

# Hope in a weary world

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Psalm 80:1-7;17-19, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

Rev Jean Shannon

Before I start, I want to know what gives you hope?

(discussion)

There is no doubt we are coming to Christmas in a weary world but this is not the first time.

When Mark wrote this Gospel, disaster was unfolding in Judea. The Jewish uprising against Rome took 7 years to quell and Rome's power was overwhelming. (can you imagine if the war in the Ukraine runs for 7 years?) It reached its climax with the taking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. That was the end of resistance. But still through the decades waves of violence and oppression continued to roll over the land, again and again, people needed to flee for their lives. The people were crushed. Yet, the birth of Jesus in this time was a beacon of hope. There was something new beginning – what could it be? Jesus was offering a different kind of freedom. A freedom of the heart. A knowledge and security of knowing whom we belong to and why we were here. The story of Christmas is a spark in the dark.

Centuries later, white people thought teaching scriptures would civilise natives both African and Aboriginal. But what these people of colour heard in the scriptures was a different kind of freedom – that no matter what slavery or oppression you suffered in this life – only God owned your soul. It gave them courage to live on in terrible times. You were as Isaiah said, no different: whether you were slave or free, man or woman or foreigner – you were God's. There was hope. The people sang songs of this different freedom while they tilled the fields and cleaned our houses.

The Christmas Bowl toolkit reminded me that as the Taliban swept over Afghanistan and the people had to flee for their lives, with our help, Christians were there to hand out survival kits for winter, healthcare and cash payments for food. Hope is a lifeline in disaster and that is the Christmas Bowl theme this year.

Hope? Where do I find hope in this weary world? This week in The Sydney Morning Herald's Column 8, a man wrote in that the woman in front of him at the grocery store had paid for his groceries. Puzzled, he ran after her and asked her why and she said, "I just wanted to do something nice today". Clearly she *needed* to do something nice that day. Hope lies dormant in us all and all we have to do is water it to bring it out.

Listen to Isaiah if you want to hear the seeds of hope.

In the last days  
the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths."  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.

Come, descendants of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord. Isaiah 2:2-5

In the very dark – there is always someone who lights a lamp. Advent is sent to remind us that we need to be awake, alert to the tiny flickers. Like wise men, go and find them and fan the sparks. Our job is to tell the story over and over and over again and to celebrate the coming birth – the birth of a new era; a new promise – a new hope.

I'd like to finish with a poem from Rev Sarah Speed from *How does a weary world rejoice?* It's called ....

### **The sound of hope**

We've been singing a sad song  
for quite some time,  
the melody syncing with our heartbeats,  
the lyrics stamped to the front of our minds.  
You say, sad songs are honest.  
It's hard to disagree,  
for sad songs tap us on the shoulder.

Sad songs remind us  
of the 100 different corners  
heartbreak could be behind.

But I don't have it in me  
to sing a sad song forever.

So despite the news,  
despite the aches in my body,  
despite the phone call last night  
that says she's waiting for the test results,  
despite yesterday's shooting,  
despite the unknown and unchanged,  
I am going to sing a song of hope.

Like a canary in a snowstorm,  
I don't need another song of what is;  
I need a song of what could be.  
So sing with me.  
Our voices may get drowned out by the wind,  
but surely someone will ask:  
Was that a flash of yellow in the snow?  
Was that the sound of hope?

Prayer by Rev. Sarah Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)