

## Advent: Hope | *Practicing Hope*

Ok we're going to play a little bit of a game right now. I'm going to show you a couple of videos, and you just guess what you think is going to happen. Ready? Ok here's the first one:

Ok – what do you think is going to happen here?

If you're together with others watching right now, maybe take a quick poll in the room, and see how many think this is going to end poorly, versus how many of you think it's going to work out ok!

And now let's see how it actually turns out.

Let's try another one now:

Ok – now you know I'm going to ask the same question: how do you think THIS situation is going to resolve? Good? Bad? Ugly?? Poll the room again if you can – and then let's check out the actual results.

As we heard earlier, the advent theme for this morning is Hope. In the most basic of terms, Hope is the practice of looking at a bad situation in front of you, and *believing hard* that good can still win.

It's amazing how we are so prone to do the opposite! We are REALLY good at imagining everything that could go wrong, at any given moment. We're experts, because we *practice* so much. And as is true of most things in life: what you feed grows, and what you starve dies. So let me ask you: **how often do you feed your hope?**

In the book of Romans the apostle Paul says:

***“Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!”***  
(Romans 15:13)

Hope, real hope, is something so much deeper and more powerful than simple optimism, or wishful thinking.

For hope to be real it has to be based in something true. There has to be a foundational source you can trust in, to make hope safe – otherwise you're just setting yourself up for heartbreak! As Christ-followers we **have** that foundational, and wholly trustworthy source. Our hope is in the nature and character of Jesus. The God of endless compassion, who holds all the days and moments and circumstances of our lives inside hands that have an ENDLESS number of ways of bringing good out of

even the worst of situations. It's often **we** who prevent **ourselves** from seeing those options, because we're just way more practiced at forecasting disappointment and disaster.

**So let's pause for a minute right now, and actually see if we can practice this – practice hoping.**

This time, rather than a funny blooper-type video, I want you to imagine a scene from your own life; a real situation where things are looking pretty crappy, where you **are** actually feeling hope-less. Somewhere that you've been mainly imagining disappointment, seeing no good outcomes on the horizon. Why don't you close your eyes right now and I'll give you a minute to think about it and see what comes to mind.

And now hold that situation together in your mind, along with the person and the presence of Jesus. Imagine him looking at it together with you. What would Jesus say, about what kind of hope maybe IS still left in this situation? What might Jesus be able to do with it, if we gave him all the pieces?

Allow yourself to indulge in some wild, ridiculous, over-the-top hope right now. Ask yourself – and really allow yourself to imagine: what is the **best** thing that **could** happen, with Jesus in the picture? What could it look like for love to actually win here?

Choosing hope as an intentional mindset is a powerful tool. But it really only changes your life... if you let it change your life. When you **live into** the reality, as if it were real **right now**. How would it change how you live and act in this moment, if you knew the story was going to end well? If you truly trusted God to bring good about, even when you don't know what that good might look like. How would it feel like to live that way? Could it even actually unleash WAY more of the love-winning outcomes we want, simply because we are more in tune with how to open those 'hope doors' – instead of slamming them shut? If you, like me, really want to experience that kind of living, I invite you to hold your hands open, like this, and let's pray.