

Hope

- [Isaiah 2:1-5](#)
- [Romans 13:11-14](#)
- [Matthew 24:36-44](#)

I read in the news this morning the sad story of Ron, a man in Maine, who rigged a pistol in his front door so that anyone who tried to enter would be shot. Unfortunately he made a mistake – I don't know the details – but on Thanksgiving he walked into his own booby trap, was shot by the pistol and later died of his wounds.

This man, Ron, believed that the world was a dangerous place, and proved himself right.

We often do the same thing in our minds. When we think that other people are out to get us we respond to them with suspicion and interpret their words and actions as though they are out to get us. Defensiveness is often a self-fulfilling prophecy because it affects our perceptions and we respond to the world we see. The world Ron saw was a very dangerous place and so he built defenses against his fear which proved fatal.

Some of you will remember that two years ago Matthew Fox was with us and preached on the first Sunday of Advent. In that sermon he said “hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up”. Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.

Like defensiveness, hope also affects our perceptions. When we look forward with hope, we have energy and forward movement. We are not passively moving through our lives but we are looking with hope to the future. Instead of building booby-traps for our enemies, we create beautiful welcome mats for the friends who are coming.

Today's readings are about hope and awakening to hope. Isaiah looks with hope to a day of international peace when all peoples, all nations will look to God for their guidance and to resolve all disputes.

Jesus talks about the coming of the Son of Man - the day when the Son of Man will be revealed and everything will be changed. There are many possible interpretations of this passage. Jesus used the term “son of man” to refer to himself, but it appears 107 times in the Old Testament and the rabbis disagree about whether it is intended to refer to the Messiah. There was an expectation among the Jews of Jesus' day that there would be a time when God would reveal Godself in glory – that day of judgment that we mention in our creed – their hope was that at that time all the enemies of the Jews would be vanquished and they would be able to live as a free people in their land.

It has been two millennia, and the Son of Man has not yet appeared in that way. So has the hope of the Jews and of the early church been pointless?

I don't think so, because there are many ways that hope keeps us going even when things seem black and despair is close at hand. Our hope is in the God of Israel, and the God of Christians everywhere, who we know to be compassionate, loyal and trustworthy. Our hope keeps us

looking for the signs of God's appearing and our noses primed for the scent of her perfume. We never know when we will glimpse God or in what way God will bless us.

This week we have been blessed by rain and rainbows. Just two weeks ago the weather forecasters were predicting a few showers on Wednesday and no real rain until the end of the year. But God shifted the low pressures and the high pressures and we have rain.

In the days of Noah, Jesus reminds us, no-one was expecting the disaster of the flood. Everyone was going about their lives in the usual way. Except of course for Noah. Yet Jesus doesn't focus on Noah's story – about his wife and sons and all the animals two by two – Jesus focuses on the wider culture who were unconscious of what was happening. Back in Genesis 6 we hear that “the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.” (Gen 6:11). That's what was going on – people were going on about their lives not recognizing the corruption and violence, or perhaps recognizing it but doing nothing. Jesus says, “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away.”

That's how it will be. It will be like a flood that comes and sweeps us away if we're not paying attention. Or maybe it will be like a thief who comes when we don't expect him.

As the people of the resurrection, we do not need to defend ourselves against that day. Unlike Ron in Maine, we do not need to barricade ourselves indoors and set booby traps for the thief in the night. Because we know the one who is coming. We know Jesus as the Son of Man. We know him as the one whose astonishing love for each of us led him to his death and us to life.

But let us not be lulled into complacency. Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.

“You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep,” says the Apostle Paul. Now is the moment to start paying attention. Now is the moment to stop being complacent and passive, allowing ourselves to be swept along by the wider culture. Now is the time to put aside the works of darkness, and instead armor ourselves with light.

Focusing our minds on the hope which is the reign of God in our midst leads us forward into the creation of that reign. Ron in Maine's fear led him to death, our hope leads us to life.

We don't really know what the reign of God is. Jesus said it was like a mustard seed, or like a valuable pearl, Jesus said it was within us but that in the reign of God the hungry would be fed and the lame would leap for joy. And this is the difference between hope and expectation. Expectation defines the outcome. Expectation says I will get a new bike for Christmas and it will be a shiny red and have 21 gears. Hope says, I am loved and whatever I get for Christmas will be just right.

We don't know what the reign of God is, exactly. But we have our sleeves rolled up, led forward by our hope. It is hope that led to the opening of the Abundance Shop almost 30 years ago. It is hope that led to the creation of Los Osos Cares. It is hope that has brought community volunteers including many of our members to provide a warming shelter these wet nights.

It is hope that enables us to let go of anger and resentment, of jealousy and disappointment. It is hope that allows to disarm our own front doors, to let go of our fears of being hurt and allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

It is hope that makes us stand up against injustice, that makes us practice gospel values of integrity, honesty and compassion in our own lives and to demand them in the public square.

This gospel passage is one used to support the idea of the Rapture when those who are true Christians will be swept up into heaven leaving the other poor Joes behind. But the text is not clear. It may well be that rather than one in the field being lifted up into heaven and one left behind, one will be swept away and one will be forgiven.

We are the ones who recognize that we have been forgiven. The hope of the reign of God sustains us as we extend that forgiveness to others, the reign of God comes as we live lives of compassion and gift. The coming of the Son of Man may not be flashy and dramatic but as quiet and unobtrusive as the people of God living their lives in hope.