

## **Being Present with Hope** **Mark 13:24-37**

### **Busy Season Is Coming**

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which marks the beginning of the Christmas season. As our time living in the United States gets longer, Juhee and I have been Americanized. Do you know how I know this? First, we cooked our first turkey for Thanksgiving dinner, though I am not sure if we are going to cook another turkey in the future. Second, Juhee decorates the house in terms of seasons, and has decorated the house for Christmas with lights and other decorations. I admire her for doing this in the midst of her busy schedule. I am not a big fan of decorating the house so I guess Juhee must be more Americanized than I am.

Christmas is a busy season for many of us. Christmas gifts, decorating our house and Christmas tree, family gatherings. Our attention is often scattered by long to-do lists and the pressure of perfection. Also, at this time of the year, we are often distracted by regrets of the past and worries about the year to come. In our busy schedules and preoccupation with concerns and worry, we are robbed of the present moment. Of course, as we get older, we may realize that our time on earth has its limits and tend to appreciate the present moment more.

As I shared in my monthly newsletter, I visited David Vacchina as his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday approached. He told me, "I used to say that I live one day at a time, but now I live an hour at a time." It serves as a reminder that we only truly live in the present moment. In fact, the present moment is all we have and we need to live the present moment.

### **Highly Connected and Detached at the same time...**

However, we often do not pay attention to the present moment. Technology has made us connected with others and the world through social media and constant newsfeeds. Ironically, this hyper connection often hinders people from being fully present to the present moment.

[ppt] Are you familiar with these pictures? Nowadays, people use their smart phones all the time and everywhere. When people go to music shows, many people are busy taking pictures with their phones rather than enjoying the music itself. While people gather for lunch and wait for their food, they are often on cell phones, checking Facebook or newsfeeds, instead of talking with one another. When our mind is preoccupied with news over there, we cannot be mindful to the present moment and people in front of us.

Furthermore, the news we read often seems more negative than positive. According to scientists, "on average, people pay more attention to negative news than to positive news."<sup>1</sup> In other words, we are preoccupied with negativity. Have you heard the word, "Doomscrolling?" If you know this word, you can be considered fairly young! Doomscrolling is a relatively new term. It is the "act of spending an excessive amount of time reading large quantities of negative news online."<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic, the George Floyd protests, the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the storming of the U.S. Capitol in 2021, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Hamas-Israel war in 2023, all these negative events intensify the phenomenon of doomscrolling. Doomscrolling makes the world seem like a "dark and dangerous place." Sometimes when I read or hear news, I feel like we are living in a nightmare. Will the cries of innocent children in Gaza and Ukraine ever stop? Can horrific gun-violence ever cease in this country? Will the division in our world ever be healed? Sometimes, we feel that there seems to be no hope and we will never be able to wake up from this living nightmare.

### **Wake Up Call!**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2019-09-05/why-people-respond-to-negative-news>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomscrolling>

You are not alone if you have ever felt this way. In fact, the early Christian community had to literally face a living nightmare. When the Gospel of Mark was written, the temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans after the failure of the First Jewish Revolt. According to Josephus, a historian, about 1.1 million civilians died in Jerusalem and a hundred thousand were killed in Galilee. The holy city was destroyed and the holy temple was ruined. Persecution continued and faithful friends were killed every day. Early Christians had to keep asking, "Is there any hope left?" In the midst of their struggle, the gospel of Mark reminded them of the hope remaining but that hope was a different kind of hope. We call it eschatological hope. This is a hope that is based on "the anticipation that God will make all things new, raising people to everlasting life with God in joyful celebration, ending all personal pain and suffering, eliminating all societal evil and harm, and bringing reconciliation and healing to all of creation."<sup>3</sup> This hope is not based on human possibility but God's promise. Today's scripture reading describes the end time. "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." I know it doesn't sound promising or joyful. "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory." The Gospel of Mark reminded the early Christian church that the Roman empire did not control history, but the Son of Man. This was the hope remaining even in their darkest hour. And that's all they needed.

Dr. McFee wrote, "The gift of hope is an essential survival tool because it reminds us that the hard times do not have the last word. Hope is not simply a wish. Hope calls us into action based on a belief that things can be different. We can work to bring about the better world that we hope for."

In a dire situation, we can lose hope. When things don't seem to change despite our constant efforts, we can lose hope. When the nightmare of war, hatred, violence and injustice continue for decades, we can give up hope that things can be different. Ironically, what we need to keep alive in that difficult time is hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, our Savior, who will come in his glory. We can discover this hope right here, right now by being mindful to the present moment.

As you know, Advent is a busy season for pastors and my schedule last week was hectic. My mind was preoccupied with things to do and what comes next and I couldn't find rest. When I led the first advent book study session, we did a practice of mindfulness. What I discovered was that I am not alone. God is with me in all these busy times. Also, God reminded me that I am not alone and the Asbury family is with me. On that day, I went to the calling hours for Linda Mills and met Asbury folks there. It was brief but I had a pleasant conversation with my Asbury family. The feeling was like being with my own family. When I tried to be attentive to the present moment, I was able to find hope and joy in the middle of my seemingly hectic schedule.

The hard times do not have the last word. Sorrow, despair and even death do not have the last word. There is still hope. It's God's hope for us. Jesus said, "keep awake!" Yes! We need to keep awake toward this hope even in the middle of trials and struggles. God still works among us in various ways. Keep awake and be attentive to what God is doing. That will bring us joy, happiness and sustain our hope!

There is a Chinese proverb which says, "better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness." Today we lit the small candle of hope. Light the candle of hope in you and make yourself present to hope where small hope is needed. Remember God is with us, no matter what, no matter where, no matter when. Be the gift of hope for people around you. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>[https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/faculty\\_publications/1521/#:~:text=Eschatological%20hope%20was%20conceptualized%20as,harm%2C%20and%20bringing%20reconciliation%20and](https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/faculty_publications/1521/#:~:text=Eschatological%20hope%20was%20conceptualized%20as,harm%2C%20and%20bringing%20reconciliation%20and)