



JESUS' FAMILY

TREE

ADVENT AT WVC

2015



2015 Advent Devotional Jesus' Family Tree

There is an online company that people can subscribe to and discover their ancestors. As of last summer, the company boasted that they provide access to “approximately 16 billion historical records and over 2 million paying subscribers.” Their numbers show that subscribers have created more than 70 million family trees and have added more than 200 million photographs, scanned documents and written stories. That is a lot of family! Reading the list of Jesus' family tree in Matthew 1:1-17 might qualify for that website; it covers thousands of years and multiple generations. Reading through the list of names can feel monotonous, yet all of the people listed have made some contribution to the One whose arrival we celebrate: Jesus. These are names that have faces and stories to tell – it was important enough to Matthew to list them and to God to have them included in Scripture.

This season of Advent, our Sunday sermons will explore just a few of the stories of the people in ***Jesus' Family Tree*** to see a more human side of Jesus, and to find the traditional Advent themes of Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love. To accompany us on that journey, people who are a part of the family tree of West Valley Church have shared about these themes from stories of their own families and lives. The writers of this devotional all have faces and names and stories to tell, too. We pray that the Holy Spirit will use these readings to draw us closer to “God our Father, Christ our Brother” (Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee), and to one another as His family at WVC.

HOPE



Sunday, November 29, 2015

Some of you know that I have been working on a second graduate degree, called a Master of Divinity, in Missional Leadership. I've been taking classes for the last 2 ½ years. As I write this I am in my very last class (I was able to "walk" in graduation last May, but still had two classes left). It has been a growing but challenging journey. Like many others who have been down this road, I wondered at times if it would ever end. Now the end is in sight and I have hope that I will have a diploma!

In an incredibly small way, I can relate to the hope that is so intimately tied to the season of Advent. For centuries, God's people awaited Christ's first Advent (or arrival). I'm sure they wondered if it would ever happen. Still, they knew where to put their hope – in God's love:

"The Lord delights in those who fear Him,
who put their hope in His unfailing love."

Psalm 147:11, niv

They knew they could count on that. For those who realized who Jesus was when He arrived, they must have been overjoyed.

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life."

Proverbs 13:12

Hope has arrived! Jesus is here! Now, we have *all* hope.

"Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die." (Romans 5:2-7)

Now, we are the people who live with and for Jesus today, and we put our confident hope in His second Advent.

Pastor Mike O'Neill

Monday, November 30, 2015

“We wait in hope for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.”

Psalm 33:20

My wife and I have a family tradition, like many do, of going up into the mountains to hunt for our Christmas tree. One snowy day in December we took our young family up in the hills on a remote snowy drive in search of an alpine tree. We had a wonderful time playing in the snow and enjoying the cold afternoon. At the time we had three small children, three years old and younger with the youngest being only two months. The day was getting late, especially for the little ones, as we finally picked the perfect tree. As the snow fell we loaded up and tied the tree on top of our SUV. As we were on our way back down through deep snow, our four wheel drive was doing fine until it started to slide on a sheet of ice underneath the snow. This caused the vehicle to slide into a ditch where it became solidly stuck. We tried and tried to get out of the ditch but nothing seemed to work. The day was getting late and now it was pitch black. We hadn't seen a vehicle all afternoon and we felt hopeless. My wife and I decided to say a prayer before I went to look for help. It was unsettling to leave my family behind as I walked down the snowy trail into the darkness. I walked further away from our headlights into the blackness of the cold snowy night and I rounded a bend in the road. That is when I saw a small light turn on.... it was from an RV trailer!!! To my surprise there was a very nice elk hunter inside who owned a jeep with a winch who was more than happy to pull us out of our predicament.

During this advent season let us focus on the Hope that we have in Jesus Christ and may He be the light in our lives during the darkest of night. Amen

Scott Lally



Tuesday, December 1, 2015

Hope shines the brightest
in the darkest
moments

One of my fondest memories growing up is searching the darkening sky for the first twinkling star of the night. I can remember sitting in the window of my mom's room, searching the horizon and when that first star appeared, I would make a wish. Ever since then, I've been fascinated with the night sky. Gazing up at those lights that seem to wink down at us from high up in that silky black sky just seems magical, like we are a small piece of something larger. Just think of all the other people who have sat staring, just as I often do, at the night sky - the Syrian refugees, Martin Luther King Jr., the wise men in search of Jesus.

Jesus.

He is the real hope we have this Christmas season. He was born in a dirty, smelly, and dark manger with only the light from the stars to usher Him into our world. Jesus is our hope that lights up our lives and leads us back to our Father in heaven. Now, every time I find myself star struck, I am reminded of the hope we have in that little babe, born in the manger.

"The hope of the righteous brings joy."
Proverbs 10:28

Kiley Keller



Wednesday, December 2, 2015

While on vacation our family of six was wading in the edge of the surf looking for freshly uncovered agates on the Olympic Peninsula's Agate Beach. Agate Beach is a relatively short beach hemmed in on both ends by rocky cliffs. At one end of the beach there is a narrow cleft in the cliff where the surf surges upwards in angry turbulence.

While keeping a close eye on the younger children, I noticed that our oldest son had wandered toward that turbulent end of the beach. Being a very independent boy it was normal for him to explore on his own. So, I wasn't alarmed over his departure from the rest of us. Then I looked his way again and he was nowhere in sight. I went over to that area and he was gone. I climbed up over the cliff for a better view and saw a drift log lodged over the cleft in the rocks where the surf roared in. My heart sank. Knowing his adventuresome spirit I was sure he had tried to walk that slippery wet log across the chasm and fallen into the rolling surf. I panicked. I watched the surging surf, hoping he would surface. Not seeing him I felt totally hopeless and returned to the other end of the beach to tell Patsy. I cannot adequately describe the agonizing hopelessness I felt. Then, to my relief, he appeared nonchalantly circling around the high ground above the beach.

That was a rather short time of self-induced hopelessness, but I learned from that experience to never give up hope again. Since then I have experienced times when about all there was to hang onto was hope. However, in every case God has encouraged me to hang in there with Him in hope. Ultimately my hope in Him has always been rewarded. He is faithful – always.

Pastor Arden Sickenberger



Thursday, December 3, 2015

“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.”

Jeremiah 29:11

In Jeremiah 29:11, God declares that His plans are not to harm us. We have hope and a future in Him. That's good news! I have always believed this and never felt tremendously tested in it.

And then I become a mother.

We were blessed with Jacob 2½ years ago, and it was the day he was born that I really learned what it meant to have anxiety, what it meant to pray fervently, and what it meant to hope. Jeremiah 29:11 rang in my ears. Of course God was not harming me – all sleep deprived, unshowered, anxious me! So along with continuing to hope and trust that God had plans to prosper Matt and me, I learned to confidently hope that He also had plans to prosper our little Jacob! Yes, this was a hard job, but I had hope – and that hope drove my faith.

Sixteen months later, along came another baby! This time we were blessed with a precious daughter, Annelies. Six hours after she was born, we were told she probably had Down Syndrome. A week later, genetic testing confirmed it. For reasons I don't know, Annelies has 47 chromosomes in every cell of her body instead of 46. And yet my hope abounds. If I had been told the day before she was born that she had Down Syndrome, I think I would have felt devastated; but as I held our beautiful new baby in my arms, hope riveted through every bone of my body. Jeremiah 29:11 still rings true!

I felt God by my side when I became a first-time mother to Jacob, and I have really felt Him by my side since Annelies' birth. I don't know what her future holds, but thank God that I am not the keeper of her (or Jacob's!) future! He has already declared that He will prosper them and give them hope and a future. What good news!

My hope lies there.

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for
and assurance about what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11:1

Lianna Sackmann

Friday, December 4, 2015

We've all heard it said that the only things that you can be sure of are death and taxes. Others have said that change is the only true constant. However, John 16:33 reminds us that in this world we will also have troubles. No one can escape this truth as every one of us will experience hardships and troubles as we move through life.

This past summer was difficult in many ways for me and my family as we had two key employees take new jobs at work, we had an employee whose young daughter died in a tragic home accident, and a good friend lost her baby in childbirth. Life can hand us troubles that seem too hard to bear and bearing these troubles can be overwhelming, but God does not ask us to do it alone. He gently calls us to share in each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Through our willingness to cry out to God (Psalm 34:17-19), to share our troubles, and to carry each other's burdens, we begin to function as the body of Christ, as God intended. It is not easy, but we can be assured that God will be with us (Zephaniah 3:17) and has a plan for us (Jeremiah 29:11).

These truths give us hope and Hope will never let us down. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit we have been showered with love (Romans 5:2-5) and this love gives us motivation to participate in hope. So "cheer up" as God has overcome the world and its troubles.

May God provide hope, as we celebrate the birth of His Son.

"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."
Jeremiah 29:11

"Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love." (Romans 5:2-5)

Scott Stephen and Family

Saturday, December 5, 2015

Every year I pray for a theme to focus on for the year and a scripture that will help me to grow in my relationship with the Lord. The word I chose for 2015 was HOPE with Romans 15:13 as my key verse. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

We've been studying the book of Daniel in Ladies Bible Study and see Daniel's unwavering hope in God as he prayed daily that the Israelites could return to their homeland after years of captivity in Babylon. Moses, Noah, Abraham – and all the Bible heroes placed their hope in God.

I'm also reminded of the hope that my dear mother had after her loving and devoted husband passed away. Most of her married life my mother suffered with asthma and emphysema resulting in many other illnesses from the side effects of medication. I remember the time she fell and broke both legs due to severe osteoporosis, resulting in surgery and being bedridden for weeks. This was only one of many falls, broken bones and hospital stays she suffered over the years. So, my father was not only her best friend and companion but her caregiver as well as he helped see her through to recovery with each physical setback she experienced.

When my father passed away prematurely we wondered how she would be able to continue to live on her own and care for herself without him by her side. But the hope she carried deep inside from her strong faith in Christ gave her the determination and courage to keep on keeping on. There were many more broken bones and ongoing physical problems resulting in rehab and assisted care after my father died, but hope is what kept her going through a broken heart, sadness, loneliness and illness. Hope that God had a purpose in the events as they happened, hope that her help would come from the Lord, hope that she would be reunited with her husband, parents, and grandparents in eternity someday, hope in the fact she would have a new body free from pain and suffering and most of all the hope of eternal life with Christ.

With God as our hope, placing our trust in Him, we will be filled with joy and peace, giving us more hope, even to overflowing! We all have hope even in times of trouble-God's promises are true. "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him." (Psalm 62:5)

Marla Gill