

**Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of
“The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016**

**Presented by Rev. Kristen Lowe at
Crossroads United Methodist Church, Waunakee, WI.**



Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of “The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016

Prayer

Isaiah 2:2-5

In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say, *“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”*

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

In Isaiah 2:2-5, Isaiah offers this word of hope to his people;

He says, “In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.³ Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.⁴

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.⁵

Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

**Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of
“The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016**

What is hope? Emily Dickenson puts it this way:



“Hope” is the thing with feathers--
That perches in the soul--
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops--at all.

**Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of
“The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016**



For too many people today the bird of hope has ceased to sing its song. Too many tragedies of life have robbed us of our song and of hope. For many people in Isaiah's day, the same thing had happened. They had lost their hope at a critical time in history when war and conflict abounded. People's hearts had turned away from God, and idol worship, superstitions and rebelliousness had taken over. People were indifferent to spiritual truth.

Isaiah came on the scene during war times with a message of hope and the promise of salvation. His message of hope came early in his career between the prosperity of Uzziah and the reforms of Hezekiah. The land is destitute--it has everything but God. They needed Isaiah to plant a seed of hope.

Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of “The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016

They had put things first in their lives that seemed comfortable, shiny, things that, for all intents and purposes, should have fulfilled them. But these things weren't eternal. Therefore, something still seemed missing. They weren't fulfilled. Does this sound familiar?



Let's see how today's scripture speaks to us about hope. Speaking during these critical times, Isaiah pointed out several things that helped the people to see that all was not lost. He's saying to them, “look at this seed of hope. Things will not always be this way because:

The mountain of the Lord's temple will be established. That was meaningful to them because the term “mountain” referred to the site on which the temple in Jerusalem was built. The significance was that Jerusalem was the center of spiritual worship—the place where God's presence dwelt. In other words it was possible to find hope by simply shifting focus.

**Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of
“The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016**



Throughout scripture reference is made to mountains. They needed to place God in the highest place and not lose him in the shuffle. Isaiah was reminding his people that putting God in the highest place of prominence would open the way to hope. God needed to be placed in the center of all things in a place for all to see and for all to have access to. He is saying, “You don’t see it now, things look very dark and desolate--but don’t give up hope. A day is coming when the Messiah will come--salvation will be available to all people.

He adds that IF the people learn to walk in God’s ways and put him first... there will be peace - to make God’s ways their lifestyle, their perspectives would need to be changed. He said, look what will happen... They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

I wonder how the people received this message of hope from the prophet Isaiah. I imagine some people said, “That’ll never happen. He must be dreaming. There has always been conflict and fighting. Things will never change...”

Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of “The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016

Sometimes we refuse to believe any message of hope. We say, “Things will never get better for me. This is the way it has been for a long time. Consumerism is an animal that can’t be turned around. If I don’t get my kid presents for Christmas, they won’t find joy. They won’t feel loved. Can’t teach old dogs new tricks. My health will never improve, my job situation will never change, and my family will never change. Our country is going to hell in a hand-basket. Sometimes when the pressures of life close in on us, “the bird of hope has just about lost its song.”

But Advent reminds us that hope, love, joy and peace are alive. And we remember that even during Isaiah’s time, hope was planted with a simple seed. The people of God had faith that the Messiah would come just as the prophets of old said he would. And during Advent, we are given yet another opportunity to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Messiah. God wants to offer us salvation, hope, blessings.

How do we prepare ourselves to receive this hope?

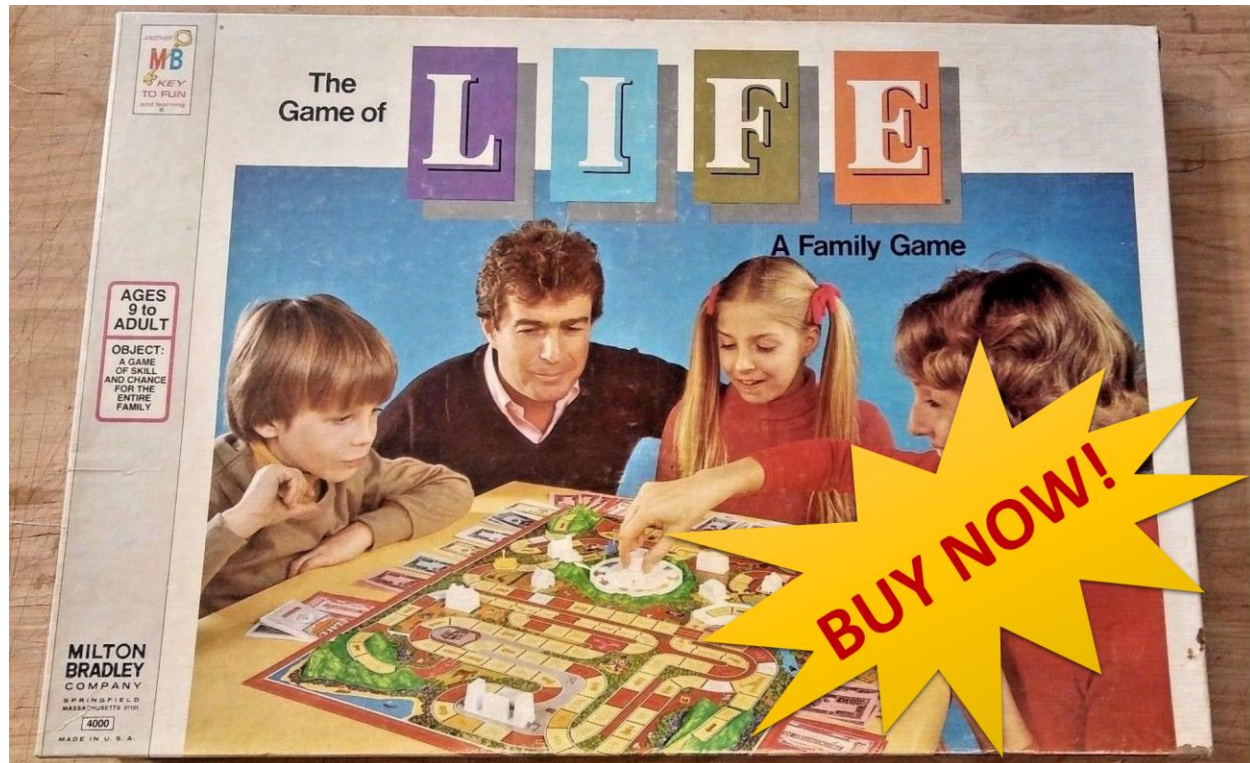


Unfortunately many of us try to manufacture hope during the holidays through the many traditions of the season--loading our houses with colorful lights, trimming the tree, packing our schedules to overflowing with events, filling our shopping carts, spending scads of cash or pulling out the plastic so we can have abundant holiday packages under the tree, bountiful feasts on our tables.... We try to recapture the feeling of simple anticipation and

Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of “The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016

the hope we may have felt in the innocence of childhood. We keep piling on to try to grab that intangible and simple gift that can only come through one source.

Unfortunately we believe things like: If you make your house a beautiful Christmas montage of lights and gifts and pine needle-smells, it will transform hardened hearts and bring you back to the joy of yesteryear when you were 7 years old and everything was hopeful and magical.



Or:

If you buy this game, your family will come together every evening, sit around the table, re-establish values, improve communication and heal old wounds. There will be hope, love, joy and peace.

Too often we look in all the wrong places. In fact, it's these very things that clutter our hearts and minds and shove the hope of the Messiah out of the way. Hope comes through simple acts of kindness. Showing people that God is a God of grace and love and mercy.

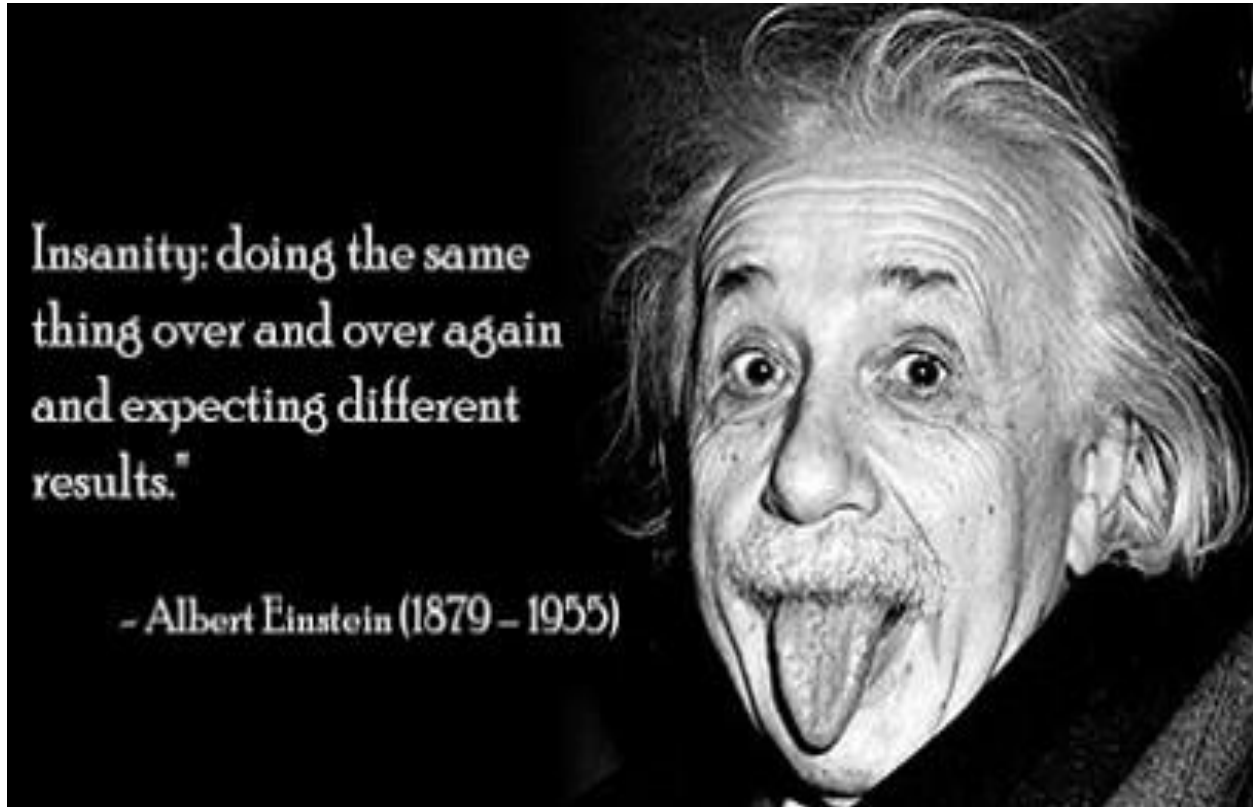
The message of the Bible is that no situation is without hope. Isaiah brought this hope to his people... a message that they so desperately needed to hear. The message to us is that God has the ABILITY to transform any situation, no matter how hopeless, into one of hope.

Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of “The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016

Isaiah brought the message of hope. We can bring the message of hope.

One thing to remember is that we don't have to manufacture our own hope. Scripture tells us in

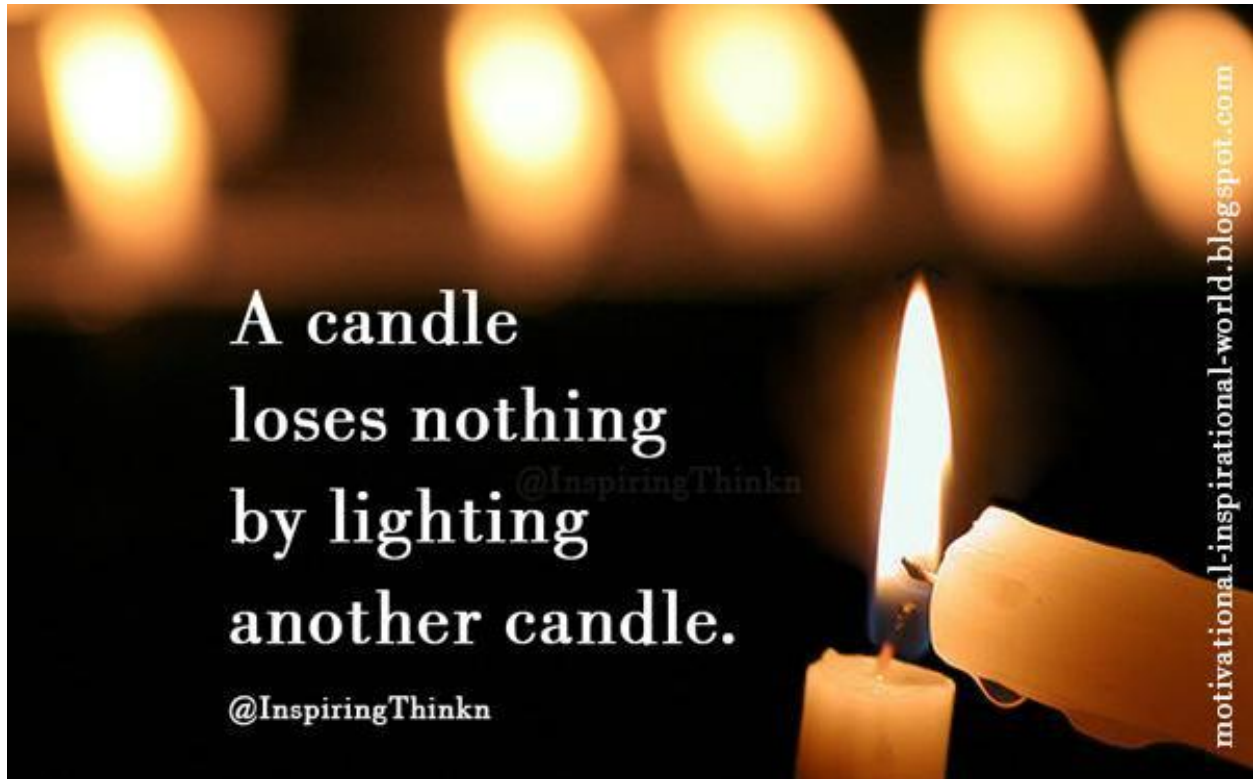
Psalms 62:5 “My hope comes from God.” Not from Milton Bradley.



Einstein said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

So when we feed the consumeristic beast, we shouldn't wonder where all the magic has gone. Each year we find ourselves falling into the same traps. We can take a step back and rekindle that hope that God so desperately wants to give us. How?

**Message: “Hope for a Hope-Hungry World”, Week 1 of
“The Christmas Payoff” series on 11-27-2016**



1. Planting hope through the practice of Advent. Preparing and showing people what the spirit of Christ’s birth really is – giving sacrificially.
 - a. Abandoning consumeristic mindset
 - b. Give generously from the heart
 - c. Prioritize quality time with loved ones and offer kindness to strangers
 - d. Speak from the heart – give the gift of affirmation
 - e. Find ways to pay unconditional love forward.

When we offer people the hope that is in Jesus Christ, we’ve increased light in the world.

I pray that you will use this Advent, this time of preparing your heart by offering people you know and people you don’t know a sample of what God’s gift to us looked like. The world is hungry right now for hope! This Advent, let’s plant that seed of hope in a hope hungry world.