

November 29, 2009
Scarboro United Church
Calgary AB

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Read: Jeremiah 33: 14-16, Luke 21: 25-26

“Hope For Our Darkest Nights”

Have you seen the movie “2012?”

Have you seen the trailers or have an idea of what it is about?

How many have never heard about it?

For those who haven't, 2012 is a doomsday movie. This time it is not God that is wreaking vengeance on the earth but an alignment of planets that exert tremendous pull on the tectonic plates that make up the earth's crust. At the same time as a massive solar flare sends enough radiation our way to heat the earth's core. The continents start to shift, wreaking massive damage and essentially destroying civilization. Only a few survive and head for Africa, now the highest point of land, a mountain on the appropriately named Cape of Good Hope.

The movie does convey, although perhaps unintentionally, the theme that no matter how dark our nights are, there is always hope.

I saw the movie Tuesday night. I needed something I didn't have to think too hard about as earlier in the day I had conducted a funeral. It wasn't a typical funeral as it was for a 15 year old boy who had taken his own life B my daughter's friend's son, a young man I knew well enough that I have my own grieving to do.

By the end of the funeral service, though, I was emotionally drained and in no shape to think too hard about anything. A movie seemed like a good idea and it was. I didn't realize it at the time, but thinking back on it, movies are all about light in the darkness. We sit in very dark rooms and light is projected on a screen to tell us a story.

For how many thousands or millions of years have humans gathered in the darkness around light, usually from a fire, and heard stories that bring hope. Stories that teach whatever we need to know to get through the struggles in life. Stories that teach a way through the darkness, stories that bring light into our darkest nights.

This is how the Bible came to us. Wandering families gathered in the night, in the wilderness, and at some point the stories would begin. Stories passed down from parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents back for who knows how many generations. Eventually they were written down and come to us today in print. It is a good thing they are there, for we no longer gather around open fires on a daily basis to tell those stories. This is no longer a typical routine in our families and clans.

That is unfortunate. Unfortunate because we are left with fear-based hopes. We hope the good things in life will never change. We hope that we can live in relative peace. We hope that we will live forever. We hope that we can have it all . . . The list goes on, and yet these are all fear-based hopes, hopes that are self-protective.

Because they are fear-based, these hopes distort our vision. We focus on those who seem to have all that we crave and become blind to those who don't. When we only see from our fear many people become invisible. In the movie I saw the whole focus was on those determined to survive. Billions died with hardly a notice, except to illustrate the certainty of death. Invisible people. We walk by them every day as we strive and strive and strive to stave off the fears of the night.

Ironically when we look even superficially at life the biggest certainty is death and so we live in fear.

Jesus knows oppression, devastation, destruction and doom. He sees that it will all continue relentlessly, even in his day and generation and he knows our fears. He points to a fig tree and talks of how the first leaves of spring tell the story of approaching summer. Hope in the winter darkness of our fears. Hope arising not from fear but from faith. We know when we see those leaves that summer will come.

Faith-based hope says that chaos is not evil. The disruption we fear can bring new vision, new opportunities for growth and diversity. Walls can come down in chaotic times. God's Spirit has some wiggle room to break into our lives and turn them upside down! Hope!

Darkness and winter and death are all part of life. Tree rings show us that God's economy has both growth and recession. Winter's death brings new growth and adds strength and flexibility. Those who are blind to the destitute and despairing have their eyes broken open and see real people instead of homeless. Hope! Those driven to succeed have their hearts broken open and discover compassion. Hope! Those hoarding their way to security have their wallets broken open and discover generosity. Hope!

In the midst of the profound darkness of the overwhelming success of the Roman Empire, the most successful, fear based empire civilization has known, in a tiny remote village in a village forsaken by fear based gods, surrounded by nobodies going nowhere, a tiny baby cries in the night. Hope!

Amen