

Let us pray,

Lord, guide us to see what is possible, and give us the opportunity to sense your future and your possibilities.

Amen.

---

Today is the first day of advent!!

Hooray!

And this weeks theme in advent is Hope.

And Hope is such a powerful tool for being human.

It helps us to see beyond our current circumstances to what could be.

But hope can also be illusory.

In my ordination vows I vowed never to provide illusory hope to the people I serve, meaning I promised never to provide false hope.

---

But what is false hope?

All hope is a gamble though, right?

Because hope is a wish for something to get better, but there is no guarantee that things will get better.

Hope is more of a feeling than a reality.

But here is the thing about hope, it has the possibility of leading us through some dark times in ways that would never have been possible before.

---

Without hope, the hard times feel never ending.

Without hope, there is no sense of relief because there is no feeling of a possibility of things getting easier or better.

Hope can be a positive powerful tool that is at our disposal as humans and especially as faith filled humans.

---

But hope can become illusory.

Positive hope becomes false hope when we claim things that are not true or that will never be true.

And this promise of life after death is truly a lofty promise.

Especially when death is usually a one way ticket.

Not many people have come back from the dead.

But yet, every single sunday we proclaim the hope of the resurrection.

The hope that this world is not the end and that there is something better on the other side.

---

Some may claim that this hope is illusory or false, but for those of us who believe, it is the light that keeps the darkness at bay.

This hope of the resurrection provides us with the ability to walk through the hard times.

It gives us the possibility to see beyond the pain and suffering, and know that this world will not claim us, but our God has claimed us for a better world eternal.

---

So what is this false hope that we clergy promised not to proclaim?

Well, the major false hope that is peddled by many christians is that by following Christ our lives will get better or that we will suffer less.

Being a Christian is not a ticket out of suffering in this life.

By giving more money to the church you will not be blessed with more money.

Some may experience economic prosperity, but it isn't because they gave a certain dollar amount or percentage of their income to the church.

This is illusory hope.

---

I cannot promise that if you pray many prayers that your prayers will be answered.

Sometimes God says no.

I cannot promise that if you come to church, do all the right things and help all of the people, that your life will become easier or more fruit filled.

---

Well pastor, why in the world would I come to church then?

This doesn't sound like Church does anything for me!

You are right that Church does not provide the way that the world provides.

But what Church provides, rather, what the Gospel provides is hope.

---

The ability to walk through suffering and a community to hold you as you do.

Coming to church will not make one prosperous and it will not shield one from suffering.

But what coming to church does is reminds us that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

That death is actually not the end and that our suffering is not in vain.

That we are not alone in our suffering, that all of us here are going through something and are in need of companionship, encouragement, support and hope.

---

Church reminds us that God cares about us, is willing and does walk alongside us during our suffering, and has indeed suffered with us through the cross and the life of Christ.

Church reminds us that life is hard, and at the same time reminds us that secluding inward makes life even harder.

---

Church is a place, if done right, where hope is provided through the promises of God and the active community of believers.

The promises that God will be with us in our lives, that God will suffer alongside us, and that in the end, when this life of ours ends, we will be with God in paradise.

We share these promises in community and through mutual support.

And through, faith we become hope for one another through difficult times.

May God's presence never feel far away, may you find hope in the resurrection and comfort in one another along the way. Amen.