Weekly Study of Sunday's Message
November 29, 2026 ***"Advent: The call to action. Hope is the call to courageous resistance".***

I Intro.
I hope you had a good Thanksgiving. We're at the end of November, and we're on our first Sunday of Advent. Can you believe we're moving into the Christmas season? There's a lot going on at NCC and you'll want to keep up with everything that's happening. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Sunday.
This is the first day of Advent. And the theme of hope. In our specific Advent theme; ***"Advent: The Call to Action."*** We're saying; ***Hope is the call to courageous resistance***.
First, some truths about this thing called hope. Hope is what holds us in place when we're waiting. To resist sliding into hopelessness. *"When is our family member going to let us know when they got there? When are we going to get the test back? When will the doctor come out? When will…?* We don't need hope when things are going well. Our only hope when things are going well is…we hope things will continue going well. We need hope when things are tough, we have struggles, uncertainty, problems we see no answers or solutions to. But, in waiting, we have to also resist sliding into learned helplessness. Just sitting in our hopelessness…waiting to be rescued. Hope is what we cling to when everything feels shaky, unstable, uncertain. In this series, real hope will move us to action.

1. Hope will meet you in the most unlikely places, in the most unlikely times. And it will probably freak you out…that in that tough situation, you're not that freaked out. You're saying; *"I'm in a bad place and I just feel this sense of calmness"*. Most likely, that infusion of hope is going to require you to resist giving up, stand up, brush yourself off, and move your feet. I'm sure you've had tough things happen, and after getting through them, you can feel the ability to hope grow stronger.
This is why hope feels like such an illusive thing. We try to hunt for it. Especially when we so desperately need it. However, hope can find itself turning into its weaker cousin. 'Wishful thinking'. Rather than making it through whatever, we 'Adult Disney Brain' ourselves, believing everything will turn out just fine. But with nothing more than magic. We want to be rescued from whatever situation we find ourselves in. Rather than moving into that unlikely promise, and trusting. And then finding the courage to act on that promise of hope.

2. Hope can't be generated or manufactured. Courageous resistance isn't how hard you strain to muster up some kind of hope. In this political environment you know what they call manufactured forced false hope? 'Hopium'. Because it's not real, and you can't ever get enough. Courageous

resistance is believing when it doesn't seem possible. Courageous resistance is actively stepping into assurance, not certainty, (certainty can be a drug also). The belief you're going to be okay, even if things don't work out. And this kind of hope only comes from God. not from our own efforts.

3. Hope will require you to step out into situations, and live like you believe. On the other hand, even though you cannot manufacture hope, hope will not come about by just sitting and waiting. You're not Cinderella waiting for your prince. Sometimes you'll have to move into situations without having all the info you need. You'll be stepping out into the unknown, resisting the familiar, centered in trust, in the midst of uncertainty. And no one likes uncertainty. It's why we are reluctant to change. We believe in this, and use it as an excuse to not step out; *"The devil I know is better than…the devil I don't know."* That can be true. But the only way you can prove it's true is by actually stepping out. If you're unable to step out, then you'll always be living in fear and hesitancy.

We'll start our first Sunday of Advent, the message of hope, by hearing this story of stepping into the unknown. And this isn't a regular 'ole run of the mill hope. This is extra fortified courageous hope.
Luke 1:26-38. ***In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."***
Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."
"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"
The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."
"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

I want to dig into the spiritual roots of hope. Let's unpack Mary's story, and find the sources of hope.
1. Courageous hope didn't begin with a plan…but with a simple question. A call to action will cause us to wrestle with some things we thought were true. And you have permission to wrestle with the hope being offered. I love that Mary's faith was so strong, she wasn't afraid to ask: *"How will this be?"* **How many times have you asked a similar question?**
To question is not a refusal. It's not saying no. Questioning is the natural result of something new. So, don't be afraid to ask the question: **How will this be?** Saying; *"I'm stuck, I see no way out, this doesn't look like the answer, it feels hopeless."* Consider what's going on in your life. Everything that you're having to deal with. All the obstacles in front of you, and people who don't believe in you. It's okay to have some questions, to have doubts. Just let those questions lead you to God.
That means give yourself grace. You've never been here before. You have no experience with this. Mary allowed herself to start this journey that was going to disrupt her life from what she thought it was going to be. You've never seen this happen before. You have no experience, no history, nothing

to fall back on to help you navigate this new thing. Give yourself time to freak out, run around like a crazy person. Get it out of your system. If you don't allow yourself, give yourself permission, to ask some very important questions, you won't be able to move through…not always on…but through. Asking questions is an important step to courageous hope.

2. Courageous hope is not the absence of struggle, but how we are transformed through that struggle. The call to action will cause us to enter into a personal time of struggle…inside a struggle. Mary wasn't all: *"This is awesome. Just what I had hoped for!"* Can I tell you something? Courageous hope is hard. In fact. ***"Hope is a dangerous thing."*** You know I had to quote "Shawshank Redemption"..Just for fun I'm going to do it twice. ***"Hope is a good thing..."***
Courageous hope will utterly remake you…over time. Hope is not the absence of struggle. Hope is resisting what may feel like unfairness, and saying *"yes"* inside the struggle. By fully entering into this new thing. Accepting this will be life for the time being. And as life does…things will change even again. There is going to be a work that's done within you, that will remake you to be the person who is more than capable of going through this new thing. You're not going to get all the details right up front of how this will work. But AS YOU ARE BEING TRANSFORMED, you will be formed, reshaped, to become the person who is able to resist and handle the new thing that's been thrust into your life. It's called courageous hope, because it's all new. Mary was about to enter into a new life that was going to take her places, introducing her to things she would have never experienced before. But, like Mary, you WILL be given what you need at that time of struggle.

3. Courageous hope trusts that even if we don't know how things will work out, we trust in the one who is doing the work. The call to action calls us to put our trust in the God who is at work. The angel references God's work in the past.
"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."
Hope can be born out of seeing what God has done in the past. Hope is what we believe needs to happen, and courageously stepping into how a trustworthy God is bringing about that work…because God has been there for us in the past. You will never see the entire road ahead of you. I drive home at night on Davis Rd. And I'm constantly watching for deer. I can't see any further than my headlights. Therefore, I don't drive so fast that I outdrive my headlights. But I trust in just what's immediately in front of me. And I learn to be okay there. But because of my past history on that road, knowing where the more dangerous spots might be, I can continue to drive ahead, even when I can't see far ahead. Courageous hope trusts in walking that line between trusting appropriately, and still being wise.

4. Courageous hope only comes from surrender. True courageous hope requires a heart of submission, surrender, to the work of God.
"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."
Imagine Wesley from "The Princess Bride" saying; *"As you wish"*. I have to keep using movie quotes. I didn't have the word *"only"* in the heading at first. But as I read through this passage several times, and reflected on the life of Mary as seen through the ministry of Jesus. Mary's ability to have this courageous hope was ***only*** found in the depth and sincerity of her surrender to what God was doing. Surrendering to the path laid out ahead of her, Mary knew God was taking her. This path would be difficult…very difficult. There would be times Mary would want to be with Jesus, and he was

completely focused on his ministry and I'm sure Mary felt pushed aside. Any of you with older kids know how this feels. But Mary continued to trust, and surrender, ONLY because of God's faithfulness. And know…this courageous hope that runs into our uncertainty, fills us with assurance, can ONLY come from courageous surrender.

III Challenge.
So… courageous hope.
Where do you need courageous hope today?
What are you going through, what are you facing, what are you having to deal with in which you need a big 'ole dose of hope to resist fear?
This Advent message is not about fixing your life. It's not about giving you all the answers, cheat codes, life hacks, to get you to where you want to be. If you had all those, you wouldn't need hope.

Let's pull out three truths.
1. This story of the visitation to Mary is the story we hold onto in this time of waiting and preparing, resisting anxiety and fear. This story isn't some step by step plan to get you to where you want to be. This is not a strategic outline of how to get God to do what we want him to do. This is the story of God entering the world to show us the depth and breadth of his love for us. And it's in receiving that love from God, we find courageous hope. And grow the ability to resist despair.

2. This story tells us where courageous hope is born. We can have the same hope Mary did. Resisting the slide into hopelessness. God is at work, calling us to this life. Even if we don't understand it. We can't manufacture this hope on our own. Courageous hope comes from being open and willing for God to step and speak into our lives living in the assurance of trusting God.

3. This story tells us that courageous hope has a cost. Courageous hope is disruptive. Resistance always disrupts. That's what makes it courageous. Mary and Joseph had plans for their life. Joseph seemed to be a really good guy. And I'm sure he and Mary had a lot of conversations about what their life would look like. But courageous hope, that resists despair, could only be found in accepting the call God had placed on their lives. And fully living into it.
Be okay with the question: ***"How will this be?"***
You will not be ready for the path God wants you to walk. You don't need courageous hope if you've got everything already figured out. But God is willing, and waiting, to meet you in your hopelessness.
So, what is YOUR *"How will it be?"* question.
Where are you uncertain, troubled, looking for direction and guidance?

The season of Advent, and this first Sunday focusing on Hope, seen in courageous resistance, we learn to wait, to prepare, and to trust in the one who is leading us.
Do you need courageous hope?
It's in following the heart and path of Mary that we find it.
"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

Next week: ***Peace is the call to disruptive reconciliation.***