

**Sermon “On the Horizon”**  
**Kirk of St James**  
**Sunday December 1, 2025**  
**Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton**

Sometimes if Chad and I are between seasons of a show we normally watch, we find ourselves flipping through channels to see if there is anything new on television, or an interesting program we have not checked out yet. One show in particular caught my attention one evening “Is It Cake?” If you had told me before the pandemic that there would be a show on television dedicated to creating cakes that look like everyday objects, I might not have believed you. Since 2020 anything feels possible. Anyway, on the show contestants create cakes that look like everyday objects we have in our homes and judges have to guess if things are cake based only on how they look. I thought it would be obvious but, I was surprised by how difficult it was. People often had a challenging time determining what was real and what was fake (or cake if you will!).

One of the things that struck me most about the show was how our senses can lie to us. This thought or question expands far beyond a show about cake and encompasses our lives. We live in a world where things can be deceptive—what do we trust? What is true? These are questions we wrestle with throughout our lives with things far greater than cake at stake. (I apologize, it was just begging to be said!). Who do we trust in our lives? When we vote we want to be able to trust that our candidate is going to do what they promise. When we take a job, we want to trust our employer. When we make friends we trust others with our hopes, dreams and vulnerabilities. We also know there are things we

should not trust—for example when it comes to advertising, we know products are marketed in a way that sells their best features and downplays their weak spots. When I go to buy a new product, I will look up reviews trusting that they are true. However, I am also aware that people could be trolling and posting negative reviews without even trying the product, or the flip side is that the reviews are paid for by the company. Our modern lives come with a certain amount of skepticism built in. That age old saying, “if its too good to be true, it probably is” rings true.

The Psalmist today, comes before God knowing that what they trust is true. With God there are no tricks, no broken promises, no false advertising. They approach God at a time in their life when they are experiencing turmoil and ask for help. This particular Psalm is known as a lament Psalm, and is made up of petition, praise, and promise. “Emphasis in the first portion of the passage on the writer’s needs—for deliverance, for guidance, and for forgiveness—presents a lens for reflecting on how the advent gift to come may respond to these specific needs, as well as to the needs of many, many others.” It is believed that this Psalm was likely written by David later in his life as he is reflecting back on his experiences and actions. This type of reflection is a good way for us to enter the new church year as well. To allow ourselves time to take stock of our experiences, to mourn the difficulties, to celebrate the good, to talk to God about the bad, and to look forward in hope.

The Psalmist gives us a window into their relationship with God through their honesty, and their comfort in approaching God. There is a sense of friendship and ease that underlies this entire encounter. One of the curious things I have discovered about my faith over the years is that I find it easy to believe in God's trust and hope for others and find it challenging personally. I absolutely believe in God's goodness and hope when I think about the world and others but, for some reason when it comes to my personal life things clog up with fear and doubt. I envy how easily the Psalmist trusts that God is going to be there for them personally in the ways they need most. How about you? Do you feel that sense of friendship our Psalmist demonstrates with God? Does it feel like a struggle for you? Do you believe that God loves you? These are tough questions. What we read today illustrates how much God loves each of us, and how we are welcomed into relationship with God in the same way.

It is interesting coming into the first Sunday of advent which is hope, because in many ways hope requires trust. If we cannot trust that God is in our lives and in the world, then it becomes exponentially harder to have a sense of hope. "This is a psalm of confident hope. It is the song of someone who has known the complexities, the downs and ups of life and still maintains a steadfast trust that God will provide for them, that God will care for them, that the future is ultimately in God's hands...Hope is always situated between the world gone wrong, life off track, tasks undone, and expectations of the world righted, life moving steadily ahead on God's mainline, work well done. It is the

human condition to live in the tension between failure and fulfillment, sin and salvation, trouble and hope. This psalm shows the very human tendency to mix concerns and expectations, reality and dreams, as the stream of consciousness flows through the mind.” Today as we begin the advent journey the Psalmist shows us how to approach God, with full trust and hope.

We often talk about how we are a people of hope, and we look to see how we might share God’s love and hope with the world. That is what it is to be a Christian in the world. However, this advent while we whole heartedly acknowledge and move toward that reality, I am also going to invite us to do something a little more personal. This advent season as we pause and look ahead to the birth of Christ, I would invite you take some time to approach God as the psalmist did today. What things over the past year were difficult? What things were heartbreaking? What brought you joy? If you were going to tell God exactly what you were thinking and feeling what would you say? “Old Testament interpreter Walter Brueggemann identifies recognition of the need for self-reflection as disorientation that makes way for new orientation, saying the psalms invite us “into the wholeness that comes in embraced brokenness.” We are invited into relationship with God, with every part of who we are which is an incredibly precious gift. After taking some time to work through your thoughts and emotions, I would invite you to consider what your hopes are for the next year? I pray that as we move into 2025 in just over a month that we do so with a sense of both trust and hope.