

Sermon Guide: Heavenly Hope in a Heavy World - “Facing the Darkness”

Mark Anderson | Dec. 3

This week’s message comes from Mark Anderson, a long time friend and supporter of the Granville community. This week, he kicks off a new sermon series for us designed specially for Advent, called “Heavenly Hope in a Heavy World.” Although the roots of the Advent season are found outside of the pages of Scripture, it is nevertheless an ancient tradition that has been practiced by the church from within a few centuries of the birth of the church. Like the season of Lent, it is a preparatory season, and a meaningful way for the church to prepare for the coming and the birth of the Messiah, Jesus.

In this opening sermon, entitled “Facing the Darkness,” Mark focuses on the importance of facing the brokenness of our world, contrasting it with the typical societal sentimental or commercial approach to Christmas. There is both brokenness in the world—global conflicts, environmental crises, economic challenges, as well as personal brokenness –including struggles with addictions and broken relationships. The brokenness of our experience in the world reminds us that there is a deep need for a Savior for all.

As Mark examines Zachariah's song from Luke 1, he explains that the context of Israel's oppression by the Roman Empire was also a dark time full of brokenness. Zechariah’s song is all about heaven’s hope coming to a heavy world. But what is hope? In everyday usage, hope can merely denote wishful thinking, but biblical hope rises above the circumstances of the world and finds its foundation in God's unchanging faithfulness. Mark therefore encourages us to shift our focus from our changing circumstances to trusting in God's unchanging faithfulness.

Mark concludes his message with a practical exercise called "Walking on the Waves," a five-step exercise which involves imagining the presence of Jesus in a difficult circumstance (the full exercise, as well as Mark’s handout, is attached below).

Key takeaways:

Zachariah's Song - Message of Hope:

- Focus on Zachariah's song as a response to dark times, emphasizing hope through God's faithfulness and the fulfillment of promises in the coming Messiah.

Understanding and Cultivating Hope:

- Definition of hope as a positive expectation grounded in trust in God's character, shifting from focusing on changing circumstances to anchoring oneself in God's unchanging faithfulness.

Bible Reading References:

1. Isaiah 9:2-7: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.
2. Luke 1:5-25, 57-79: The birth of John the Baptist, including Zachariah's song.



**First Sunday in Advent
Dec. 3, 2023**

ADVENT is a beginning:
A 4-week journey of facing the darkness
as we prepare our hearts to receive
the great gift of God-With-Us,
Immanuel

Facing the Darkness Around Us

...the world is very broken

- Conflict
- Environmental
- Economic
- Health
- Weather & Shorter Days

Facing the Darkness In Us

...I am very broken

- Selfishness
- Addictions
- Stress
- Broken Relationships

- Broken Promises
- Loss, Grief, Pain, Regrets

Zechariah's Song in Luke 1:67-80

v.68 God has come to His people

v.71 salvation from our enemies

vv.78f the rising sun

will come to us from heaven,

to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death

(our response)

v.74 enable us to serve Him without fear

v.79 guide our feet into the path of peace

What is Hope?

A feeling of positive expectation regarding the future

How Does Hope Work?

Loss of hope, or discouragement, is never pleasant,
but it is an opportunity
to recenter our lives, values, priorities, and worship on God.

We shift our focus
from changing circumstances
to God's unchanging faithfulness

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength ~ Is 40:31

Lamentations 3:19-23

I remember my afflictions ...

And my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind,

And therefore I have hope:

Because of the Lord's great love,

We are not consumed,

For His compassions never fail,
They are new every morning;
Great is Your Faithfulness.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for He Who promised is faithful.

Hope is not based on things going well today.

Hope is not based on feelings.

Hope and doubt always co-exist

Hope is an ongoing struggle, a daily choice

Hope chooses to believe
that God is with me

**Hope is a perspective on my life today
based on trusting God's Goodness**

It is a powerful life-force!

Exercise: Walking on the Waves

Hope rising above circumstances...above needing to control

1. Think of the dark, discouraging situation
2. Imagine Jesus joining you there
... focus on Him (not the waves)
0. Notice His Feelings... and yours
... grieve and lament together
0. Notice His Longings... and yours
... groan together
0. Leave the situation in His Hands

... taking only the part He gives you to carry

Exercise ~ Writing a Lament

Offering Our Grief to God ... and finding Hope in Him

Lament is not a complaint ... it's not whining or grumbling ...it is probably the most important, honest and raw kind of prayer we can pray. We bring to God's light what is darkening our soul. Lament is agreeing with God that things are not the way they should be, and asking for help.

In this exercise, adapted from wonderful material by Jim Martin of IJM, you will be guided to pour out your heart to God ... and find solidarity with God's aching, longing heart. Your lament (in seven steps) will be a powerful prayer expressing your exhaustion, your longing, your frustration to God ... and finding His Hope.

Keep it simple ... just write one or two lines for each category.

1. Address God directly

"Creator God" or "O Lord" or "Mighty God" or "King of Compassion and Justice" or "Abba, Daddy" *Who is God to you? What role does He play in your situation today?*

2. Review God's faithfulness in the past

"You divided the sea and led your people through ..." (Ps 78)

How has God been faithful to you over the years?

How has He shown up in the last few weeks or days?



3. Your suffering, your situation, your feelings

"I am forgotten, cut off from Your care. You have thrown me into the lowest pit and the darkest depths!" (Ps 88)

What is the source of your grief, sorrow, or anger?

What painful situation are you facing? What feelings do you notice?

4. Confession of Sin or Pleading of Innocence

"O Lord, my God, I have done wrong." (Ps 7)

"I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. I am blameless before the Lord." (Ps 18)

"Because of Your great Compassion, blot out the stain of my sin." (Ps 51)

Is there anything within you that aches for forgiveness ... either personally, or speaking for your people, your city, your culture?

How have you been faithful to the Lord ... or how have we failed to trust and obey God?

5. Request for help

"Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my cry for help! Please listen and help me for I am overwhelmed by my troubles." (Ps 55)

What specific thing are you asking God to do?

What are you asking Him to give you?

In what ways do you long to see Him move?



**Sometimes,
good things grow
in really unexpected
places!**

6. Declaration of God's Unchanging Character

"But You have been our King from the beginning, O God; You have saved us many times."
(Ps 74)

Recount the ways in which God has responded to your suffering in the past.

Who do you know God to be, based on Scripture and your personal experiences with Him?

What evidence do you have that He will show up again?

7. Statement of Trust in God

"The Lord has heard my plea; The Lord will answer my prayer." (Ps 6)

"Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise Him again—my Saviour and my God. Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember You." (Ps 42)

"I love the Lord because He hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because He bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!" (Ps 116)

Looking beyond your current circumstances, what are the reasons God is still worthy of praise? Worthy of our trust?



Psalms of lament are powerful expressions of the experience of disorientation.

They express the pain, grief, dismay, and anger that life is not good.

They also refuse to settle for things as they are, and so they assert hope.

*—Walter Brueggemann,
Praying the Psalms*