
Christ is Our Hope

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Advent 2 – Year B**

“Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.”

Advent is a season of expectation. Advent is a season of preparation. But, more importantly, Advent is a season of hope. What do you hope for this time of year?

Some of our children are hoping that Santa brings the perfect present. Some of our students are hoping for good grades. Some of us hope that we can get our spouse a gift that he or she will enjoy. Others hope that politics doesn't come up during Christmas dinner.

These are some of the hopes that we have this time of year.

Yet, there are those hoping to make it through Christmas. They are hoping to make it through a first Christmas without someone they love.

Then, there are those who are ill, just hoping to get out of bed and celebrate Christmas with their family. Finally, there are those hoping to make it through Christmas on a budget with no room for gifts or a Christmas dinner.

Advent is a season of hope: “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.”

We sing the hymn “All My Hope on God is Founded.” We read scripture and hear about God parting the sea and raising the dead because we are people of hope. Paul writes about this hope to the Romans, “We know that God raises the dead and calls into being things that are not” (Romans 4:17).

But, what does it mean to have hope? What does it look like in our daily lives?

I imagine some of you are like me. When life presents challenges that you can't fix and circumstances that you can't change, you hope that God will make it right (meaning the way you want it to go). We pray our own version of the Lord's Prayer: My will be done instead of thy will be done!

A great philosopher once said, “He who does not hope for the unexpected will not find it.” Yes, it is fine to hope in the unexpected, *but is that where we should place all of our hope? Is that really what it means to hope in God? Is that what it means to be people of hope?*

If so, perhaps that is why there are so many people without hope. It is easy to lose hope when God doesn't come to our assistance by supernaturally rectifying the improbable and impossible in our lives.

So, what does it mean to be people of hope?

This is a season of hope. Advent is a season of hope because we realize that God wants us... God desires us... God loves us so much that God comes to us.

In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul says “Christ is our hope” (Colossians 1:27).

When we follow Christ from the *manger* to the *grave*, we see a love so amazing that it becomes the hope of the earth. Christ is our hope!

I saw on Facebook that one of my college professors lost his wife of 50 years this week. As I kept him in my prayers, I kept thinking about the courses I took from him.

I remember taking his class on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and many years later (during seminary), rereading that work from a theological perspective. As fate would have it, I found myself back on my college campus sitting in my old professor’s office for another round of discussion on Dante.

I went to visit my college professor over a Thanksgiving break because I was taking a seminary class on love. Yes, it was a course on love, and no, you do not need to call me the love doctor, for I still have a lot to learn (so I am told).

In all seriousness, the title of the seminary course was “Agape,” a Greek word often used to describe the love of God. As we discussed love in the *Divine Comedy*, we talked about the opening section of the poem. As Dante enters the gates of hell, he sees a sign that reads, “Leave behind all hope, you who enter here.”

The people in Dante’s hell have abandoned hope. What that means, according to Dante, is that they cut themselves off from the love of God, leaving them in a state of hopelessness.

True hope is not found in wanting objects, nor is it found in desiring the impossible: true hope is realizing that God’s love is above us, around us, in us, and nearer to us than we are to ourselves. Christ is our hope!

Let me conclude by saying this season of Advent is a time where we wait for the coming of Christ. Advent is a season of many hopes and expectation (perhaps too many), and that is why I challenge you from now until Christmas to pray these words from St. Paul, “Christ is our hope.”

It is a simple and profound prayer, a prayer that can redirect our hopes and fears.

That verse is why this Cathedral exists. We are here to proclaim that message—Christ is our hope! Our worship, programs, and parish life are geared for people to experience and know that Christ is our hope!

Dean Candler asks the Cathedral staff to proclaim and model Christ with grace, excellence, and hospitality. It is a sign to all those who enter this space that Christ is our hope. But, these words are not just for the clergy and staff; all of us are called to join in that message.

In a few minutes we will have our annual pledge procession. As we process and support this Cathedral’s ministries and programs, we send a sign to each other, to Atlanta, and to the world that Christ is our hope!

This sermon draws upon the work of Jurgen Moltmann, especially his “Theology of Hope.”