

Hope.

For me, that word conjures so many thoughts. You know, the unsinkable, eternally springing, optimistic, silver linings, glass half-full kind. It's beloved fictional character Ted Lasso refuting barkeep Mae's assertion, "it's the hope that kills you" with his own rousing halftime speech exclaiming "it's the LACK of hope that kills you" followed shortly by the exhortation, "do you believe in miracles?!"

(Insert blue and yellow "BELIEVE" sign here)

Hopeful people are the ones you want to be around. I've certainly been accused of being a hopeful person plenty in my life. These days, though? Sorry Ted. I'm, regrettably, a bit more of a Mae girl. I don't have to walk you through the litany of events that put sizable dents in one's ability to remain hopeful. Yours may be different than mine. But the ones I know we share involve injustice, suffering, oppression, and good old-fashioned indifference for the well-being of our brothers and sisters. It's a lot. And, for me, so is the helplessness that comes with it.

Cue the next pop culture reference.

The Broadway musical *Hadestown* eloquently paints a picture of a fractured society that longs to see "how the world could be, in spite of the way it is." They recount a Greek tragedy. We all know those don't end well. But even after the tragic end, they sing this refrain:

*"Cause here's the thing:  
To know how it ends  
And still begin to sing it again  
As if it might turn out this time  
I learned that from a friend of mine  
See, Orpheus was a poor boy  
But he had a gift to give:  
He could make you see how the world could be,  
In spite of the way that it is"*

They resolved to keep singing. Because who knows? Maybe this time...THIS time the world becomes what it can be. If we've ever had hope, we long to see the world the way we know it can be. No matter its current state.

All due respect to Ted and Orpheus, but the ultimate version of this story belongs to God, a refugee couple, their baby boy, Jesus, and the world He came to redeem.

"O Holy Night" perfectly encapsulates not only the birth of Jesus and its ramifications, but the desperate and broken world that longed for Him to arrive. Read these verses with me.

*"Long lay the world, in sin and error pining  
Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope- the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!"*

*"Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,*

*And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;  
Let all within us praise His holy name."*

The gravity of those verses! Is it any wonder the chorus begs us to fall on our knees and praise His name forever? The weight of suffering is real, church. But...BUT! A thrill of hope waits. Jesus is coming. And with him? Broken chains. Oppression's end. A law of love and a gospel of peace.

Let us lean into that "thrill of hope" this Advent.

Amen.

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