

Old Testament: Isaiah 2:1-5
New Testament: Matthew 24:36-44

Please join me in prayer. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

So many of us bemoan the stress and anxiety of the holiday season. We claim to wish for a simpler time or we claim to wish for an opportunity to not have to spend so much money as we fall prey to the consumer capitalism of the United States. We feel pressure not just from our family and friends, but from advertisers, to find that “perfect” gift. And much of this stress and anxiety makes what could easily be a season of merriment, wonder, beauty, grace and wisdom, become a season of pushing and shoving as we wait for the doors to open for the black Friday special at one of our favorite retailers. Yes, online shopping has made this last bit much easier in these past several years but you get my point. The question before us today is why do we continue to do this to ourselves? Even further, why do we still do this to ourselves 50 years later after the initial release of “A Charlie Brown Christmas”?

In the Christmas special we see, specifically for poor old Charlie Brown, how unfulfilling the “holiday” season is. He gets no Christmas cards; he’s completely disinterested in winning a lights and display contest for “money, money, money”; he’s disappointed in his baby sister’s specific request for cash-money from Santa Claus; he’s clearly struggling to see the point of it all. Further, Charlie Brown is lacking hope. What is the point of hope? What purpose does it serve? Hope keeps us encouraged that we might continue to pursue whatever it is that we are pursuing. If you have hope that you are going to make it into the NBA, you don’t quit grinding away on your basketball skills and techniques; you don’t quit grinding away on your exercises and stamina building. If you have hope that you are going to enter politics one day, you don’t quit grinding away in school, becoming more and more familiar with the political history of our nation and its current machinations. What hope does is that it sustains us.

There are so many times that any one of us feels like giving up. Giving up our dreams of being in the NBA, being in politics, being a farmer, being a musician. It is not easy to achieve any of those dreams. But hope comes in and tells us to keep pushing; keep driving; keep becoming. This is perfectly analogous to the hope of redemption. There are so many times that any one of us feels like giving up. I could never be “holy” enough. I can’t save myself so what’s the point? I could never know the whole Bible. The hope of redemption sustains our efforts at continuing to become the best versions of ourselves. Though what we read in Matthew’s gospel sounds a bit more

dire or foreboding, this is effectively the point he was trying to make. Lean into the hope of redemption that sustains our efforts at becoming the best version of ourselves. Since no one knows concerning the hour of the culmination of all things, there is no expectation that anyone be fully formed; that anyone be without sin; that anyone be flawless. But Jesus does tell us to be prepared or even, to be preparing. And the hope of redemption is what sustains our unceasing efforts in preparation for Christ's return. The hope of the advent season is not *just* that Christ has come but it is also that Christ is coming again.

The sustaining nature of hope is why Charles Schulz made the Charlie Brown Christmas special in the way that *he* wanted it to be. In an ironic reversal of the tides, Charles Schulz took advantage of a truncated timeline to force Coca-Cola's hand to play the special, speaking against the ills of commercialism, to further their own commercialistic agenda! Anyone who likes a good underdog story has got to appreciate the irony here. The little guy takes on and overcomes the big corporate machine. Lexington vs. Tyson anyone? And so the backstory on the making and production of A Charlie Brown Christmas, that we will continue to see throughout the Advent season, will offer sustaining hope as we proceed ahead through this season of uncertainty for our town. Don't you love it when a plan comes together?

The final question before us this morning then is to consider *why* we hope for a non-commercial Christmas. Everyone, take a moment and close your eyes. Reflect back on the *best* material Christmas gift you ever got. The best thing. Your bicycle. Your PF Flyers. Your video game system. Your dollhouse. Where are those things now? Did the commercialism that promised you how awesome that material thing would be continue to sustain your enthusiasm for that thing all these years later? Does your life continue to be better because of that material gift? Does that material gift provide hope for you today in whatever circumstance you might find yourself? Now reflect on your relationship with Christ; with the Risen Lord. Even in the midst of its inconsistencies; its ups and downs, its high and lows, its remembering and forgetting. Does the gift of that relationship provide for you today in whatever circumstance you might find yourself? Does that relationship sustain your hope for things to improve and get better? This is why we hope for a non-commercial Christmas. Because it is that kind of hope that sustains us and keeps us moving forward. Christ has come. Christ is coming again. May that hope sustain us all this season and every season. Amen.