

Labyrinths of Hope: A Reflection on Hope in the Season of Advent

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I had heard about the labyrinth from a friend who suggested I visit it while in Austin, Texas for my brother's wedding. The labyrinth is in back of the Lake Travis United Methodist Church out on Farm Road 620. It sits on a hill overlooking Lake Travis in a beautiful part of the Texas Hill country. This labyrinth is made of rough-hewn limestone demarcating a gravel path. A large cross in the background orients East and West. At sunset, the sky turns pink and purple behind the cross as the shadows of the afternoon descend.

My family and I had worshipped at Lake Travis UMC on the First Sunday of Advent. The youth had led us in worship, and two young people had preached on the topic of hope. We shared communion with the congregation. Together we anticipated the coming of Christ and the hope that would come with the righteousness of his reign. That hope is expressed in a well-known passage in Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." Jeremiah 33: 14-16

In Jeremiah's vision a Davidic King would restore all that had gone wrong in the life of Israel. He would turn back the injustices that had grown from one group elevating itself above another. He would turn back the oppression that would come from one group seeking to conquer another. He would turn back the destructiveness of brother turning against brother, sister against sister, and of neighbor turning against friend. He would bring hope for the safety of Jerusalem and for the salvation of a people.

In this season of Advent, we look to the same hope. We hope for a world in which children in Yemen or in Syria are safe from the terrors of famine and war. We hope for a world in which worshippers in synagogues and mosques and churches are safe from the ravages of hate. We hope for a world in which we would care for creation and for one another as an expression of God's righteousness and love.

I reflected on the journey toward this Christian hope as I walked the labyrinth behind the Lake Travis United Methodist Church. As I walked that labyrinth, I walked inward toward a center but found myself on a meandering path that was hard to predict. I made slow progress, but the journey seemed to take me to the outskirts of the path. Somewhere along the way I realized that I was not in charge of the journey, but that the destination was sure.

Our destination is indeed sure. We will always make progress toward Christ as the center of our hope. And we will rest there for a while--finding sustenance in our common faith—in the preaching of children and in the sharing of the bread and the cup. Then we will walk out, by the same meandering and unpredictable path, into the wideness of the surrounding landscape toward the world in all of its beauty and complication and pain. We will walk out better prepared to be the Body of Christ bringing hope to the world.