# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Hope”**

**Matthew 12:18-21**

 **November 29, 2020**

“This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be.” In the movie *Grand Canyon,* a man is driving through Los Angeles when he takes a wrong turn into a very rough neighborhood where his car stalls. He calls for a tow truck, but before it arrives, five young members of a street gang surround his car and begin to threaten him. Then, the tow truck shows up and its driver begins to hook up to the disabled car. The gang members protest, whereupon the driver says: “This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be. I’m supposed to be able to do my job without you interfering, and that guy in the car is supposed to be able to wait in his car without you harassing him. Everything’s supposed to be different than what it is here.”

The world ought to be as designed and intended by God. But, it’s not. Human wrongdoing pollutes every aspect of our world, leading to hostility toward God and hostility toward one other. God’s ordered world has become disordered. And there is nothing that you and I can do about it, because sin is stronger than our ability to overcome its devastating effects. But, there is something that God can do about it, and he has set his plan to restore order to his world into motion.

Today we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent, the season of looking forward to the birth of the Christ child. It is in and through this Christ that God will bring things back to the way they’re supposed to be. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 12:18-21 where we are given a glimpse of how the Christ will restore God’s order. Matthew is quoting the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 42 where God speaks these words

“Look at my Servant, whom I have chosen. He is my Beloved, who pleases me. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not fight or shout or raise his voice in public. He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. Finally he will cause justice to be victorious. And his name will be the hope of all the world.”

The Servant of God, God’s Beloved, foretold by Isaiah some 600 years before his birth, is Jesus the Christ. According to the prophecy, and confirmed by his ministry, Jesus proclaims justice to the world. Now, people have all kinds of ideas about justice, what it means and how it is to be achieved, but biblical justice, God’s justice that Jesus is proclaiming and that Jesus will cause to be victorious, is bringing God’s order to that which sin has disordered. It is restoring to its originally intended godly beauty and function that which sin has marred and made dysfunctional. But, the prophecy doesn’t just tell us what Jesus will do, it also tells us how he will do it. “He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle.”

When the prophecy speaks of weak reeds and flickering candles, it is speaking figuratively of you and me. Picture reeds standing along a river; these slender yet sturdy blades of river grass stand tall and proud, like you and me standing strong and confident in this world. Then, something happens and we’re weakened, like a reed that’s been damaged, frail and bending over, barely hanging on. The news from the doctor is as bad as it can be. Our relationship with a spouse or a child is in danger of coming apart. Our already tight financial situation just got hit with an expensive repair bill. These are just a few of the things I have become aware of in the lives of people I deeply care about this past week. Weakened reeds, barely hanging on, bent over with grief or worry or loss. And some are wondering, where is God in all this? He is here in his Son, Jesus Christ, who came not to crush you in your weakened state with feelings of guilt or abandonment or futility, but to restore you to the good that God has for you. The world may not see your pain, but Jesus does, and he still says “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy ladened, and I will give you rest.”

Similarly, the flickering candle is in danger of being extinguished by the winds of adversity and turmoil that are a part of our world. There may have been a day when your faith in God was strong, when you felt you could face any problem without doubting God’s goodness. But, now your faith is flickering, barely alive, as the many things in your life that are not as they are supposed to be are threatening to blow it out. What is God’s response to your weak faith? He sent his Son into the world, not to condemn you for your small, flickering faith but to save you by restoring you to a good, strong, trusting relationship with your heavenly Father.

Jesus will cause justice to be victorious. Jesus will restore goodness and health and wellbeing to your life and to my life. It may happen today, or it may be in the near future, and it won’t finally be completely restored until he returns, but in his name we put our hope. Hope motivates us to keep going and not give up. Hope sees that things are not as they are supposed to be, but it doesn’t despair, because it believes in a God who will one day, through his Son, restore all things and the world will once again be what it was meant to be.