

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**December 3, 2017**  
**Mark 13:24-47**

Today is the first Sunday of Advent and the focus for today is HOPE. I came to know the word “hope” intimately the day our first son was born. It would take pages to list all the hopes I had for him. I could sit quietly for a long time, studying his beautiful little face cradled in the crook of my arm and my mind would wander. His life lay ahead of him, he was so perfect and vulnerable, and I wanted only the best for him. I hoped that his life would be full of love, creativity, generosity, friendship, adventure. I hoped that he would be strong, healthy, kind, ..... you get the picture. And later, when he got sick and his temperature soared or when he collided with a player twice his size on the soccer field, I fervently hoped he was going to be OK. And even later, I hoped he would get through his teen years unscathed, that he would show up in one piece on the nights I sat anxiously in the dark waiting for him to come home, that he would make it through highschool, and that he wouldn’t break his neck at the skateboard park. These are the usual ways we think, when we think of hope.

But as Christians, we use the word “hope” in a different way. A fuller way. Scripture guides us to understand hope as something that speaks to our every day experience and guides our feet in the way of peace and love, in the company of One who loves us, even when, or especially when, the going gets tough.

In today’s gospel reading from Mark, we hear Jesus portraying a troubling time when the world will be turned inside out and upside

down. The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give off any light, and the stars will fall from heaven. Wow, that sounds very scary and bleak! But right away, in the next lines, the darkness is punctuated with the brilliance of the Son of Man coming in clouds of great power and glory, sending out angels to gather in his elect. The vision of darkness, disorientation and despair doesn't last long – Jesus comes to gather us in. He tells his disciples that, yes, “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” What a relief! All I can think is, thank God!!

So this is our hope. Our hope is beyond the outcome of the events of our lives; beyond our experience of life as good or bad – our hope is in the knowledge that we are held through all time by the love of God which has no end. Jesus' words are with us forever. Jesus as *the Word*, is with us forever. Again, thank God!

And the signs that Jesus is with us forever are etched in the details of our everyday lives. We just need eyes to see and ears to hear. In the reading today, Jesus tells us that we will see the signs of his presence in everything God has created. Life begets life. And we see it in the greening of the Spring, and in all of Creation.

“Therefore, keep awake,” Jesus implores us.

Advent is meant as a time for us to open our eyes. To wait expectantly, faithfully, maybe even a little impatiently for signs of new life. We know the birth of God amongst us brings that new life, that new promise. We don't know how this new life will arrive. It arrives in different ways for everyone. But it is born vulnerable, tender, and needing our care and attention. Are we awake? Are we

prepared? Are our eyes and ears open? How will this new life arrive?  
How will we let it change us?

How do we respond to this life moving in, through and around us? Do  
notice it, do we ignore it, do we react to it without thinking, or are we  
fully awake?

Do we make big drama out of the changes in our lives? When  
difficulties arise, do we feel sorry for ourselves and say, “Why me?”  
When we are blessed with privilege and health, do we also say, “Why  
me?” Do we notice how life is going for the people around us?

Change doesn't always feel welcome. We all have had times  
when our world seems to fall apart; when there seems to be no light,  
no solid rock, no warmth. These are the times when we are shaken to  
our core. But as Christians, we have hope. We have scripture, liturgy,  
a community to support and pray for us. We begin to see, hear and  
feel new life, new hope as in our vulnerability we receive the  
kindness of friends and strangers, the beauty of a sunset or a piece of  
music, the comforting light of a new day dawning, or the unexpected  
phone call or the hug of a friend to remind us that we are not alone.

This staying awake to life and love is what Jesus calls us to. To  
train our eyes to see it being born in the most difficult of moments. To  
expect the unexpected. To be open and vulnerable. And as we become  
aware of love in our own dark moments, we are called to pay that  
love forward. To care for the hurting parts of his Body as part of the  
exchange of life and love that we are all caught up in. Whether we  
know it or not.

My first born son is now 32 years old. And my understanding of  
“Hope” has been hard won as an experienced mother. Now when I

look at my beloved son's face, I know I will not be around all his life to care for him. In fact, he has clearly let me know that he experiences my worry and concern as a lack of faith in him. He's right. It's his life, his path. And I have no idea what his journey is all about. I need to butt out and I've pretty much been able to do that because of the Hope I have – that he is held in the Love of God, always has been, and always will be, and that that will support him if he lets it as he navigates the ups and inevitable downs in life.

And I've had ample examples of how the Body of Christ is a living entity that embraces anyone who cares to pay attention. Here's one. When Isaac was 21, he left home to start his independent life in Calgary. He hardly knew a soul there and he left to go there on a whim. I was worried about him. I don't know why. He's a capable person. And then one day he called home and told me, "You know, it's pretty interesting that every time I'm stuck and don't know what to do, someone shows up to help me. It's amazing!" Yes, son, it is amazing!

This is the body of Christ, the fellowship of God's Son, bringing to life the second coming of Christ as we learn to notice, and care for one another. Every time we notice how God is moving in our lives and in the lives of others, we come closer to new life that transcends bitterness, pain, despair. We come closer to the HOPE that we have been promised - the promise of life beyond death, of life amidst death, and of life through death. And in this is our hope, shining through the ups and downs of our lives. Anchoring us to the One who has saved us, once and for all. And who waits faithfully for us, and asks us to wait as faithfully for Him.

Amen.