Biblical Text: Isaiah 2:1-5

**Introduction**

What does it mean to have hope?

There is a frivolous way that we use that word. I hope it works. By which we mean it’s 50/50 at best. But that focuses on the likelihood of the it alone. And that reduces one of the three theological virtues – faith, hope and charity – to the realm of Las Vegas. I hope the wheel gives me red. I hope I win the powerball. It’s a prayer to the goddess fortune. A prayer that pays no attention to the quality of the thing desired or how it is achieved.

The original Star Wars, the one that started it all, today comes with the subtitle – “A New Hope”. We might be tempted to think that this is an example of a frivolous use of that word. But hope, the theological virtue is the artistic core of that entire franchise. Thomas Aquinas defined hope as some desired good that is possible but very difficult to achieve. The desired good in Star Wars in the fall of the Empire. The fact that Darth Vader is the 2nd most powerful entity in the universe tells you something about the difficulty. But empires fall all the time. Most of us saw one – nicknamed the Evil Empire – vaporize within our lifetimes. The most successful modern Star Wars film is Rogue One. Probably the only one that you might remember a line from. “Rebellions are built on hope.” The entire story of that movie being what one might be willing to do with hope.

Aquinas also defines two ways of missing the mark of hope. Underestimating the odds or the cost is the sin of presumption. In that Star Wars universe, that might be the problem with the prequels. Everyone – well everyone except Yoda – just presumes that the Jedi, the great and the good, will have no problem with Anakin. Such presumption might have been part of the church’s sin over the past generation or so. Repeatedly she presumed that being the church would be easy, that the world instead of being a constant temptation was always a potential ally or friend, that she could do away with practices and doctrines and everything would come up roses.

But the opposite way of spoiling the virtue of hope is no longer believing in the possibility of good. This is the sin of despair. And that might be why everyone hated those Star Wars sequels. Mr. New Hope himself – Luke – was turned into walking case of despair. And it was a despair that anything would ever be different. It didn’t matter if you beat the empire, because it is just replaced with the Frist Order. And even if there was something new, it was just meaningless. Time a flat circle always spitting out variations on the same thing.

**Text**

Ok, I’ll let Star Wars go, sorry if you aren’t a movie buff. But in its core resonance, it matches up with how the Bible wants to talk about Hope.

What was Israel in all of the history of the Judges and Kings? At best it was a 2nd rate power, usually a 3rd. In its early history they failed to conquer all the Canaanites as God has told them, and so they were constantly having internal troubles. The Philistines ran roughshod over them. The height of Israel is under Solomon who managed to flip the tables on Syria and Philistia and be the direct partner of the great powers: Egypt and Assyria/Babylon. But that was short lived and the Kingdom split and soon they are back to being something like North and South Korea to China and the US. And when the big boys want have at each other? They meet up in Israel as their war playground.

Into that situation comes the prophecy of Isaiah. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains….and all the nations shall flow to it.

What is the Hope? That the people of God would no longer be trampled under the will of the nations of the world. That the power dynamic that has always existed would be flip-flopped. That the empire would fall. That Satan would no longer be this world’s tyrant.

What is the Hope? That when the empire falls, it won’t just be replaced by a new one. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. (But maybe worse.) But in the latter days…”he may teach us his ways and we might walk in his paths. Out of Zion shall go the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” This thing that we’ve held onto through all the ups and down. This thing that Abraham received by faith, and Moses brought down in stone, and David was promised would be eternal. This would become the basis of the new thing. The kingdoms of this world would become the kingdoms of our God.

What is the Hope? That this God is just and good. “He shall judge between the nations and decide disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares…nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Is this Hope good? Undoubtedly. Is it difficult to achieve? Absolutely. Is it possible?

**Christology**

Is it possible? Not in this world. As Jesus would say, “My Kingdom is not of this world.”

But that would tell us that our Hope – that Israel’s Hope – is in vain, it’s part of those frivolous things.

It would be, except for one thing, He rose.

Yes, the King of King came. He rode into Jerusalem to the cries of Hosanna, and by the end of the week they were calling crucify him. The one who came in the name of the Lord would be met by clubs and swords and led outside the city. And if that is where it ended it wouldn’t be despair to say Israel’s hope wasn’t possible, because you’d have the proof. But Jesus rose. The one we killed, the Father raised.

There is a new world. And the King is the firstborn of that new world. And he has triumphed over all the petty kingdoms of this world – and this world’s tyrant - who know their time is short.

**Moral**

Today, the Kingdom is one of rebellion. Rebellions are built on hope. And our hope is in that promise of the resurrection – the new heavens and the new earth. Our hope is in that day when the Kingdoms of this world are no longer threats because they have become the Kingdom of our Lord. Our hope is in that great ingathering of all nations to the mountain of the Lord – Calvary. That ingathering that is taught in peace.

In this world we will still have troubles. In this world we live by hope because we are rebels. The devil would like us to believe it is easy. To spoil out hope in presumption. Which is why the Apostle Paul reminds us that we should “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” If you are going to be rebels, you’ve got to know you are in a war. We don’t presume, but we prepare. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

We don’t presume, but neither do we despair. “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” And Christ has loved us. He loved sinners. He loved us enough to save us. We don’t despair that the world will beat us, because He has risen. We don’t despair that we can’t keep that law, because He kept it for us. And so we are called to follow. We have hope, the question is what are we willing to do because of that hope. This rebellion is one of love. To love the unlovable, just as we were loved.

**Eschatological**

We can see just enough fulfillment of Israel’s hope to maintain it and its possibility. The nations have been called and they are taught the law that went out from Zion. The way for Christ is the way of peace. It is a strange rebellion that seeks not force against force, but instead plants seeds and tends gardens – ploughs and pruning hooks - against all the weapons of the world.

All this was accomplished in that first advent. The basis of Hope was renewed and enlarged. Israel’s hope is not just the fall of Egypt and Babylon, but the fall of Satan’s Empire. Israel’s hope is not some small throne but an eternal one. One of Justice and peace.

Israel’s hope is our hope. That one day we will walk in the light of the Lord. Today, in between the advents, we prepare. We walk by faith and not by sight. We live by hope. Because the hour has come for us to wake. We have seen our salvation. And we know that Christ shall come. Not like the first time in weakness, but in glory. We risk love. Because this is the will of the King who first loved us and has called us into his light.

What does it mean to have hope? To live in his Kingdom now, his Kingdom of love, knowing that the day is not long. Amen.