

“The Arrival Of Our New Identity”

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:36-44

The Hope Candle is lit. Shame and guilt are motivators and hindrances in human experience. Our true human identity, however, is determined by God. And it is good, freed from shame and guilt. It is by receiving God’s grace, God’s unmerited favor for us, that we begin to live from a different vantage point than shame and guilt. It is through grace that we change and are transformed. We begin to experience and grow in hope. In his book, *Simply Christian*, N. T. Wright begins his chapter entitled “Putting the World to Rights” with the following personal story:

I had a dream the other night, a powerful and interesting dream. And the really frustrating thing is that I can’t remember what it was about. I had a flash of it as I woke up, enough to make me think how extraordinary and meaningful it was; and then it was gone . . . . Our passion for justice often seems like that. We dream the dream of justice. We glimpse, for a moment, a world at one, a world put to rights, a world where things work out, where societies function fairly and efficiently . . . . and then we wake up and come back to reality.<sup>1</sup>

According to Wright, our longing for justice “comes with the kit of being human.

Unfortunately, although we all strive for justice, we often fail to achieve it. As Wright says,

You fall off your bicycle and break your leg. You go to the hospital and they fix it. You stagger around on crutches for awhile. Then, rather gingerly, you start to walk normally again . . . . There is such a thing as putting something to rights, as in fixing it, as getting it back on track. You can fix a broken leg, a broken toy, a broken television. So why can’t we fix injustice. It isn’t for lack of trying. And yet, in spite of failures to fix injustice, we keep dreaming that one day all broken things will be set right.

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 3-13.

Wright contends,

Christians believe this is so because all humans have heard, deep within themselves, the echo of a voice which calls us to live [with a dream for justice]. And [followers of Christ] believe that in Jesus that voice became human and did what had to be done to bring it about.<sup>2</sup>

This is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent anticipates the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah and portends the second coming of the Messiah as well. The First Sunday of Advent is about hope! Hope is experienced as we take seriously the person and purpose of Jesus Christ. Jesus brought God's mission of salvation into the world. Salvation for eternal and abundant life, as well as salvation from injustice. Salvation is the message of justice to set things right. The journey of Advent, then, is one of discovering and experiencing our identity as a child of God.

The texts in Isaiah 2:1-5, Psalm 122, Romans 13:11-14 and Matthew 24:36-44 remind Christians that Advent hope is not something we experience once a year. To the contrary, Advent hope announces what was, what is, and what's to come continually in our daily practice of following Jesus. The hope of living our new identity was then, now, and yet to come.

Isaiah 2:1-5 is the prophecy of a new kingdom of God and a new people of God who would seek after salvation, learn from the LORD, and walk in the LORD'S ways. This prophecy was for then, now, and the future. God began the new kingdom with Abraham's call and continued it through the judges, kings, and prophets. And the new kingdom will be fulfilled in the Messiah with the new heaven and new earth. Isaiah 2:5 reads, "O house

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!” The hope of living our new identity was then, now, and yet to come.

Psalm 122 proclaims loudly that the journey of Advent is one of discovering and experiencing our identity as a child of God. Until every human realizes and experiences what it means to be created in the image of God, we cannot claim our true identity. We are God’s beloved. In our true identity, we experience hope, peace, joy, and love. Psalm 122:8-9 reads, “For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, ‘Peace be within you.’ For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.” The hope of living our new identity was then, now, and yet to come.

Romans 13:11-14 speaks to Christians about presenting themselves as living sacrifices. Paul challenges Christians to see the sacrifice as living in harmony with others in community. Yes, pay what one owes the government. This is required. It is not a debt. The only debt we have is to others and that debt is to love them. Romans 13:13-14 reads, “...let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” The hope of living our new identity was then, now, and yet to come.

Matthew 24:36-44 records that Jesus’ return is certain, but not predictable. Given this dilemma, Christians must be prepared for the Second Coming of Christ. The way we prepare, according to Matthew, is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and side with the marginalized. When we do this, we serve Jesus. Matthew is clear that being unprepared is known by excessive behavior to the contrary of the teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. Humans obsess with what they want to know. Christians obsess on what they

would like to know. There is a significant difference between “want to know” and “like to know.” Matthew 24:42 reads, “Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day the Lord is coming”<sup>3</sup> The hope of living our new identity was then, now, and yet to come.

The hope of living our new identity was then, now, and yet to come. Superficial jollity in a world of divisiveness, chaos, conflict, suffering, and pain is not Advent hope. As we experience and live our new identity as God’s beloved, we declare the hope of God. When we experience and live our new identity as God’s beloved, we exude hope to others to find their way in the darkness of violence, suffering, and death. When we experience and live our new identity as God’s beloved, we embody the truth hope is real, because the One who is coming is already here. Jesus frees us to be fully present each and every day. When we experience and live our new identity as God’s beloved, we know that Advent hope calls us to live fully in this world, because we are in the advent of Christ now and tomorrow. Hope abounds in and through living our new identity. Amen!

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)  
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<sup>3</sup>In all five sections of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Leanne Van Dyke, David A. Jones, Marci Auld Glass, Jin Young Choi, John M. Buchanan, Raj Nadella, and Daniel L. Smith-Christopher in *Connections, Year A, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 2-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-10, 10-11, 12-14 and 14-16.