



"Celebrate Messiah: Hope Strongly"

Third Sunday of Advent
8:15 and 11:00 am Sunday, December 11, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 1:46b-55; Matthew 11:2-11

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

*"Congratulations!
Today is your day.
You're off to Great Places!
You're off and away!"*

*You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
any direction you choose."*

This is the beginning of one of my favorite books to read to my kids when it was time for them to go to bed, "Oh the Places You'll Go!" by Dr. Seuss. He was a good Lutheran by the way in case you didn't know that. This was the last book that he wrote before his death at the age of 87. In some ways, perhaps it is a reflection on all that he had done, and how he had inspired generations and generations of children. The message of the book is moving and hope filled. The basic premise for the book is for you and for me to embrace the journey of life, and when we embrace it fully we will find that, yes, we can even move mountains.

But, the book also recognizes that the journey can be hard at times. Life can be tough,

*There are bang-ups and hang-ups,
they can happen to you.
"You can get all hung-up
in a prickle-ly perch.
And your gang will fly on.
You'll be left in a Lurch.*

*You'll come down from the Lurch
with an unpleasant bump.
And the chances are, then,
that you'll be in a Slump
And when you're in a Slump,
you're not much fun.
Un-slumping yourself
is not easily done."*

The people of Israel were in a slump. At the time of Isaiah's prophecy, Israel had been disbursed through a number of foreign invasions and now finally the people were returning home. Some were coming home permanently and some were coming home in pilgrimage to be able to spend some time in worship in the Temple. They had to pass through foreign territories to get home, though, areas controlled by neighboring but hostile peoples which made that passage an unpleasant experience to say the least. They went on this pilgrimage because they were hopefully waiting and anticipating the Messiah; a messiah king who would come and restore God's people, and so they were encouraged by the words of Isaiah. These words where God would help the people who had weak hands and feeble knees, the people who had fearful hearts, those who were blind and death and lame. God would restore them and those people represented so many of the people in the pilgrim progressions and processions on their way to the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Isaiah tells us that God will give strength for them on their journey. But there are those who are traveling who are afraid. There are the people who are afraid of where God might take them. There are those who are blind to God. Isaiah says that they cannot see, they're blind, they have no vision. They refuse to open their eyes to the possibilities that God might be trying to offer them. But Isaiah says, God will open their eyes. God will give them ears to hear and to understand his holy purposes. And instead of road blocks, the way will be clear, the crooked paths they shall be made straight, obstacles will be removed by God's own hand and God will turn their fears and their tears into joy and gladness.

*"You'll find the bright places
where Boom Bands are playing.*

*With banner flip-flapping,
once more you'll ride high!
Ready for anything under the sky.
Ready because you're that kind of a guy!*

Oh, the places you'll go! There is fun to be done!"

It takes patience and endurance for such a trip as that. And so, the writer James in our second reading says that it will take patience and endurance, like a farmer waiting patiently for the harvest. The seeds have been planted, they have been watered, the sun has been out and now one waits. But we don't like to wait, do we? We get upset if we have to wait in line just a little bit as we're making our way through the Christmas lines trying to buy something for a loved one. We live a schizophrenic existence if we're really honest with ourselves. We want immediate gratification and yet we also sing a song in the church *"Ponder anew what the Almighty can do."* But do we really want that too? In either case, you don't get very far, on the one hand you might be living but just living without purpose, on the other hand you're just plain stuck.

Like Isaiah, James encourages the people not to fear but to be strong of heart. Why? Because the coming of the Lord is near. You and I can trust in God's promises and in trusting James encourages patience. Just a little while before we prayed for a spirit of patience to be with Julian. (Baptized that day) It's the same prayer that's been said for generations for those who have been baptized, with the hands of the pastor being laid on their heads, an act of confidence in God and in His promises.

The places we will go together! These are the promises given to the community of the Messiah. And yet, James cautions the church that when we journey, we do it together as community, a faith-filled community. And so, that means there is no room for gossip on this side of God's kingdom, not only is it part of the transgressions of the Ten Commandments, but James also says, that in the church we should stop our grumbling. Don't judge one another, seek unity and community, because as sure as I am standing here God sees what you do the shadows. And he is the judge standing at the door. We are to watch over and to care for one another as members of that community. We are to care about the things that Jesus cares about; bringing healing, forgiveness, having mercy, loving our neighbor, strongly living in hope. And it all begins with hope, you see. Because it is hope that makes the deserts of our souls bloom and fills our empty cups with overflowing springs. Our cup runneth over says the psalmist.

*"So, be sure when you step.
Step with care and great tact
and remember that Life's
a Great Balancing Act.
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.
And never mix up your right foot with your left.*

*And will you succeed?
Yes! You will, indeed!
(98 and ³/₄ percent guaranteed.*

KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!"

Hope strongly people of God. Our Messiah comes to take us places we cannot imagine, or can we? Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2016, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org