

Sermon on Advent Sunday 2025

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: Isaiah 2. 1-5 & Matthew 24. 36-44

Make hope normal

Fun fact: there is a campsite just outside the town of Hope, Idaho, called 'Beyond Hope'!

I wonder, if like me, you occasionally find yourself pitched somewhere beyond hope?

Just when you think the world can't get more cruel, more unfair, more unfathomable, it does.

Zack Polanski, leader of the Green Party has been campaigning recently under the slogan 'Let's make hope normal again'. I love that.

Hope feels like it's in short supply. Our default more often is to despair, or become jaded, numb, apathetic. It's tempting sometimes to just batten down the hatches and withdraw.

And yet Advent requires that we resist that temptation; that we make hope our new normal.

Which might feel a little ironic because lots of the readings in

Advent can, on the surface of it, seem very doom n' gloom; very end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it.

And that's because one of the themes of Advent *is* the end of this world as we know it. The Second Advent or Second Coming of Christ promises an end to this present world order, and the renewal of justice and peace.

In our reading today, Jesus is speaking about this. And it will happen, he says, when we least expect it; 'Like a thief in the night'. So, keep watch and be ready; in other words, make hope normal.

But what is hope, true hope?

Well, it's not wishful thinking; cross our fingers, hope it'll all work out. Christian hope is built on the promises and the character of the Promised One, Jesus' whole life and message were about a kingdom coming, a reign of peace and justice breaking in; a hopeful kingdom that comes in the midst of hopelessness.

Some of you know that I'm a big fan of the musician Nick Cave. Now, Nick is no stranger to tragedy. He lost two sons within the space of a few years, and that devastation changed him forever. It could have destroyed him but within the grief of it all, unexpectedly, he discovered hope. In one of his books, he describes hope as a warrior emotion: It's 'optimism with a broken heart'.

‘This means,’ he says, ‘that hope has an earned understanding of the sorrowful and corrupted nature of things, yet it rises to attend to the world even still’. The biggest impediment, he believes, is defeatism and despair. Hope, he says, is an emotional temper that ‘emboldens the heart to be *active*. It is a feat of the imagination, both courageous and ingenious, a vitality that inspires us to take innovative action to defend the world. Hope is essential to our survival and our flourishing’.

So, hope is not passive. Hope doesn’t sit back and wait for a Second Coming. Hope is a courageous choice to be active in defending the world from despair. It’s a defiant and courageous optimism that chooses to believe in goodness and kindness regardless.

Hope is daring to see beauty amidst the brokenness of life and choosing to imagine and work for a different world. It is the energy of change.

You might have heard recently about a beautiful example of hope. The senseless destruction of the Sycamore Gap tree, which had stood for over 120 years in a gap in Hadrian’s Wall, was a willful and needless act of vandalism which both shocked and saddened so many. Two years later, this month, a charity called ‘Trees of Hope’ have planted, across the British Isles, the first 49 saplings grown from seeds rescued from the Sycamore Gap tree.

Hope is believing in the power of small things, like rescued seeds, like small acts of kindness; like brave acts of resistance.

Cynicism and despair are easy. Hope is hard, because it makes demands on us.

I want to suggest something that might seem a bit radical. When Christ spoke of his Second Coming, could he have also meant *us*? Could it be that he's returning in every redemptive or loving act, in every small resistance in the darkness. Could we be the Second Coming?

We can create hope for others, some of whom we might never meet, through our kindness and our giving; like donating to the [Hertford Pantry Appeal](#), for instance, for new toys for children living below the poverty line this Christmas. We can pass hope on.

And underneath, underpinning everything, is the energy of change we call prayer. Never, ever underestimate the power of prayer. Prayer creates hope. Prayer changes things because first of all it changes us.

You'll perhaps have heard me tell a story before about a young Robert Louis Stephenson who, as a young boy, would watch the lamplighter light the street gaslights by hand. When asked by his nanny what he was doing, he replied, 'Look at that man, he's punching holes in the darkness'.

This is what we do when we pray. In hope, we defiantly punch holes in the darkness, so the light can get through. So, I'd like to set a challenge for us all this Advent morning. As you came in, you'll have received a card with some prayers to say at the

beginning and end of each day in Advent. They can also be found in the [Christmas](#) section of the website. It begins with lighting a candle, a little hole in the darkness. I'd invite you to use these every day during this season, as a way of making hope normal again, not just for us, but for a world that needs reminding of the light that shines despite everything.

