

December

Dear Salem Family,

Each year I count down the days until Christmas (well...not literally). Somehow the snow, the tree, along with all the decorations & music, create a symphony that soothes me into a place of euphoria. As a pastor, I long for the sweet and holy vigil of Christmas Eve. Those hallowed moments that capture our full attention, as candlelight wafts a special glow through the sanctuary, where people of all ages gather together to be stirred by songs and scripture – drifting into an eternal reality – the hope we have in Jesus. Beautiful.

It's odd then to think that from Genesis to Jesus, people waited for centuries for God to make things right (Gen. 3:15). In the time that passed, generations of people died not receiving the promise (Heb. 11:39). Yet here we stand, thousands of years removed, on the other side of Jesus. Be amazed at what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3b-4,

“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...”

I like to think then that our hope is death proof, sin proof, and time proof. Certainly, the good news of Jesus is extravagant beyond measure, a gift that offers the thrill of hope that rings louder than all the bells of Christmas combined - nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:39)! In this season, isn't that the encouragement that the world – the church included – needs to hear?

These last years have been filled with heartache, angst, and disbelief. It seems to me, that while those are not yet fully removed, they have settled into a general state of discontent. The Christian story is that human beings since the fall in Genesis have needed hope. But as I've reflected and prayed during this season, I'm trusting that the difference now is that people want hope. In our discontent we long for something better. We all do – both those inside the church and those outside the church. It's interesting to ponder the question, "Is it possible that this Christmas season is potentially the best opportunity the church has had for outreach in the past two years?" Consider then with fresh perspective,

"How beautiful are the feet of those that preach the good news!"(Rom. 10:15).

My encouragement to you is this: we have a hope more beautiful than all the gifts the world will supply this Christmas season. It's a hope better than all the garland and music combined. Lord knows our heart needs that kind of hope! May we not be swayed by anything this Christmas other than Jesus. My challenge to you is this: as we are entering into the final weeks of this season, I want to encourage us all, myself included, to be praying and seeking for opportunities to bring hope to the people where we live, work, and play. Would you please consider partnering with us in ministry this year by inviting a friend, or family to our Christmas Eve services? After all, we all need hope!

As we come to the end of December, I also want to thank each person for giving to our church financially so faithfully. As a pastor, we cannot do this apart from your support. It's your generosity that allows us to be faithful ministers to you. But more so, we believe (and are excited to see) that God wants to continue to work powerfully both in and through Salem in the year to come (Eph. 3:21). Would you please consider partnering with us in such a way that we finish the year beyond expectations?

There is much work to be done that benefits both Salem and Fargo-Moorhead. We invite you back in January as we recapture the biblical view of heaven in a two-week series called "Surprised by Hope." Afterwards, we'll do a semester long series in the prophet Jeremiah in a series called "For this City" as we seek to examine ways that we can both pray for and seek the welfare of the city that God has planted us in (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

To Recap:

- Join us in ministry by asking God to present you opportunities to bring hope to a neighbor, co-worker, or friend. Perhaps invite them to Christmas Eve services at 2:00, 3:30, or 5:00.

- Join us by partnering with us financially as we seek to end the year strong. If you are unable, please join us in prayer, asking God to supply all we need.

- Join us in January as we seek to grow our community in the gospel as we reclaim the biblical idea of heaven, and how we can partner in God's kingdom by being a blessing to Fargo-Moorhead.

To all of you we wish you a Merry Christmas!

Seth Dunham