

Moore Presbyterian Churches

November 28, 2021

First Sunday of Advent

God calls us to worship

Advent reading and candle lighting (Insert):

L: Hope is a flame that is given by God.

P: Hope for a new world burns in our hearts.

L: Hope burns in the message of the Law
and the teaching of the Prophets.

P: Hope is revealed in Jesus Christ.

The candle is lit.

L: Let us pray:

**P: Source of light, burn in our lives
and in your world with your renewing hope.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Song: "A Candle is Burning"

We offer our prayers

Prayer of Praise:

God of light and love,
our praises and prayers overflow with hope as the season of Advent opens.
You come to your people to dwell with us.
You come with power to transform.
You come with promise to make all things new according to your word.
You come with signs of your deep love for the world.
Your coming is our hope,
and so, we offer you our worship in gratitude and anticipation.
Come into our lives again, O God,
and show us how to hope in the face of all that is discouraging,
for we gather in the name of Jesus the Christ,
your promise and our desire.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**God of mercy:
you have called us to be thankful
for your good gifts to us,
but too often we have taken them for granted
as if we deserved them.**

**You have called us to be hopeful
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,
but too often despair has come upon us,
and the cares of the world have weighed us down.**

**You have called us to be joyful
in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving.**

We offer our lives and resources

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar)

Hymn: #120 "Lo! Christ comes with clouds descending"

God speaks to us through his Word

Living in the Presence of the Christ

Advent is the season of waiting.

But for what are we waiting? As tempting as it is to wait for peace on earth and good will towards all people; as faithful as it is to wait for the Day of the Lord: the return of Christ, the wedding of heaven and earth, and the final casting out of everything that is not of God – which is, after all, the fundamental Christian hope – if those are our sole foci of hope, we will likely be quite disappointed.

Instead, Advent is designed to help us learn to wait for Christ in the midst of our present, messy circumstances. To live in Christian hope in the midst of the chaos. To live our imperfect, earthy days in the presence of the Christ.

The readings for the first Sunday of Advent encourage us to not jump too quickly to Christmas, but to pause and remember why Christmas was necessary in the first place.

READ JEREMIAH 33:14-16

LUKE 21:1-20, 25-28, 34-38

1ST THESSALONIANS 3:12-13

1. Jesus was in the temple. And he was watching people's behaviour. He saw rich people putting a small portion of their net worth into the treasury. He saw a poor widow

put in what might have been the money for her supper that day. He saw misaligned societal values in real-time. He saw a religious institution that was supposed to symbolize the presence and power of God amongst humanity; divine justice and righteousness forcing a vulnerable woman to give up her supper while the rich simply gave a small portion of their abundance. And then, with this real-life lesson in inequality still fresh in his mind, he heard people speak about the glory of the temple: how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to the God of justice and righteousness.

And then he opened his mouth and dared to say that the temple was temporary.

the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.

This statement must have loomed in the imagination of the people present like the end of the world. The temple was God's home among mortals. It symbolized His eternal presence, His justice, and His mercy. The presence of the temple meant that God was with his people. Jerusalem and Judah could live in safety. It meant that regardless of foreign empires and persecution, God was still working out his promise to re-install a descendant of David on the throne. As long as the temple stood, hope continued to burn in hearts.

To conceive of a world without the temple was to consider a world without God.

Jesus' comments must have sounded like a prediction of the end of the world. Certainly, the end of a Godly world.

(Of course, in light of the juxtaposition of the widow and the rich people at the treasury, one might wonder if the society was all that Godly to begin with!)

2. Although on first consideration the Jerusalem temple may seem foreign to us and the importance of it quite abstract, its not actually that hard to place ourselves in the mindset of Jesus' audience:

Think about the emotions you might feel when a congregation closes.

Now, imagine a society with no Christian temples, no church buildings.

For those of you who are long-time members of a Christian congregation, imagine life without the gathered Christian community, without the smell and feel of the well-worn pews, the music of the organ, the sight of the cross on the wall at the front.

Think about the reaction you would get if you went to a congregation's annual meeting, stood up, and said that in the near future this building would be bulldozed and the land sold to a condominium developer!

For Jesus' audience, what he was describing was the end of the world.

3. We need to keep in mind that Luke likely wrote his gospel in the early 80s of the first century. Why that's significant is that in the year 70 C.E., nearly 40 years after Jesus likely spoke these words, the temple was in fact destroyed! This was a violent time. There was much bloodshed, much heartache, and much persecution.

Like us, Luke's original audience would have heard these words retrospectively. The event that had seemed like the end of the world had happened. Yet, the world did not end! The Jewish faith was not destroyed! The Lord's influence was not quelled! Much changed, to be sure. The temple sacrifices were no longer the central ritual of worship. The political landscape changed as there were no longer any temple politicians. The economy would have changed because a large part of Jerusalem's economy was devoted to supplying the temple – not to ignore the effects of war and its aftermath! Life changed drastically. But the loss of the temple did not mean the end of the world.

When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.

In fact, what Jesus described beginning in verse 8, could describe any era: people proclaiming to be the saviour of civilization, people claiming to know the ultimate secret to happiness and health and salvation; nations rising against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms; temples collapsing; great earthquakes; famines, plagues, nations confused by the anger of the natural world ... Sounds a lot like today!

It is precisely for these circumstances that the Lord has come.

And come, he has. The righteous Branch of the house of David has sprung up. He executes justice and righteousness among those who claim Him as King. And he will do so for all in due course.

4. There are probably times when you would like to jump right to that eventual day. Every year we experience this in a sense because, by the time we get to November, many people are anxious to skip ahead to Christmas: sing carols, watch pageants and movies, and listen to the angels proclaiming peace on earth. Every year someone will say: “Let’s get this year over with, 2022 can’t possibly be as bad as 2021!”

Advent begins the Christian year by challenging us to wait. To accept that we cannot fix the world – or even bring rest to our wearied hearts – and to wait for the One who can. To wait for the arrival of Christ.

There are three dimensions to this act of waiting:

1. *Remembering* the arrival of the Christ child. Retelling the stories of Jesus’ birth, of how the Word became flesh and lived among us. Singing of how the righteous branch has sprung up for David. Remembering affirms that we ought not to expect another pregnancy. Jesus, the Messiah has been born!
2. *Anticipating* the future re-arrival of the Christ at the fulfillment of salvation history. The Bible describes our ultimate hope as a marriage when heaven comes to earth, when all that is not of God is cast out – when the chaos is re-ordered as it was in the beginning, and we live in perfect harmony with our Creator once again as we were in the Garden of Eden. This age of perfect redemption is yet to come. With the birth of Christ, the Kingdom of God has come near, but it is yet to be completed.

Advent is about remembering and anticipating.

The Messiah has come.

The Messiah will come again.

Past and future are in his hands.

3. The third dimension of Advent waiting involves the present age between those two horizons.

When it seems like the world is falling apart, it is then, says the Messiah, that they will see the Son of Man coming with power and great glory.

Waiting in advent prepares us to see the Son of Man and to trust his power to establish within us the peace that foreshadows peace on earth.

In the third dimension, waiting takes the form of watching and being on guard.

Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life...

The apostle Paul encouraged holiness. This is encouragement to take care of what we think, say, and especially (in this case) what we do so that we are receptive to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily experiences.

Holiness is going to look different for someone who is in their teens or 20s or 60s or 90s. Drunkenness and frivolous distractions (dissipations) will be different depending on your stage of life. But while the specifics are different, the principles are the same.

Drunkenness may refer to alcohol consumption, but more generally it refers to anything that causes you to lose focus; to lose your holy vision and your awareness of the Spirit's presence.

There is much that can fill our minds, cloud our vision, and weigh down our hearts: pandemics and politics; extreme weather events and social justice concerns; illness, personal crises, and fatigue; sugar, salt, caffeine and carbs; excessive screen time, binge-worthy video streaming, the list seems to be endless!

The holy habit of keeping Advent; of waiting, watching, and heeding encourages us to pay attention to what might be distracting and even preventing us from living daily in the Presence of the Christ; what might be helping us embrace the chaos of the world and shy away from the peace of the Holy Spirit.

Christ has come, Christ will come again, the Holy Spirit dwells within us in the messiness of life between the horizons. When these things begin to take place; when natural disasters happen, when political fighting consumes the news, when our hearts

are weighed down, stand up, raise our heads, and proclaim to a world bound and struggling: the Messiah *has* come, the *Lord* is righteousness, Redemption *is* drawing near!

For the health of our souls, the good of the nation, and the glory of God.
Amen.

Hymn: #109 “All earth is waiting” (verses 1-3)

The Sacrament of the Lord's supper

Invitation

Regardless of our present circumstances,
Christ reaches out to us in the Word of God
and in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
This is the Lord's table.
Our Saviour invites all those who trust him
to share the feast which he has prepared.
So, come,
not because you are strong,
but because you are weak.
Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come,
but because you need mercy and help;
Come, because you love the Lord a little
and would like to love him more.
Come, because the Lord loves you
and gave himself for you.
Let this bread and wine be for you
the token and pledge
of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of the Father,
and the communion of the holy Spirit,
all meant for you if you will receive them in humble faith.
So, come,
taste and see that the Lord is good.

And as we come to the table,
we examine our own faith
as we recite in unison the Apostle's Creed.

The Apostles' Creed (Book of Praise #539)

The Prayer of Thanksgiving (Book of Praise #564)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Holy God, Creator of heaven and earth,
with joy we give you thanks and praise.
Through the words of your prophets
you gave your people hope
by promising them the Redeemer.
And now we rejoice that in your Son, Jesus Christ,
the Saviour has come
and will come again in power and glory

making all things new

How wonderful are your ways, almighty God.
How marvellous is your name, O Holy One.
You alone are God.

Therefore with apostles and prophets,
and that great cloud of witnesses
who live for you beyond all time and space,
we lift our hearts in joyful praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise you, most holy God,
for sending your unique Son Jesus to live among us,
full of grace and truth.
Sharing our joy and sorrow,
he healed the sick and was a friend of sinners.

Obeying you,
he took up his cross and died that we might live.
We praise you that he overcame death
and is risen to rule the world.
He is still the friend of sinners.
We trust him to overcome every power that can hurt or divide us,
and believe that when he comes in glory
we will celebrate victory with him.

Therefore, in remembrance of your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we take this bread and this cup
and give you praise and thanksgiving
as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

Gracious God,
pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,
and upon this bread and wine,
that we, and all who share this feast,
may be one with Christ and he with us.

Here we offer ourselves to be a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to you.
In your mercy,
accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.
Fill us with the joy of eternal life,
that we may be your faithful people
until we feast with you in glory.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour are yours, almighty God,
for ever and ever.

Our Father ...

The Breaking of Bread

Hear now the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper as recorded by the
apostle Paul: 1ST CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

When we break the bread,
it is a sharing in the body of Christ.

When we bless the cup,
it is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The gifts of God
for the people of God.

The Communion

Prayer

Eternal God,
we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves for others
in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

God sends us with His blessing

Hymn: #556 "Now let us from this table rise"

Blessing

Go into the world in peace.
Whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to the Father through him.
And may the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.