

**ADVENT SERMON ON HOPE** by John R. Collins  
Draft 5 of Saturday, November 28, 2020

**MARK 13:32-37 (NRSV)**

<sup>32</sup>“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

**SERMON**

**EXPLORE:** While working the crossword to try to get my brain jump started this past Tuesday morning, I came across the following clue for 67 across: “Wish Earnestly.” There was space for four letters and I knew what they were looking for. When I filled in the letters h, o, p, and e for hope, it turned out that I was right. But I kind of wished I wasn’t.

You see, an earnest wish is not really what hope is, at least not in the Christian sense.

And I want to talk about what hope is, in the Christian sense, because This Sunday, I’m beginning a three part sermon series on the four Advent themes: It’s a three part series because the message for one of the Sunday’s is going to come in the form of the Children and Youth Christmas Pageant—and we’re all looking forward to that.

As we light the four advent candles, one each Sunday, we often talk about them as the candle of Hope, the candle of Peace, the candle of Joy and the candle of Love.

Today when we light the first advent candle and I wanted to talk to you about the hope we have as Christians.

The hope of the Christian faith is not a hope of optimism, or earnest wishing or even a heartfelt desire.

**EXPLAIN:** In the words of *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*: "In the Bible, hope is not normally expressed as desire (something good that one would like to have happen) but as expectation (something good that one knows is going to happen and, so, anticipates)." [1]

The Christian hope is not something that may or may not happen, but we really wish it would, Christian hope is a longing for the arrival of God's kingdom in all its fullness on earth as it is in heaven.

Christian hope is a sure and certain thing secured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As I read from the *Book of Worship* for the graveside service of committal:

"Almighty God, into your hands we commend your child, in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

As a sure and certain thing, our hope is not disarmed by darkness because our hope is not optimism. The best analogy I can find to explain this is something called the Stockdale Paradox.

Said paradox is named after Admiral Jim Stockdale, the highest-ranking military officer held at the Hanoi Hilton during the Vietnam War.

Boiled down to its essentials, the Stockdale paradox is that we have to have faith that we will prevail through the most difficult times of our life, and even come out stronger on the other side, without denying the hard fact that we are in for a long, hard time of it. [2]

Those of us who claim Christ as our Risen Savior know that one way or another, we can come out of any crisis stronger than we went in. Our faith tells us that in Jesus Christ—who conquered evil, sin, and death in his suffering, death, and resurrection—we will prevail.

While we do this, we must also acknowledge that it is going to be hard, and it's going to take longer than any of us want it to. Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, the most faithful, fully-human being to ever walk the face of the earth, suffered. There is no reason to believe we can avoid doing likewise.

But Christ's suffering and death were not the end of the story. This difficult time need not be the end of our story, either.

Christian Hope affirms that the Kingdom of God and all the good things that come with it are indeed coming, the question is not if, but when. Not even Jesus knew the day or the hour. Unfortunately, biblical hope does not deny that it will be a long hard wait.

**APPLY:** In the midst of all that has gone and probably will continue to go wrong this year. We still have hope. We can still pick ourselves up off the ground and stagger forward, because we have hope. Not a hope of wishful thinking grounded in our own abilities, or an optimism in the possibilities of this world, but in the Lord God Almighty who, through Jesus Christ, has already won the victory.

Keep your chins up. In Christ Jesus, there is always hope. Amen.

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[1] Karl Paul Donfried, "Hope," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised, Updated), ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011).

[2] Jim Collins, "The Stockdale Paradox," JimCollins.com, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2Y1Ouda>.