




# *Trinity Presbyterian Church*

**2018 Advent Devotionals**



*but those who hope in the Lord  
will renew their strength. They  
will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow  
weary, they will walk and not  
be faint.*

*Isaiah 40:31*

# **TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

## **ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET 2018**

Ephesians 1:18-19: “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

Advent, the first season of the church year, begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. The word Advent means “coming.” Advent is not just a time to wait expectantly but also a time to prepare for the Christmas celebration.

This is the 14th issue of Trinity’s Advent Devotional Booklet. Since 2005, the Christian Education Committee has provided the congregation each year with a collection of devotions written by members of the Trinity family. The theme for this year’s booklet is HOPE.

Each devotion begins with a suggested scripture reading that refers to the theme of hope or is one of the lectionary choices for that date. These entries can be read for private devotions or shared out loud by the family for a shared devotional time. We hope that these devotions will bring you both inspiration and peace during this holiday season. We also hope they will draw you closer to your church family.

We give our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors who have shared their inspirational thoughts to help all of us better prepare once again for God’s gift of Love, His Son, Jesus Christ. Thanks also to Carol Corson, Shelley Wheeler, and the church office staff for their work editing and publishing this year’s booklet.

The Christian Education Committee

## **“Prepare The Way for The Lord”**

On this day, 14 years ago, Trevor and I were in the hospital holding our, only hours old, precious baby girl. I remember this day like it was yesterday. We held her almost all day sitting in the hospital bed watching tv. I remember feeling such love for my little family.

I can't predict her future and as much as I want to protect her, I try to let her choose her own path. My hope is that she holds tight to God and follows his desires for her life.

This Advent we again celebrate the birth of a special baby, Jesus. Imagine the joy and excitement and anticipation of this savior's birth and the hope that all the believers had for this tiny baby.

This same hope and excitement exists today, in this Advent season. Today, wake up and feel the hope that Jesus Christ brings to your life today. Feel the love that Christ has for you. Find hope in the birth of new children, in new opportunities, and in new beginnings, for in everything we can find a reason to praise God. God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good.

Brooke Tucker

**Prayer: God, Today we come before you with prayers of Thanksgiving. We thank you for new beginnings and the new hope that each day brings. We are grateful that your love and mercy is new every day. Prepare our hearts to once again celebrate the birth of our Savior. Amen**

## Hope and Change

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

As I sit and write this, change in my life (and Steve's) is afoot. We have made the decision to move to Colorado to be closer to our children and grandchildren. Our house is on the market. . .and we are hoping that it will sell. . .but not too soon. I have things I still hope to do in Palm Coast; people I hope to see; walks I hope to take along the ocean.

Twenty years ago we came to Palm Coast, looking for a vacation home. We had no idea that, within three years, we would be permanent residents. And I thought permanent would be permanent. Things and times change, but I remain hopeful that God will bless this transition as He has blessed ALL the others.

Being a part of Trinity was one of those blessings. The opportunities that were opened for me were by God's bountiful hand. They were more than I could ever have imagined, let alone hoped for. I will carry the joy and love I have experienced at Trinity with me wherever I may go.

Karen Thomas

Dr. Beebe shared the Merton Prayer with the Circle Bible Study Leaders.

**"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."**  
Thomas Merton

## Plans, Hope and a Future

Jeremiah was writing to the exiles in Babylon to reassure them of God's plans for His Chosen People and to tell them that they would prosper in Babylon and return to Israel after 70 years. Therefore, the exiles could be assured they had a future and hope.

It's like God is saying, "Trust me, I have everything under control. I know your situation stinks, but I know what I'm doing. I have your best interest in mind."

After "googling" the meaning of this verse, I found this paragraph in an Ezine article by Zirkon Kalti:

*The meaning of Jeremiah 29:11 is that God has a wonderful plan for his people. Christians who follow God's plan can live a successful life. God has different plans and callings for every one of his children. His plan for us does not necessarily mean that he wants us to be rich and have all that our hearts' desire. His plan for us is that we do what is according to his will. To find out what is God's plan for your life, you must seek God for yourself through prayer.*

So, maybe Jeremiah 29:11 isn't about God's specific day to day plan. Instead, it is a message of hope. God knows what's best for us.

And, as I was praying and thinking what I could write, this thought kept going through in my mind. (God's little nudge, maybe?) There is also a plan for Trinity Presbyterian Church and that He knows our situation. Therefore, Trinity can be assured He has plans for good not for harm. Pray and Trust Him! What a message of hope!

Jane Gaulding, Elder and Deacon

**Prayer: God, please remind us to trust you as you have a plan, a hope and a future for all of us as you know what's best in our lives and that of your Church.**

## **Hope lives on in all of us**

Hope is when you are only 5 years old, you have never seen your biological father, and you HOPE that one day you will come to know him and learn about him.

My biological Dad, Lt. Robert Jensen, was the pilot of a B-25 in the Pacific during WWII. He didn't make it back. He died 2 months before I was born and interred at the Punchbowl Military Cemetery in Hawaii. I was often asked, in primary school, "Where's your Dad?" I always answered, "My Dad is in Heaven." I had been told about his bomb raids, crashing north of Hong Kong; being buried by the local Chinese so that the Japanese could not find and desecrate the bodies. I also knew that after the war, his remains were recovered and taken to Hawaii to be interred. As a former USAF pilot, I first visited Dad's grave site coming back from a mission in Vietnam. That's all I knew about my Dad.

However, in 2006, I received a call from a cousin I had never known, Chris, on the Jensen side of the family. He had been looking for me for over 20 years. He had been looking for Robert Jensen Jr., not a Pearson. My mother had remarried when I was 6 years old to Pastor John Pearson, the best Dad in the world!

Cousin Chris and I had a long and interesting conversation, but the short story is that a reunion of Dad Jensen's Bomb Squadron was going to take place the next week in Maine. I was on the next plane. Along with Chris, I met 3 of my father's flying buddies. One of them was Lynn Daker, who showed me a painting of a ditched B-25 in the Pacific waters. He pointed to a survivor in the water...."That's your Dad." Wow! At this reunion, I was able to talk with Daker and the other 2 pilots and learn so much more about my biological Dad.

Fast forward to this past summer of 2018... Before Julie and I left to spend August and September in Colorado, I was looking at that painting- a little sad, realizing that the 3 flying buddies that I knew from my Dad's flying career were no longer with us.

But, while in Colorado, I got a call from Cousin Chris. He had learned of someone else that my Dad had flown with who was still alive? Irving Horowitz is 97 years old and blind. I called him and once again had a wonderful conversation, learning even more about my biological father. Irving told me that he was the navigator on that B-25 that had ditched in the Pacific. It was his last mission. My Dad was the co-pilot and it was his first mission. Irving relayed the story that upon impact, he had broken both wrists, his collarbone, and a rib or two. He couldn't move to get out and was certain he would drown. He said my Dad swam back and got him out of the plane to his safety of the life raft. He wanted me to know that my Dad had most certainly saved his life!

As a 5 year old, I had truly HOPED to learn more about my biological Dad. At 73 years old, I'm very grateful that my HOPE was realized, yet I am still HOPING to know more about my father, Bob Jensen... The "Circle of Life" continues.

**Bob "Jensen" Pearson**

## A New Song

In today's lectionary reading, Zechariah praises God after months of silence. Zechariah's silence was the result of his disbelief in the angel Gabriel's message. Zechariah was told that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a baby. How did he manage to stay calm during those months of silence? Did he ever despair? Zechariah was a priest and known as a righteous man. When the baby was born, Zechariah wrote on a tablet informing their neighbors and relatives that the baby's name would be John. Suddenly, his mouth was opened and he became filled with the Holy Spirit. He praised God and prophesied that one day this special son, John, would prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

When my children were young, we watched a 1985 television mini-series based on the book *Anne of Green Gables*. Actress Colleen Dewhurst played the part of Marilla Cuthbert, who takes in the young orphan Anne. In one particular scene, Anne is having a bad day. In fact, she's in the depths of despair. Anne turns to Marilla, and asks her if she can't at least imagine being in the depths of despair. I was struck by Marilla's response – "No I cannot. To despair is to turn your back on God."

Like Anne, I have experienced rough days; yet, I found myself remembering Marilla's words. I've learned to rely on daily scripture reading, devotional reading, and music to provide hope for each day. Psalm 98:1 tells us to "sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things." Zechariah sang a new song after months of silence! I learned to sing a new song after my first husband passed away. God gives us a new song when children marry, when we are blessed with grandchildren, and even when we're sick. The important thing is to sing a song – a new song of faith and hope, regardless of the circumstances in which I find myself. All I have to do is ask Him for a new song each day.

Karen Walker

***Prayer: Musical God, each day is filled with moments of pure joy. I give you thanks for the gift of community. Please bless me with a new song that will strengthen my bonds with others. Amen.***

## **Hope in Grim Times**

Today's date will not have escaped the notice of many readers: December 7; the date that lives in infamy; Pearl Harbor. Though most will recognize the significance of the date, fewer and fewer can say they actually remember the day. Though in 1941 I was only 5 years old, I have a vivid memory of that Sunday. I was very ill and feverish (it was probably scarlet fever). I can picture our living room; I was wrapped in a blanket, lying on a couch. My parents and two older sisters were gathered around the large, floor-model radio, listening intently to the announcer. I was fading in and out, not really understanding the speaker, but I clearly heard him say, over and over again, the words "Pearl Harbor". I had never heard of Pearl Harbor before, and thought he was talking about a lady named Pearl, since I was aware of it as a woman's name.

December 7, 1941 was, of course, not the beginning of The War (to persons of a certain age "The War" always means World War II), but only America's entry into the war. European nations had been fighting for well over two years, and war in Asia even longer. As I was to learn later, this was a very grim time; for those nations who were to soon become our allies, things had not been going well at all; for Europe and China these were certainly the grimmest of times. And our own nation was ill-prepared for war. Besides, we were just coming out of a long, deep, economic depression. In fact, for my parents, until my Dad left the farm and went to work in a war factory, it was still the Depression.

Grim times, indeed. But December 7 was a Sunday, the second Sunday in Advent that year; and what is Advent but a time of Hope? Hope for the coming of the Savior, with the second meaning for us today of the return of our Savior. And He did come, and His return is the source of hope for all of us in grim times, whether those are grim times for the world or for us personally, hope is what keeps us going. Whatever grim times come to you, never lose sight of the Hope that is central to this season, the season of Advent.

The wonders of the Internet allow me to look at the newspaper from my home town, Marshfield, Wisconsin in 1941; I find that only a few days after Pearl Harbor, on December 11, the Ladies Aid Society of First Presbyterian Church of Marshfield held a baked chicken supper. What better expression of hope can there be than Presbyterians having a chicken supper?

**Del Smith**

**Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that nothing can happen to me today that you and I together can't handle. Amen.**



## Hope in the midst of Darkness

It was the Thanksgiving season in Vermont. A time of family gathering with a cozy fire in the fireplace and a time to count our blessings together. Advent was right around the corner with the time for preparing our hearts and minds for the true meaning of Christmas and getting the Christmas cookies and decorations ready at the same time. Our first born daughter was preparing her heart and mind for the birth of her first born son. It was at this time that she and her husband were told that their son might need fetal or in-utero kidney surgery. The new life, so tiny and fragile was at risk. It was a time of watching and waiting, praying and hugging, tears and consolations.

The hope for a healthy pregnancy had been strong and now it was threatened. Faith was tested. God was there. He was speaking to us but we were having trouble hearing Him at first.

Medical decisions were not forthcoming fast enough for our racing hearts and minds. What could we do to find Hope in this situation? God gave us Hope through our continuous prayers.

There were no guarantees from the medical profession..... but there was God!

God supplies us with Hope, which arms us with faith which then opens the door to peace. That is where faith comes in, as we feel his arms wrapping around us, like a father to his family. Our baby needed to be carried through this difficult time by God and we needed our faith to sustain our hopes for his healthy future.

We prayed together fervently that Christmas season for our as-yet-unnamed grandchild, for his health and successful delivery.

We felt the Hope which led the way to strengthen our faith through two more frigid months until Gabriel was brought into this world by God. God continues to bless this beautiful child through his many surgeries, his brilliant doctors and his loving parents.

The Hope and Faith in what we cannot see, sustains us and grants us peace.

Laurie Harrison

**Prayer: Dear Father, please help us to cling to the knowledge that you are the Hope of the world. This Hope is our pathway to strengthening our faith when we cannot see. Your all seeing, all-knowing power is beyond our understanding and we find peace and solace in your Everlasting Arms. Amen.**

## Hope in God's Promise

*music and lyrics by Geoff Moore*

*In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song.*

*This Cornerstone, this solid ground, Firm through the fiercest drought and storm*

*What heights of love, what depths of peace! When fears are stilled, when strivings cease*

*My Comforter, my All in All, Here in the love of Christ I stand...*

Upon what do I rely? Upon whom? Who is my light, my strength, my song?  
Who is my Cornerstone? My Comforter?

We allow our careers to define us; ask our families to provide us with hope and security; see our house as measure of success, our toys and activities become our treasures. They all become our idols. And they aren't very reliable ones. Any joy we think they provide is temporal and temporary. There is no peace, no lasting joy.

It is not always easy to hear the voice of God. In the competing cacophony, where is the still, small voice? How do we tune in to his voice? Prayer. Recently I heard a wise one say "All you need to know about God is that you are not It." Talk to God. Pour out your heart. God already knows, but you need to say it! It's spiritual exercise that makes you stronger. God already promised he hears you. And God keeps those promises!

...No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man Can ever pluck me from his hand  
Til he returns or calls me home, Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

Linda McClelland

**Prayer: Our Cornerstone, our Comforter: help us to focus on what is important, lasting, eternal. Help us make our decisions based on eternal life rather than earthly concerns. Thank you for the hope you gave us in the gift of your son Jesus. Amen.**

## **Count Your Blessings**

When Jon and I were a young married couple and had our children, we began the Christmas traditions as a family. I baked Spritz cookies, we had a fresh tree which we all decorated, I did the lights, we all put on the balls and Jon did tinsel one strand at a time. During all of this, the Ray Conniff CD was playing. My favorite song was Count Your Blessings. "When you're weary and you can't sleep, just count your blessings instead of sheep and you'll fall asleep counting your blessings."

Once the children went off to college, they came home at holidays but the anticipation and surprise were missing. The gifts were more practical and no lists for Santa. We had been busy raising our family and we went back to college. When the dust settled, Jon and I got to know each other again. I realized that there was something missing in my life. My belief in God had escaped. I decided to try church first. From there, I joined a Bible Study group given at the church on Sundays. I again accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Each day since then, I have grown in my service to the Lord and am in 2 Bible Studies.

Now the children are grown and have grown children of their own. All three families still have the Ray Conniff CD which we all play at the holidays. I am spending Thanksgiving with my son and his family in Connecticut. Their will be Spritz cookies in my suitcase.

When I chose Hebrew 13:15, it just seemed right to me. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." As this Advent season begins and leads us to the birth of our dear Baby Jesus, may I wish you all hope and joy. Don't forget to count your blessings!

**Carol Graff**

**Prayer: May peace and joy enter each of our hearts during the celebration of the birth of the holy Child. May we carry that with us each day. Thank you for your love, dear Jesus. Amen**

## **LIVE OUR LIFE WITH HOPE**

As I thought about our theme this year – **HOPE** – a couple of ideas came to mind but I decided to look up the definition. Much to my surprise the word “hope” is both a noun and a verb. As a noun it can be used as a desire or expectation, i.e. *“our only hope for victory.”* The verb also implies desire or expectation, i.e. *“I hope she remembers.”* In both instances it is the anticipation that something good will happen.

Luke 21: 29-38 is the Parable of the Fig Tree that Jesus tells to predict his second coming. As the fig tree is budding, we know that summer is coming. We need to be ready all of the time for his second coming. He warns us not to get distracted with our worldly life, but to keep our spiritual life in focus.

A girlfriend of mine has a dog named “Hope”. She was a Rescue Dog who was severely mistreated in an earlier life. Even after three years in a loving and stable home, Hope still trembles at loud sounds. A door bell or loud voice will send her scurrying into another room, or clinging to her owner. When visiting we can always find Hope near her or at least, in her line of sight. Recently my friend posted a picture of Hope sunning herself in the backyard - ALONE. A sign that her life is no longer “hope-less.”

How many times in our lives have we experienced hopelessness? Only through prayer and our actions can we overcome that feeling.

Muriel Fallon

**Prayer: “Lord, may we face life realistically so that when death does come, we may be prepared.” By William Benner, Temple, Texas in *These Days***

## **God's in the Drivers Seat**

In Jeremiah 29, the Lord says he has plans for us-- plans to give us hope and a future. For the Waugamans, hope has been the benchmark of our lives together. Hope that God's plan for us is the "driver" through life. Our hope and belief in God's plan began over 59 years ago. If you saw the movie *An Officer and a Gentleman*, then you know the story: a blind date during Officer Candidate School, a young soldier from Pittsburgh meets a Georgia girl through a phone call by third party, and there was indeed a plan that took us through all those ensuing years. Hope for four children through 17 physical moves, many different schools, moving wherever broadcasting business took us; dealing with typical parent-children relationships, including several cases of alcoholism, depression, and failed marriages.

Hope always kept us positive and moving forward. Hope helped us welcome six wonderful and healthy grandchildren, in whose lives we play an active role. Hope and faith in God has permitted us to stay positive. Hope makes the fulfillment of God's plan for us possible. Hope in God's plan has moved us through life's detours: the peaks, but particularly the valleys we've encountered. Psalm 23 says hope for us.

As we take part in another Advent Season, may your hope in God's eternal plan provide strength for you in your daily journey as faith in God's plan has provided such strong hope in our daily lives.

**John & Betty Jean Waugaman**

## Hope to the Rescue

*And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out God's love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom God has given us.*

I'm writing this about a week after Hurricane Michael ravaged the Florida Panhandle. I watched the minute by minute reporting by news people on site as the eye of the hurricane passed over them. Then the next day, the pictures of the devastation of Mexico Beach and Panama City seemed unreal.

Many people who had just lost everything were interviewed and I was struck by their feelings that ranged from hopelessness to hopeful. Some were in such shock and despair that they could not even respond to the interviewers questions. Others were already talking about rebuilding. I wondered how that difference in outlook could be explained. I wondered how I would respond in a similar situation.

Many neighbors and outside groups began rushing in to attend to the immediate needs of the people and to the destroyed infrastructure. It was amazing to see people of different faiths, different skin colors and different political outlooks working together to bring help to their fellow human beings to relieve their suffering and to bring them some sense of hope.

It's also inspiring to me to see the financial support given to those organizations on the front lines after this disaster. These groups include or own *Presbyterian Disaster Assistance* teams.

In difficult times when all seems lost, Christians need to remember that our future destiny is assured by God's love. And that is our HOPE!

Ross Royce

## **I Thank You Lord**

“How Do I Love Thee” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1806-1861

How Do I Thank Thee Lord.....let me count the ways...

I THANK YOU

*for being born into a loving family 85 years ago*

*for having a younger brother Michael and two younger sisters, Louise and Joyce*

*for meeting and marrying a loving man whom I married 66 years ago, Robert better known as Bob*

*for being blessed with three wonderful children, Leslie Gay, Christopher Rob and Kymberlee Ann*

*Leslie was taken from us to be with You in 2016 and her husband Bill four months later for the wonderful places we have lived our lives with loving friends and family, Hillside, N.J., Middletown, N.J., Lewisburg, Pa., Naples, Florida and now Palm Coast, Florida;*

*for all the wonderful churches we have been an active part in, some small (Hillside, N.J.) and some very large, Tower Hill, Red Bank, N.J.) serving as an usher, Sunday School teacher, working on Christian Education committee, working on Vacation Bible School, Holiday Fair, Elder, and Clerk of Session;*

*for all the wonderful places we have had the opportunity to see and experience in and out of our great country; for shopping at Harrod's department store, London, England, at their one day annual sale; for Bob's and my good health and the ability to serve in so many different venues; for being part of the Palm Coast Garden Club and the Palm Coast Arranger's Guild for being able to dig in my garden and plant and watch it grow; for being able to enjoy water color painting; for all of this and so much more.....*

*And I will thank you to the end of my journey . . . .*

**Edwina J. Tabit**

*Dear Lord continue to walk with me and be my guide in all things. Amen*

## **Knee Surgery**

Trying to sleep was impossible. My pain was at a clear “8”. I moved out to the couch to toss and turn without bothering my husband. Every cell in my body was on edge and I prayed and prayed, but the pain kept distracting me. I knew God was with me but my senses seemed numb. Hours went by, the severe discomfort never leaving my consciousness.

In an instant a new sensation hit my body. The warmest ray of sunlight hit my face and suddenly my numbness transformed to a feeling of comfort. The heat of the sunlight permeated my entire body. The sun was rising, coming through the patio doors. It warmed my pained body, distracted mind, and depressed spirit. I knew it would be okay. God sent me the message of hope by way of sunshine.

I will always remember this: Hope is only a sunrise away. Thank you God. Thank you for always being with me although I am distracted with worldly concerns. Hope is in me, through you.

Amen

Tracy Martin

\* Hopefully by the time this is published I will be pain free!



## **Hope and Renewal**

“Hopeless” is a word I rarely hear anymore and one that I don’t ever remember having used in conversation. In today’s world there is a definite aversion to that much negativity, even (especially!) with the recent hurricane damages. Somewhere between praying for God’s loving presence during the storm and the feeling of relief after the storm has passed, HOPE is reborn. We are all concerned with praying for those towns and families affected by the storms right now and I, for one, was very impressed with how quickly various forms of assistance were being sent to the affected areas...answers to basic needs, essential to keeping HOPE alive.

Hebrews 12 was one of the last verses that my mother suggested I become familiar with before she passed away. Each time in the past when I had bragged to her about having memorized something new in the Bible, she would suggest a new passage to focus on. Hebrews 12:18 wasn’t the same format as the Lord’s Prayer or the Beatitudes or Ecclesiastes, etc., but it was just as poetic and meaningful to me growing up.

People often hesitate to tell their personal stories of rebirth and renewal, thinking that others will get tired of hearing about it. The reality is that the simple writing/telling of the story oftentimes inspires HOPE in others. We can still pick and choose which stories we share, but what is important is that we DO share.

**Maudie Parker**

**Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the many opportunities you give us to share HOPE with others. May we always present as your HOPE-ful people, and not as victims.**

## **Pursue Your Hope**

Each one of us is a wonderful gift of God both to your family and to all the world. Remember it always, especially when the cold winds of doubt and discouragement fall upon your life. There is always hope.

Be not afraid of anyone or anything when it comes to living your life most fully. Pursue your hopes and your dreams. Avoid those sour pessimists who listen to your dreams and hopes and then say, "Yeah, but what if ..." The heck with "what if" ..... "Just do it!" One of the worst things in life is to say "I would have; I could have; I should have." Take risks. Make mistakes.

Make a list of all those things you want to do - travel to new places and include visiting a foreign country. Don't wait until you have "enough" money or until everything is "just right". Learn a new skill, master another language. Make the list long and do some things from it every year. Don't say "I'll do it tomorrow" (or next month or next year). Tomorrow is not promised. There is no right time except now.

Read books – as many as you can! They are a wonderful source of delight, wisdom and inspiration. They need no batteries or connections and they can go anywhere.

Live in harmony with nature. Go into the outdoors, the mountains, the sea, the desert. It's important for your soul. My husband and I recently returned from a trip to our National Parks. It was life changing and indeed moved our souls. Hope and believe in God, the angels and saints. Remember, God is always with you.

Helene Read

**Prayer: Dear God, help me to hear you saying above all other voices "I am your hope." Fill me up with hope and remind me today that hope is an unbreakable spiritual lifeline to you my Lord Jesus, Amen.**

## **A Father's Hope**

As a parent to two teen boys, "hope" takes on new meanings every day. I hope I'm being the father these two boys need. I hope they are making good friends who respect them. I hope my sons are loyal friends. I hope I am preparing them for the day they become a father.

Above all though, I hope my sons realize the church in which they are being raised is a church who will always envelop them in open arms in times of need. It is a church which teaches them lessons like we see in Romans 8:28.

Parenting in 2018 is not the same thing as what my parents experienced with me in 1988. Nor is it the same as what my grandparents experienced with my parents in, say, 1958. These are different times, in a different world, with different pitfalls and dangers. I realize I do not have all the answers for my sons, and I often tell them I'm sorry for not being able to be what they might need at times. I hope I'm not screwing things up, but I honestly don't know. I won't know until they are out on their own and have their own families. I hope they find a life partner as good as the one I found. The two of us make a heck of a team and my admiration goes to those parents who are doing this all on their own.

But I hope my sons come to realize what a powerful word "hope" is. Hope is believing. Hope is what helps you get out of bed in the morning to take on the next day. Hope is what can change the world for the better.

Jason Wheeler

***Prayer: Dear Lord, I thank you for giving me hope, for the hopeless are those who do not feel your presence. I pray hope remains in my heart and that it never leaves. When I have hope, I have belief in You and the power You have in my life.***

## **Finding Your Peaceful Place**

I was raised in a Christian home attending church, Sunday School and a 2 year Catechism class where we memorized many Bible verses. For as long as I can remember, the 23rd Psalm was my very favorite verse. Knowing that the Lord (and mom) would watch over me, and mom teaching me to appreciate what I had, was comforting. I loved the thought of lying down in green grass and/or being near water. I didn't have many worries growing up, but I would always recite these verses when things weren't going well.

As I got older the entire Psalm 23 took on a whole new meaning. I felt God's hand in guiding me with my life. College decisions changed and I made choices on my profession. I met Bill at church after thinking I would never find a 'good' guy. Then, I walked through the valley of the shadow of death (praying the whole time) and feared no evil during Tiffany's short life on earth. Although it was a very painful time, I knew that God would not let go of me, as he took her. God took one of his children to comfort, care for and keep her safe, all the while loving and comforting me through many special people here on earth.

I know that goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life as long as I put my hope and trust in God. As I get stressed or worried, I always go back to those special places from Psalm 23:1-2. I try to remember that I shall not want —as he does lead me to my peaceful places.

**Libbie Butler**

**During this special advent season, I pray that you, my church family, find hope, peace, and comfort from God who is our shepherd. Advent is a time of waiting and as the verse ends, " and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Christmas comes and our Savior is born. We have hope.**

## **God Never Fails**

*"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from helping me from the words of my groaning?*

*O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;*

*and by night, but find no rest.*

*Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel..."*

"Why is this happening to me?" we ask. Why are we ill, have financial worries, a dissolving marriage, disappointing children? Why do the burdens of others weigh so heavily on me? Why do my friends desert, my loved ones die? Christ himself on the cross expressed this same humanity. "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Yet, even in his darkest hour he proclaimed the saving love of God: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Similarly, it is our conviction of the hope that is in God that we, too, can rise over suffering and glimpse the eternal kingdom.

My sister was dying, leaving me as the last surviving member of my birth family. "I am losing the last person on earth who has known me my whole life," I wailed, feeling despair and isolation. God heard my cry. Psalm 139 reminds me of the hope in God who "knows when I sit down and when I get up", who "discerns my thoughts", who "is acquainted with all my ways." Yes, my birth family is gone. Yet I have the comfort in knowing that God, who has known me forever, will never leave me!

As Christians, we don't avoid the sufferings of this life. Certainly that was true of Christ, upon whom we look for how we are to live. And yet, as Christians, we never have to bear that suffering alone. Our hope is in God who made our deepest sufferings his own in the gift of his Son.

**Linda McClelland**

**Prayer: Holy Lord, help us be mindful of you as the source of the hope that never fails us. Amen.**

## Hope for the Christian

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Wow! That scripture was the one that caught my attention when I started my early journey with Christ. It was simple, to the point, and with very little room for interpretation. God did not want to forsake us; he wanted us to be in his kingdom. Through his son, Jesus, I would have eternal life in Heaven.

Over my years as a Christian I have clung to those words in John 3:16. God Loves Me! When you love someone, that love motivates you to give. God loved us so much that he gave us a part of himself-Jesus.

Giving and *doing good* keeps me focused on what matters in life. The feeling that I get from helping others is wonderful. That wonderful happiness is what fuels my courage to face whatever comes my way. As a matter of fact, I look forward to how God will help me figure out a situation.

My past services to the Family Life Center, to Daytona State College, to my Delta Gamma sorority, to my TPC church family, has given me a place to continue showing how hope and God's promise of eternal life will bring me happiness and contentment.

The moment I accepted God as part of my life I knew that my life will not end with death but will continue beyond. Why? Because God Loves me.

Kelly Jebbia

***Prayer: Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.*** Hebrews 10:23

## For Nothing is Impossible with God

Gabriel sure was busy in the beginning verses of Luke Chapter 1! First a visit to Zechariah as he performed his priestly duties in the temple. When Gabriel appeared, verse 12 says that Zechariah was startled and was gripped with fear. The reassuring words of Gabriel "Do Not Be Afraid". His proclamation of a coming son followed with even instruction as to the name of this son, John. How could this be? Zechariah and Elizabeth were no spring chickens, but the reassurance of their prayers being heard and the description of what kind of man John would be must have filled the couple with such HOPE! Still how could this be? Doubt set in the mind of Zechariah and of course we know the result.

Next Gabriel visits Mary and again he reassures her, "Do not be afraid." He tells her the amazing news and also tells her to give her son the name Jesus. How can this be? She is a virgin! Can we imagine how Mary processed the explanation of how she would conceive this child? Her response, "I am the Lord's servant." As Gabriel brings Mary up to date with the news of her relative Elizabeth, Mary decides a visit is in order. As soon as Elizabeth hears Mary's voice, the baby in her womb 'leapt for joy!'

This story is well known to us, yet as I read these verses and think of what those visits from Gabriel were like... I thought of the months that followed as the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary progressed. What amazing HOPE they must have felt.

During this Christmas season as we reflect on the wonderful gifts from God the Father, I remembered the words of a favorite hymn by Edward Mote.. *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness...When He shall come with trumpet sound- Oh may I then in Him be found....Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne!*

Jane Lippian

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for the blessed hope of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

## **Rejoice in hope of the glory of God**

In 1970 Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, left the Federal Government and came to the University of Georgia to be Professor of International Law at the University of Georgia School of Law. At that time I was the Coordinator of Social Studies in Athens, GA, overseeing Social Studies curriculum for 15 schools. To say I was amazed is short of describing my real feelings when the Superintendent of Schools rang my office (upstairs from his) to tell me Dean Rusk was on his way to my office and wanted to discuss with me setting up a meeting with my high school and middle school teachers and he would tell me about it. Right away the Superintendent and Dean Rusk were at my door. My thought was, "here is a man who has rubbed elbows with President Kennedy, President Johnson, and numerous world leaders and he is in my office!" Oh, my!

He was a very impressive man, not because of his stature, or handsome good looks, but his demeanor. He acted like he was my next door neighbor. We shook hands and after some introductory comments he told me his reason for coming. He was very concerned about our young people losing hope. The atomic bomb had been dropped in 1945. It was 25 years later and he believed many of the suicides and "lost" young people had lost hope in the world. His belief was that the longer time elapsed the less likely an atomic (or hydrogen) bomb would be dropped again. He wanted teachers to help restore hope and faith in the future of the world. His father was a Presbyterian minister, and he was definitely a man of faith. As secretary of state he had been quoted as saying, "When you solve a problem, you ought to thank God and go on to the next task." The teachers were impressed with his message about hope. Having hope allows people to set goals and develop strategies to move forward with positive expectations. People without hope feel despair and discouragement finding little to live for.----- Drug use, suicide and depression are some of the results of such lack of hope.

Christian hope is in God who simply loves us, always seeking us to come to him. He sent us his son, who lived, died and rose again, defeating death that we might have eternal life. Paul said in Romans 15:13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Lois Settles**

**Prayer: Our Father God, help us to always remember at the worst of times that you are there for us and give us hope. Amen**



## **“Our Hopeful Expectations”**

At an early age Christmas is about opening presents. Every child is, as often am I, consumed by seeing what's in the wrapping and this time of hopeful waiting adds to the excitement and sometimes frustration. We think about what's in the wrapping again, perhaps frustrating, especially if one knows what is in the wrapping. The Advent season has hopefully provided us again the opportunity to wait once again on the expected unexpected gift to be unwrapped on Christmas morning to be unwrapped and then again on Easter morning. Advent is a gift to wait upon the One who has come and will come again. This is the hope in which we live, and move, and have our being.

We all have the tendency to think of the birth of Christ as simply an event that happened way back in those days. But the birth of Christ is to mean so much more for us. The birth fulfills God's promise of great joy and provides us with hope.

Our assurance of pardon often asks the question: Who is a position to condemn? Our assurance is; Only Christ. Christ died for us, Christ rose again for us. Christ reigns in power for us. Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life is gone and a new life has begun. Believe the Good News of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Through the season of Advent we have been gearing up for the day ahead. Our Advent journey has been a time of letting go. A time of letting *the things of the Earth grow strangely dim*, so that we might set our focus on the “Light of Light”. The symbol of light is at the heart of Christian faith. We are reminded the promised hope of gospel that, Jesus is “the Light of the world” and those who follow Him “will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life”.

Rev. Dr. Jeff Beebe

*“Hope is willing to leave unanswered questions unanswered and unknown futures unknown. Hope makes you see God's guiding hand not only in the gentle and pleasant moments, but also in the shadows of disappointment and darkness.”* Henri Nouwen

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