

November 30, 2025

What Angels Longed to See

I. Salvation Promised

1 Peter 1:1-12

Rev. John DuBose
Easley Presbyterian Church
Easley, South Carolina

When I graduated from high school, my mom gave me a book by Dr. Seuss called, *O, The Places You'll Go!* It's one of the all-time greatest children's books. Right up there with Goodnight Moon. But even though it's a children's book, I appreciated getting it at graduation because, at the time, I felt like I was on the edge of something. Like something was about to happen... but I didn't know what. And so, I had to wait. In its own Dr. Seuss sort of way, the book talks about waiting. The main character is on his way when, suddenly, he finds himself in the familiar, yet strangely disorienting waiting place. It says,

*Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come,
or a plane to go or the mail to come,
or the rain to go or the phone to ring,
or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No
or waiting for their hair to grow.*

Everyone is just waiting.¹

Sometimes it feels like we're all waiting for something. Like a farmer who plants seeds and waits for the crops to grow. Or a student who waits for graduation after years of hard work. Or a mother who waits with anticipation for the birth of her precious baby. But sometimes the waiting is not so good, like waiting to get your report card after you know you failed that last exam, or the waiting of a patient for the results of a diagnosis, or waiting at the bedside of a loved one, not sure what the night will bring.

Or maybe we don't know quite what we're waiting for. But there's a longing within us, isn't there? An expectation that something is coming. Like an arrow strung on a bow and ready to fly, but without a target in sight. We get up every morning and stretch, but what are we stretching toward? What is all this living about? Day by day passes, but where is life leading us? Surely there's something, right? What is it? Why do we wake from sleep and drive to work? Why do we go to school and study for our exams? What is it all about? Clearly, we're waiting for something. What is it?

Peter writes his letter to a mostly Gentile community. They knew the Hebrew Scriptures, but didn't necessarily see themselves in them. They came from a broader Greek and Roman world where questions of life's meaning were quite familiar. One commentator says, "While Greco Roman civilization abounded with beauty, with courage, and with intellectual vigor, it was indeed a world without hope. Old age was faced with fear; Life was continually threatened with

¹ Dr. Seuss – O The Places You'll Go!

misfortune and tragedy; and early death was to be desired.”² Why? Because there was nothing to wait for. Nothing to hope for.

And apparently, it wasn’t an unfamiliar feeling. Not even to the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Romans, Paul talks about the futility of creation. How everything was groaning under that futility until God’s own hope took hold. He says,

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, ... ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ³

Groaning... what a powerful image. We groan inwardly... aching for meaning in a world that seems desperate and futile. Waiting for the consummation of a world bound for something... but what, we cannot say. We know what Paul is talking about. When I worked in the corporate world, around this time of year, we always had to submit an annual review. And one of the questions on the review was always, “What are your goals for the coming year?” Well, I don’t know. What I wanted to say was, “I guess I want to still have a job.” But that wouldn’t exactly cut it. It was supposed to be something profound. Like, “I want to streamline this or that process,” or, “I want to become a team leader.” Something grand, yet realizable. Something confident and distinguishing that would make both me and the company successful. And yet, even if I did manage to reach those goals, there was always another goal yet to reach for the year to come.

But I don’t say this to try and sound superior, as if I’ve somehow escaped the corporate grind. Because the same pressure exists in the church. What new program is the church down the street doing? And what’s their average weekly attendance? Are we succeeding in the present moment and have we cast a vision for the future? We’re trying our best to build something lasting and significant. But what? What does it ultimately amount to? What do all these goals and visions get us in the end? It feels like there should be more. What we’re truly desperate for, I think, is hope.

Hope. It’s a strange and powerful thing. Hope is what makes life worth living. One preacher says,

“Hope is an essential element in human life; Without it even the finest and best which earth can yield is shrouded with a deadly miasma of futility. Lacking A realizable future, our most meaningful experiences of and our most profound confidences in reality are but tantalizing projections of our fancy. What value is the education of man, the cultivation of his implanted capacities, the arousal of his noblest potentialities, if he at last is enveloped in the... the unfeeling grave of extinction?”⁴

Yes, hope is essential, but if hope is to have any meaning, then it needs to have some truth behind it. Something to hang on to. I can buy a lottery ticket and *hope* for a billion dollars to show up in my bank account. And I can imagine all the things I would go out and buy with my newfound fortune, but deep down, I know it’s nothing more than wishful thinking. There’s no truth behind that hope. No, true hope doesn’t come from within. It comes from outside us. The

² Interpreter’s Commentary – 1 Peter 1

³ Romans 8:19-23

⁴ Interpreter’s Commentary

farmer hopes the seed will sprout because he has seen a flower in Spring. He trusts that God will bring forth life from the dirt.

The poet, WH Auden writes that “Nothing can save us that is possible.”⁵ And I think what he means by that is that nothing we can conceive in our limited human minds could ever have the capacity to satisfy the eternal longing in our hearts. There’s nothing we can do to secure ourselves against a future that remains forever shrouded. We live and we die and we’re quickly forgotten. And yet, we still have this feeling that there’s got to be something more. There’s got to be more to it. We’re waiting for something to rescue us. Or maybe we’re waiting for someone. Fleming Rutledge says, “The human race cannot expect to receive any lasting comfort from the world. The comfort we so desperately need must come from somewhere else – in a burst of transcendent power breaking upon our ears from beyond our sphere altogether.”⁶ That’s the nature of hope. It’s not wishful thinking. It’s not human invention. It’s a divine gift. Hope is not something we manufacture. Hope is something we receive.

In our text for this morning, Peter writes of Good News to his Gentile audience when he says, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a *living* hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”

Because God is merciful, he causes us to be born again to a *living* hope through the resurrection. A living hope. A person. Jesus Christ. This is the hope that we’ve been waiting for... that we’ve been longing for this first Sunday of Advent... our living hope is Jesus. Jesus... God in human flesh, descending from his glorious throne – emptying himself of glory – all for our sake. To be born as a weak and helpless baby so that we might be raised to new life.

What sometimes happens around this time of year is we tell ourselves the old, old story. How Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem and had a tiny baby. And we think it’s all just that... a story. Sure, it’s got meaning for our lives. Just like how Moses saved the people from Pharaoh, Jesus saved his people too. It’s a nice story. But it’s in the past. It’s got very little to do with our lives here and now.

But what if this old, old story tells of a new and present truth? What if this man who lived 2000 years ago is the answer to what we’ve been waiting for? Karl Barth says, “He who from eternity willed to become man for our good, has become man in time for our good, [and] will be and remain in eternity for our good.”⁷ In other words, Jesus is the one who was and is and is to come. Peter says, “, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope.” A *living* hope. What that means is that the same Jesus who was born in a manger is alive even now, and the miracle of his being alive makes possible our life into eternity. By the power of his resurrection, we’ve finally got something to wait for. We’ve got a living hope!

Philip Yancey, in his classic book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, tells the story of losing a friend. He writes,

“My friend Bob died scuba diving at the bottom of Lake Michigan... I spoke at [his] funeral, and... as I struggled with what to say, the old, ugly word - irreversible -

⁵ WH Auden - For the time being

⁶ Fleming Rutledge - Advent

⁷ Karl Barth – Dogmatics in Outline

came flooding back, with greater force than I had ever known. Nothing I could say, nothing I could do would accomplish what I wanted above all else: to get my friend back...

In the cloud of grief over Bob's death, I began to see the meaning of [the resurrection] in a new light... I had learned the harsh lesson of irreversibility. Now... I saw that [the resurrection] actually held out the awesome promise of reversibility. Nothing – no, not even death – was final. Even that could be reversed.

When I spoke at Bob's funeral, I [asked the] question... What would it mean for us if Bob rose again? We were sitting in a chapel, numbed by three days of sorrow, death bearing down upon us like a crushing weight. How would it be to walk outside to the parking lot and there, to our utter astonishment, find Bob. Bob! With his bounding walk, his crooked grin, his clear gray eyes. It could be no one else but Bob, alive again!

That image gave me a hint of what Jesus' disciples felt on the first Easter. They too had grieved for three days. On Sunday they heard a new, euphonious sound, clear as a bell struck in mountain air. Easter hits a new note of hope and faith that what God did once in a graveyard in Jerusalem, he can and will repeat on a grand scale. For Bob. For us. For the world. Against all odds, the irreversible will be reversed.”⁸

“According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The miracle of Advent is that everything we've been waiting for is already here. Jesus comes to us, not once, in a story from long ago, but now, through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is our living hope who keeps us until that day when he comes again to take us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. Thanks be to God

⁸ Philip Yancey – The Jesus I Never Knew