

# WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## Sermon Series Devotional

11/28/21-12/26/21

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## Introduction

“When is it ever going to end?” I just get my hopes up and then they get dashed.” “Why? What is God doing?” Such were the words uttered during...the first century church....during the Middle Ages... during the Great depression... during World Wars...and, of course, during the Pandemic. The capacity to remain hopeful is currently in short supply. And it isn’t just because the Pandemic lingers, but because of the fallout. Lost jobs, isolation, political strife, lost loved ones, and cultural shifts. But, hope is a cornerstone among followers of Jesus. If we understand how and where to find it, we just might not only survive better ourselves, but be a light to others as well. This sermon series is designed to help you do just that.

## Why a sermon series devotional?

A deep faith and rich discipleship is not built on an hour a week in worship. No matter how good a sermon is, there is always more to pursue. These devotionals give you the opportunity to go deeper and wider in your understanding. Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one sitting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

*“The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.”*

— Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

## **Week One - Longing**

A case can be made that much creativity, development of relationships, and the search for the Holy is found in a longing in our hearts. There is something within us that strives. It may not always be for something worthy and often it may be misguided, but our longing still drives us forward nonetheless. It raises the question of what we are trying to fill in our lives, doesn't it? It also says something about how we view our current circumstances and whether we have needs that proceed out of those circumstances. As we begin this series on Hope, it couldn't come at a more opportune time. You can look around you and see that almost everyone is longing for something...someone...the beginning of a new thing...or the end of something awful. Let's own the longing that is ours and embrace its place on the journey of faith.

### **Reflection questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. If you are honest, what is one thing that you long for?
3. Have you ever felt like your inner drive forward is flagging?
4. If you could ask God one question, what would it be?

### **Read Romans 8:18-28**

1. How is the word "groaning" used in this text? How does it reflect a longing? Have you ever felt like that?
2. What direction is creation depicted as heading? Do you have the expectation that things are going that direction?
3. What do you think it means to be "subjected in hope?"
4. What does vs. 28 mean to you? Does it stir something inside of you or and give you hope?

### **Read Luke 1:5-25**

1. Had Zechariah and Elizabeth given up on having children? How much of a blow do you believe this was to their longing to conceive? Have you known people who have had the same longing?
2. What does this scripture say to people who have given up?
3. What obstacles stand in the way of you receiving something you have longed for?

### **Read Isaiah 11**

1. This scripture has been interpreted to refer to the Messiah. For a people who (at the time of Jesus) were subjects of a foreign government (Rome), how did this promise address their longing? What did they most want?
2. Describe the idyllic conditions you long for in our present time. How does the presence of Christ lead us that direction?

### **Read John 1:1-18**

1. In our current time of darkness, why is light so compelling? What would you like to see illuminated?
2. If Jesus comes to “make all things right,” what are the things in life you wish could be made right? What is your part? Do you have the patience and trust for it to happen? How is that different from just being optimistic?

## **Week Two -Expectation**

Have you ever run into someone in a public setting that you were used to seeing in a uniform of some sort? Did you recognize them? Often we see only what we expect to see. And, conversely, we don't see things that are right in front of us because we weren't expecting them. When we talk about what God does in our lives it is possible to believe God isn't doing anything. Why? Because we don't expect it, or we are expecting something completely different. We have possibly gotten so used to Hollywood's version of God's acts that we don't “see” the advent of God's actions. Buckle up. Open your eyes. And be ready.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. What was the most challenging thing you heard in the message?
3. What are you most likely to implement after having heard the message?
4. What is the most challenging thing to you when it comes to thanks-living?

### **Read Mark 5:25-34**

1. What was the condition of the woman? How did her condition affect how she was treated in her community?
2. How does this story depict the confidence she has in Jesus? What does she expect?
3. What does this scripture say about whether it is necessary for other people to understand or agree with your expectancy?

### **Read Joshua 6:2-20**

1. How ridiculous does this instruction from God to Joshua sound? Why would anyone assume that approach would produce a good result?
2. For them to expect it to work, what did they need to believe? How much did they need to trust God (and Joshua)?
3. What is the difference between an individual believing God and persuading a large group of people to expect God to work?
4. What effect does expecting something to happen actually encourage it to happen? How is this different from the “law of attraction” thinking that believes you can MAKE something happen by expecting it? How does it affect your openness?

### **Read Matthew 24:3-14**

1. What are the things Jesus tells the disciples to expect?
2. What was the purpose of the warnings?
3. Were the warnings of “wars and rumors of war” anything out of the ordinary for their lives?
4. If they didn’t expect things to be hard, how would that affect their willingness to stay faithful?
5. How did his instructions address the fears they might have had?

## **Week Three - Anticipation**

What goes through your mind when you think about the word “anticipation?” The Carly Simon song? Date night this week? A possible year-end bonus? Seeing the next move in a sporting contest? Or the end of the Pandemic? There are so many emotions that can accompany the thought. “It is/isn’t worth it.” “It is so easy to get disappointed.” “I don’t know what to look for.” “I feel like it is a wasteland, the in-between existence.” As we think about Hope, anticipation plays a key role and God has given us some tools to help. Let’s find out how anticipation plays a role in our lives.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. When was the last time you anticipated something? How did it go?

3. Have you ever been disappointed because something you anticipated didn't happen the way you expected?

### **Read Romans 8:28-30**

1. What difference does it make if you anticipate God to work for the good in your life?
2. Is it critical for you to know exactly how that is going to happen?
3. Does the experience of anticipating something good happening affect one's hope?

### **Read Luke 2:25-35**

1. What was the promise given to Simeon?
2. What does the scripture mean, "waiting for the consolation of Israel?"
3. How did the promise that he would not die before seeing the fulfillment of the coming Messiah?
4. Did Simeon have any idea who it would be? Did he have any knowledge of how he would recognize?
5. What role did the Holy Spirit have in this event?
6. Have you ever anticipated something that was ill-defined?

## **Week 4- Waiting**

It seems like one of the hardest things we have to do is wait. In the current climate it seems like we are waiting on a host of things. A new job, the end of the pandemic, the time we can gather safely with friends and family, the time we can get our driver's license, the end of our healing process, the moment we see we have reached our target weight, etc. Living in an "instant society" we have come to expect things to happen quickly, whether it is a fast food drive-through or a microwaved meal. Many have given up on the truism "all good things come to those who wait." And yet, wait we must. There is a biblical principle called "Kairos" that means "the fullness of time." It means that not everything is possible all the time. Things have to come together. So, how does that determine the necessity of waiting and our sense of Hope?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?

2. What is the hardest part of waiting for you? How does it compare with people around you?
3. Have you ever tried to force things and it backfired?

### **Read Romans 12:12**

1. How is waiting related to Hope?
2. How important is it to remain in joy, patience, and faithfulness at the same time?

### **Read Isaiah 52:11-12**

1. What is the promise in this text, which is addressed to people in exile?
2. Does it indicate how soon it will happen?
3. How does knowing it will happen assist them in being patient?
4. Have you had experiences where you knew the outcome but knew you had to wait?  
What was it like? How is it like waiting to give birth?

### **Read Genesis 40-41**

1. There is a lot of waiting going on in this text. How does Joseph display his patience?  
What incentive did he have to wait?
2. How much of his patience was an expression of his character?
3. In Joseph's forecast about the abundance and the famine, what requirement of faith does that require to believe and embrace?
4. How normal is it for people to forget (the abundance) and lose patience?
5. Have you had the experience of forgetting blessings when you have faced hard times?

## **Week 5- Fulfillment**

We tend to think of fulfillment as the end of things. The delivery has been made. The order has been received. The best feeling we can experience has faded. And often it does mean those things. But when we talk about fulfillment of hope, especially fulfillment in Jesus's coming, it can mean more. What if fulfillment can also signal the start of something? What if it means the integration of a lot of disparate lines of thought to make sense of life? As we celebrate Jesus's coming we will talk about why Advent (arrival/beginning) means so much to our Christian walk.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. What would you say have been some of the most fulfilling times in your life? What made them so?
3. What do you look forward to at present?

### **Read Romans 2:7**

1. The "glory" that is mentioned doesn't mean glory for self. What does it mean? What is the fulfilling result of the persistence Paul talks about?

### **Read Luke 2:1-20**

1. In what ways was the birth of Jesus a fulfillment of God's promise to the people?
2. What extra signs are shown in this part of the story to emphasize the significance of Jesus's entrance into the world?
3. Jesus's birthday didn't just change things on that night. What else has changed because of that event? What did it put in motion?

### **Read Luke 10:1-24**

1. There is a sense of "What you said was true!" in this text. What have the disciples returned from?
2. How is what they have experienced on the road a confirmation of who Jesus was?
3. How does that confirmation serve as an encouragement for them to continue?



4. Part of Jesus's instructions for their mission have to do with a discipline they are to observe. What is it? How important is faithful discipline in our life to be able to experience what is promised?

## **II Peter 1:19**

1. How is hope displayed in this text for your life?

## Closing reflection:

Hope is not always about what we will be able to see ourselves. Countless times in history people have had to wait for something that they expected but weren't able to see. Moses didn't get to see the Promised Land. Many Israelites never returned from captivity. Many incarcerated people have had to wait before they were exonerated. Many slaves in the US never saw their own liberation. Is it worth anticipating, expecting and waiting for those things to happen, even if it is for others? Yes. Is it worth planting a tree under which you may never sit? In a culture where we expect instant results and want to experience the benefits directly, the faithful hope that people of faith can exhibit is counter-cultural to say the least. But it can be the foundation upon which hope can sustain society.