as a Child of God we deserve all the good we attain out of our life journey.

The 'B' of bold means to believe the causes that arise within our hearts are valuable and meaningful. The 'B' means the we are to maintain hope in the dreams that coalesce within our minds and hearts and have faith that the goals Christ whispers to our souls are worthy of our time, are God-inspired and are sacred.

The second letter, 'O' means to be "On Fire"; to be passionate about what we are doing. It means to be excited about life, about who we are, and what we have to give. John Wesley was asked how he developed such large crowds when he preached, and he replied, "I set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn."

To be bold is to be "on fire" with enthusiasm and excitement about our activities and thoughts. When we are impassioned by whatever we are doing, people are attracted to us – even just out of morbid curiosity.

In the words of Earl Nightingale: "The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek word "entheos" which means the God within. And the happiest, most interesting people are those who have found the secret of maintaining their enthusiasm, that God within."

So we have so far, Believe and On fire.

The third letter for bold is 'L', which signifies letting go. Part of what we are to release is the power the past has over us, which is zero, unless our egos say differently. Our past does not predict our path. What we have said, done, thought, felt, and been in the past has no consequence at all as to who we are or do today. What we have done before does not have to determine our future. It is what we are doing now.

To move hopefully and boldly into the future requires that we learn from the past but release its hold on us. We can learn from our setbacks and mistakes and move on. We do not deny what we were, but rather, we assimilate it, learn from it, then grow and transform beyond it.

Part of being bold is to release our fears, concerns, and doubts. If our minds are entrenched in this moment there can be no fear – there is no past to haunt us, no future to intimidate us. By moving forward on the infinite wave of ‘now’ we learn that on the other side of our fear is freedom.

Hope is inextricably conjoined to boldness in that we can let go of any anticipations of outcomes. When we are doing God’s work and walking with Christ, we are not to be wondering about results – that is God’s domain. We don’t know how to judge or determine what is right or good or best for ourselves or anyone else. All we can do is move forward with hope that the outcome is exactly what God intended, no matter what it looks like.

We’ve heard it said, “Pray like it all depends upon God; work like it all depends upon us.” Yes, we can become emotionally involved and enthusiastic about the process, but not with the results; they are in God’s hands. Our purpose is to do our best, then rest. Let go and let God.

The final letter in the word bold is ‘D’, for dedicated. Winston Churchill, on October 29, 1941, addressed Harrows School graduates. These words are quoted from the speech he gave:

“Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never -- in nothing, great or small, large or petty--never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy”.

The ‘D’ of bold represents dedication, determination, and dogged diligence. Today our personal and spiritual enemies are different than the ones faced by Churchill during WWII. We face fear, guilt, forgiveness, compassion, judgment, and must choose our

course. We face challenges of self-worth and self-esteem, and create our future.

Leo Buscaglia said: Change is the end result of all true learning. Change involves three things: First, a dissatisfaction with self -- a felt void or need; second, a decision to change to fill the void or need; and third, a conscious dedication to the process of growth and change -- the willful act of making the change, doing something.

To go boldly where we have not gone before, with hope and faith, that is God's call to us. We are either hearers of that call and respond, or we ignore its subtle vibrations and are essentially deaf to it. We are either participants in life or spectators. As a spectator, the word bold will never be an adjective describing our activity – “That Patrick, he watched life boldly; he was a bold spectator.”

No, the word ‘Bold’ is reserved for the participants, and not to every participant – only to those who choose not to be shy about their gifts and facing life. Theodore Roosevelt, in a speech given in Paris 1910, said this: It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause, who at best knows achievement and who at the worst if he fails at least fails while daring greatly so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

In Romans 8:24-25 we read: *For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.*

The season of Advent begins with Hope. It doesn't have to be great hope; just the desire to be hopeful is fine. Whatever you have is perfect. Eventually, Advent Hope can grow into the bold and joyous anticipation that God's promises of good are coming. Divine Hope refers to the spiritual longing, expectancy, trust, confidence, and the undaunted anticipation of the birth of Christ within us. It is the yearning to awaken to our highest part and recognize our union with God. This is what Jesus accomplished in his lifetime, the perfect union of his human nature and his divine nature; that is when he became the Christ. The birth of Jesus, in part, represents the possibility for God's consciousness to awaken within each of us.

So, my prayer is that we embrace hope by daring to bold: Believing, setting our self On Fire, Letting Go of results and our fears, and Dedicating our self to our unique causes, dreams, values, and aspirations, while never giving in.

That is what Hope is all about – it is about the emboldened and faithful anticipation of something happening right now, not in some distant future. It is about focusing on the Christ-filled present and expecting joy and God's good in this very moment. It is knowing God's good is here right now, and we are just waiting for it to be revealed.

Let us pray....