<u>Advent</u> – Hope (Psalm 130)

Today, we are going to address one of my favorite topics as a pastor. **HOPE.** Today is also the first day of a special season known as Advent. The Advent season is a four-week period that intends to prepare us for celebrating Jesus Christ's birth, while also pointing ahead to His promised return. Over the next four Sunday's we are going to spotlight a key theme as part of our Christmas preparations—hope, peace, joy, and love. During these times together, I want to invite you to join me in a season of reflection, prayer, and expectant celebration.

I know many of you have started your countdown to Christmas. Some out of excitement and anticipation and others out of anxiety and stress. I want to encourage you to forget about the countdown and to focus on the true reasons for celebration during this advent season. The word *advent* in most English translations means "coming" or "arrival". When we consider these definitions, we find that God's people before Jesus were eagerly anticipating the "coming" of the promised Messiah. Today, we recognize that Jesus Christ was the Messiah they so eagerly awaited, and now we eagerly await His second "arrival".

Sometimes hope feels wishful. Have you ever crossed your fingers, dreaming of a better outcome, or wishing for something better. We might hope for things such as better employment, a brighter future, improved finances, better relationships. But that kind of hope is based on things that may or may not happen. We may as well close our eyes and cross our fingers, if this is the kind of hope we believe in. When things don't go as we hoped, it can be crushing and sometimes even defeating. Focusing on Hope during advent invites us to imagine a different kind of hope, rooted in the unchanging nature of God and his promise to restore every part of his creation. Advent hope does not minimize pain or difficulty, nor does it assume things will soon get better. Instead, it faces the darkness with courage, knowing that the enemy is the one crushed and defeated, and it chooses to trust that God's promises will come to pass.

Read Psalm 130:1-8

In this reflective Psalm we see "hope" and "wait" used synonymously. Israel's story suggests that human effort alone cannot repair the damage unleashed in God's good world. We all need someone who can truly embody God's wisdom and lead us back to life. Advent hope acknowledges human failure and need for God without shaming. Followers of Jesus embrace a way of patience with themselves and one another, a way of mercy and forgiveness, waiting upon the one who brings new light every morning and redeems us from every form of brokenness.

To hope in God means to wait with patient expectation, trusting that He will indeed fulfill his promises. This kind of waiting, this kind of hoping, leans forward, anticipating the day when Jesus will arrive once again to make all things new. It is this kind of hope that should empower us to persevere in our faith, to act justly when we want to act unfairly, and to serve others as Jesus has served us, with mercy, grace, and love. Talk about something the world around us

needs to genuinely experience! God's people filled with a hope that serves as a sign of the restoration that will arrive through Jesus.

Read Advent Week 1 – "Hope" and light Candle (purple)

<u>The Lord's Supper</u>

Elders distribute the elements – Play song:

One of the other things we participate in that reminds us of the HOPE we have in Christ Jesus is the Lord's Supper. **1 Corinthians 11:26** says, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."* What a special reminder the Lord has given us about the sacrifice of His Son on our behalf. What a special way He has for encouraging us to intently and patiently wait, or hope, for His return.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Breaking of bread – **Read 1 Cor. 11:23-24**

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Raising of the cup **– Read 1 Cor. 11:25**

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Closing prayer and song: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus