



November 29, 2023
A Note from Pastor Jon

Dear Friends,

Advent is one of my favorite rhythms of the church. I love the decorations, the beautification, the lights, the flowers, the colors, yet I loathe the cold on most days that end in “y.”

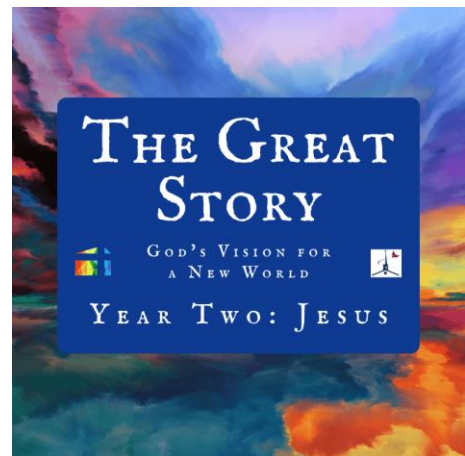
In this season, it is with great fondness and intention that I reflect upon the LOVE, HOPE, JOY, and PEACE we speak of as we light our Advent candles.

Last year, it was in Advent that we began our journey through the Gospel according to Matthew as a part of our three-year journey through The Great Story. (Year One was the story of Israel in the Old Testament.) This year we began Advent two Sundays ago by wrapping up the Gospel of Matthew.

Spending one full year in a single book of the Bible is something I have never done before as a pastor. I must admit that I loved this journey.

Being able to see the arc of the story unfold week after week, even if we did have to skip over some stuff, helped to hold the continuity of the story together. Being able to see the thesis of this book unfold allowed me to stay even more deeply connected than I could have imagined. I was able to see the LOVE, HOPE, JOY, and PEACE born in a Bethlehem manger lived out through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The thesis of Matthew really is about how to live a righteous life as a Jew in light of the one called Jesus. Likely the book was written just a few years after the destruction of the second Temple by the Roman Empire. The author is writing to this small community who still identified as Jewish but now were learning how to live, worship, and interact with the world around them in a new way.





For us today, as the Gentiles, this writing still speaks to us about how to live a righteous life in light of the one called Jesus. How do we check ourselves to be sure that our hearts, minds, bodies, souls, and actions line up with how God calls us to be in this life?

We don't do this in isolation — we do this in community. That's what the author of Matthew was saying to their community from the beginning. We don't exist in isolation. We exist and live together, and we have generations of examples of the community of saints joining in alignment with God as best they could.

Matthew reminds us that we need each other. We need community. It is in our community that we find support and accountability.

We will have highs and lows, and it is our community that celebrates with us and checks in with us to make sure we are okay and that we are doing our best to stay in alignment with God. In times of grief and loss it is our community that holds us, supports us, and reminds us that God is with us.

It is support and accountability in community that gives us space and the encouragement to constantly check in with ourselves and each other. When the journey is hard and we witness and maybe even feel the pain of the world around us, our community is here with us, loving us.

When we make a misstep, when we feel like we are failing as a follower of Jesus, it is our community that helps us get back on track, without judgment. It is our community that reminds us that we matter to God and to each other, and together we continue to feel God's love for us and are encouraged to share God's love for all others, no matter what.

Friends, this is not just a pipe dream or some fanciful thought.

We can live righteous lives, we can support one another in community through the highs and lows, because of what comes at the end of the story, because of resurrection.

It is because of the resurrection of Jesus that we have the promise of the LOVE, HOPE, JOY, and PEACE that we often speak about in this Advent season.

It is because of the resurrection that the LOVE, HOPE, JOY, and PEACE promised at the birth of Jesus didn't die on the executioner's cross of an Empire, but arose out of that tomb with Jesus.



The LOVE, HOPE, JOY and PEACE brought to this world in the form of a baby, God incarnate, now lives on in each of us.

Resurrection reminds us that this season of Advent is not just a short season at the beginning of the church year or at the end of the calendar year.

Resurrection reminds us that the worst thing is never the last thing.

I am who I am today because I am a follower of Jesus, seeking to live my life in alignment with God, and because I am living this life in community with each of you.

May your Advent be full of LOVE, HOPE, JOY, and PEACE, and may you carry that Advent spirit and the message of Matthew with you each and every day.

Pastor Jon



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