

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 1st, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Hope
First Sunday of Advent
Jeremiah 33:14-16

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Show us your unfailing love, O God, our Savior,
and grant us your salvation.

Listen to what the Lord our God says:
**He promises peace to his people,
who are his beloved saints.**

The Lord will indeed give what is good.
**Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.**

May the Lord make his holy face to shine upon us
in this time of Advent worship.
**May we see God's face and so know peace.
Amen.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe,
for you have kept us in life, sustained us,
and brought us to this holy season.
our hearts desire the warmth of your love,
and our minds are searching for the light of your Word.
Increase our longing for Christ, our Savior,
and give us the strength to grow in love,
that the dawn of his coming
may find us rejoicing in his presence
and welcoming the light of his truth.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Advent Candle Lighting

Reader: Today we mark the beginning of the Advent season, entering into a season of Hope. In celebration we light the candles of the advent wreath, one each time we gather for worship. Every week, we add to those lit the week before, and as the light grows brighter, our hope draws nearer.

The first candle is a candle of hope. Our hope is in the long-awaited Jesus, who first came to us as a baby. As we reflect on the ways and the whys of our hope, instill in us, Lord, a joy that knows no bounds. The joy that comes in welcoming new life.

Reader: On this first Sunday, we reflect on the reasonableness of our hope. We long for the coming savior, and we need the hope he brings. As a tender shoot emerges from the stump of a tree that has been felled, we can see the hope of new life that comes from meeting Jesus in our Advent journey.

God, meet us in the midst of our hoping. Give us the assurance that what you have promised us will come to pass. Forgive us for those times when we are tempted to despair, and light the fire of your hope in our hearts once more!

Light the first candle of the Advent wreath.

Children's Hymn

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,
always with us, always coming:
We confess that we do not know
how to prepare for your Advent.
We have forgotten how to hope in miracles;
we have ignored the promise of your kingdom;
we get distracted by all the busyness of this season.
Forgive us, God.
Grant us the simple wonder of the shepherds,
the intelligent courage of the Magi,
and the patient faith of Mary and Joseph,
that we may journey with them to Bethlehem
and find the good news of a child born for us.
Now, in the quiet of our hearts,
we ask you to make us ready for his coming. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

As we hear the ancient prophecies of the coming of the Messiah,
we long for the day when death will be swallowed up
and every tear will be wiped away.

As we wait expectantly
for Christ's promised return,
we live in the assurance of God's gracious forgiveness

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.**

Opening Hymn #122: "Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel" (V 1,3,5)

Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lowly exile here,
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:
Rejoice, rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee,
O Israel.

Oh come, thou Wisdom from on high,
and order all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and cause us in her ways to go.

Oh come, thou Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high
and close the path to misery.

Responsive Reading**Psalms 132:1-12**

¹ Remember, O Lord, in David's favor,
all the hardships he endured,

**² how he swore to the Lord
and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,**

**³ “I will not enter my house
or get into my bed,**

**⁴ I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,**

**⁵ until I find a place for the Lord,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”**

**⁶ Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.**

**⁷ “Let us go to his dwelling place;
let us worship at his footstool!”**

**⁸ Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.**

**⁹ Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,
and let your saints shout for joy.**

**¹⁰ For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.**

**¹¹ The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:**

**“One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.**

**¹² If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them,
their sons also forever
shall sit on your throne.”**

Music Ministry: “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”

**Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)**

Scripture

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will

dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

Sermon

Dec 1st, The countdown to Christmas has officially begun in many homes all around the world. However, the reasons and motivations behind the countdown will often vary from household to household.

In some houses it is a countdown to the great gift opening of Christmas morning, a time when they are anticipating getting that perfect gift that they have been hinting at for the entire year. For others it is a countdown to the main event, a gathering of family and friends, and there are a million things on the countdown list to complete, gifts to purchase, decorations to put up, treats to bake, and the house needs to be cleaned from top to bottom. Yes, the countdown to Christmas has truly begun, Christmas is coming!

However, there is also the countdown to Christmas that God's followers take part in, the time of Advent, but did you know that it is not new, or even unique to our time and place in history? Advent means the countdown to the expectant coming of the Saviour. However, that countdown actually began when God first made the promise to send a Saviour to this world to redeem sinners from their sin. The countdown clock started ticking in the garden of Eden and has continued throughout all of the centuries, God constantly reminding his people the Christ is coming.

God continually sent his prophets to the people, all echoing the message that 'Christ is coming.' Why were those constant reminders necessary, why are there so many books from the prophets in the Old Testament? Simply put, just like people today the people of the Old Testament had short attention spans. They got distracted some people began to doubt that God would ever fulfil his promise and other just gave up waiting and decided to embrace the world and its ways, choosing to pursue their own pleasures in the here and now.

That is what was happening when the prophet Jeremiah came along in around 600BC. There were a lot of people looking at the nation of Israel and wondering if the promise of a Saviour was ever going to come true, or if it was even real. Israel, the people of God, had been ripped apart by civil war, its kingdoms in the north had been slowly dismantled, its cities destroyed, its people killed or enslaved in exile by the armies of the Assyrians. All that remained of the once great nation of Israel was the smaller southern kingdom of Judah and its capital city of Jerusalem.

The people of Judah were not safe, however, the Babylonians, one of the world's rising powers was at its borders, raiding its cities and enslaving its citizens. In the times of Jeremiah, the city of Jerusalem will be surrounded and starved into surrender, after which its people will be sent into exile or slavery and the entire city will be burned to the ground.

Things were bad in the time of Jeremiah and his fellow Jews.

Jeremiah 33:4-5

⁴ For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege mounds and against the sword: ⁵ They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans and to fill them with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil.

The people of God were called to be set apart from the world, set apart from other nations in the way that they think, act and speak and instead embraced the ways of the world. They had forgotten that they were to stay true to God until the coming of the Saviour and had deserted the Lord and began to fall into pagan ways, idolizing the gods and lives of their neighbors.

It was not just the people, it was the leaders as well, the kings had failed to provide Godly leadership. The religious leaders who should have been calling for the people to recognize their sinful nature and to repent and turn away from sin, remained silent and by doing so appeared to condone of the wickedness that the people were doing. The voices of the faithful, and the prophets, calling on the people to stay true to God and await the coming of Christ, fell upon deaf ears! The nation of Israel, the chosen people of God, once called a mighty tree in the desert had become a lifeless stump because of its wicked and worldly ways, no longer capable of producing much good at all.

Then along comes Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’

Do you hear what God is saying to the nation of Israel? Despite your unfaithfulness, despite your doubt, despite your wickedness, the countdown continues. From the seemingly lifeless stump of the nation a branch will sprout, and not just any branch a righteous branch. From the fallen nation of Israel, from the family line of King David, the Savior will come. Why would God promise that?

It’s actually simple. To put it in perspective for you I have a question. At Christmas one of the most popular Christmas songs is ‘Santa Claus is coming to town’ and if you pay attention to the lyrics, and one of the reasons the song is so popular with parents, is because Santa Claus brings gifts to a specific type of boy and girl.

I am not going to sing it but here are the lyrics

**You better watch out,
You better not cry,
Better not pout,
I'm telling you why:
Santa Claus is comin' to town.**

**He's making a list
And checking it twice,
Gonna find out
Who's naughty and nice.
Santa Claus is comin' to town.**

**He sees you when you're sleepin',
He knows when you're awake,
he knows if you've been bad or good,
So be good for goodness sake.**

**You better watch out,
You better not cry,
Better not pout,
I'm telling you why:
Santa Claus is comin' to town.**

Who gets the gifts? The people who are good, the people who are nice, the ones who do not complain or pout. If you were to hold yourself up to the standard of this song, no pouting no crying, no complaining, no anger, no jealousy, no wickedness, only good thoughts and deeds, even in your sleep, would you get a gift this year from Santa? We would all be gift less.

Contrast that with what God is saying to the people of Israel. 'The days are coming when I fulfil my promise, I will make a righteous branch come forth and do what is right in the land.' In the Scripture it is God who is doing what is good, God who is doing what is right. God is the reason that Christ is coming.

The gift of the Saviour is not coming because of the nations of Israel's behavior, he is not coming because they have been good and nice, because they have not been pouting and crying. In fact, Christ is coming because of the exact opposite reasons, he is coming because the people have not been good, because they have been unfaithful and sinful. Christ will be the righteous branch; he will be the one who does what is just and right. He will come to give righteousness to all who have failed to do what is right in this world, as long as they are willing to place their faith and trust in him.

Christ comes to do what is just in the place of a people who have not always made God-pleasing decisions in their lives. Christ comes to be righteous and to live perfectly according to the Law of God, so that all of us who would be gift less, can receive the gifts of God through him.

God tells the nation of Judah that the constant state of despair and fear that they will have safety when the Saviour comes. Remember that they were under constant attack, the Babylonians sweeping across the nation of Judah, burning towns to the ground, killing and enslaving its citizens and it was just a matter of time until they would reach Jerusalem and surround its walls. God uses the imagery of that righteous branch, that offshoot, our Lord Jesus Christ to tell the people what will happen when the Saviour comes.

The Lord, our righteous Saviour will bring us to safety. When our minds are led astray by the world, when our thoughts go to our sinful nature in the past and our ongoing struggles against that nature in the present. When the devil is doing his best to makes us ask the question, 'Did God really say...', when we feel like God could not forgive us or accept us – it is the Lord's righteousness that protects us and gives us peace.

Yes, we might think about sins, we might be tempted by the devil, we might struggle constantly against falling into the ways of this world. However, God does not see those things when he looks upon us, instead he sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He sees us through the branch, the offshoot of the tree of the wicked stump left by the nation of Israel, the one who came and did everything perfectly in our place.

On the day your life ends, the devil will have more than enough evidence to prove that you should be in hell alongside him, he will know everyone of your wicked deeds and sinful thoughts. He has them all catalogues, dated and categorized. However, in God's eye there will only be the perfect life of Jesus Christ- every correct decision made, every loving word spoken, every pure and perfect thought, every action that was in line with the will of God. It is because of our faith, because of our willingness to humble ourselves, to recognize our sinful nature and turn to Christ, repenting and seeking his forgiveness, that God will only see Christ in us and grant us the greatest gift of all, eternal life in his coming Kingdom.

If you are one of those people that gets anxious waiting for Christmas, picture how the people of the nation of Israel felt. It would be almost 600 years from the time that Jeremiah prophesied these words before Jesus Christ would come. 600 years before the righteous branch would be born in Bethlehem. And although in that 600 years there would be many people who would lose sight of the countdown, many who would give up waiting, many who would give into the ways of the world, there would also be those who were faithful, those who would cling to the promise of God, trusting that the Lord would come and make them right with God, giving them hope in their eternal safety.

Hope. In the world today there are many people who have no hope or have placed all their hope in worldly things and worldly organizations and people.

There are so many people who are insecure in their relationship with God and uncertain of what will happen at the end of their lifetime.

So many questions and so few answers leads to a sense of despair, a sense of hopelessness.

The world is filled with people banking on the religion of the man in the big red suit, hoping that they are nice enough and good enough to be accepted by God at the end of their time here on earth.

What they do not realize is that they will never be perfectly nice, perfectly good, perfectly loving. If God was Santa, we all would not receive a gift, we all cry and complain at times, we all sin and fall short of God's expectations.

This is why God offers us Hope in the promise of his Son. It is by his grace alone we are saved; it is by our relationship with Jesus that we will receive lasting safety and security in God's eternal kingdom, it has nothing to do with us being good enough to be accepted by God. Instead, it has everything to do with the righteousness of the branch that sprouted from the root of the tree of Israel, Jesus, a man who came exactly as God promised he would. A man who did everything right in his life for his faithful followers, so that they could be made in right relationship with God in heaven.

This is the Hope we celebrate during Advent; this is the reason we count down to Christmas, remembering the first coming and anticipating the second coming of our Lord and Saviour. Because the righteous branch of our salvation is worthy of our anticipation, worthy of our celebration, and worthy of the invitation to others to come and see the amazing things that Our God has done. So go out and share the glory of God's name with everyone you meet in the Christmas season, be the Salt and Light of his Word, knowing that the gift you receive is because of God and his promises to his people.

Let us Pray,

May We always Watch and Pray

Lord God, heavenly Father,
by your Son you have revealed to us that heaven and earth will pass away,
that our bodies will rise again and that we all must appear before the judgment throne.
Keep us by your Holy Spirit in your Word,
establish us in the true faith,
graciously defend us from sin and preserve us in all temptations,
that our hearts may not be obsessed with carousing, drunkenness, and foolish cares,
but that we may always watch and pray and trust fully in your grace,
await with joy the glorious coming of your Son and at last,
obtain eternal salvation,
through your beloved Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one true Living God, now and forever.
Amen.

Source: Veit Dietrich

Hymn #114: "Emmanuel"

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His name is Called Emmanuel
 God with us, revealed in us, His name is called Emmanuel.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, we wait for you Emmanuel
 God with us, revealed to us, His name is called Emmanuel.

Emmanuel, Emmanuel, we sing Your praise Emmanuel
 God with us. revealed to us, we sing Your praise Emmanuel.

Communion

Invitation to the Table

As we prepare to celebrate holy communion, let us remember that Scripture calls us to examine ourselves before God. We are taught that eating and drinking unworthily brings judgment upon ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28-29). Let us therefore ask God for the proper spirit in which to celebrate the sacrament.

Let us Pray,

Almighty God, before whom can be neither secret thought nor hidden deed,
 grant us your Spirit that we may know our hearts, our lives, and our inmost
 thoughts as you know them.

Grant us your grace that we may repent sincerely of all sin, find peace with you
 through our Lord Jesus Christ, and grow in assurance of salvation in him.

May the celebration of our Savior's infinite love in his redeeming death bring joy
 to us and glory to you. **Amen.**

The Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you;
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts;

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God;
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is truly right and our greatest joy
 to give you thanks and praise,
 O holy God, creator, and ruler of the universe.
 You created light out of darkness
 and brought forth life on the earth.
 You formed us in your image
 and called us to love and serve you.
 When we were unfaithful
 and turned from your ways,
 you did not forsake us,
 your love remained steadfast.
 You delivered us from captivity,
 made covenant to be our sovereign God,
 and sent prophets to call us back to your way.
 In the fullness of time
 you sent your only Son Jesus Christ to be our Savior.
 In him, your Word, dwelling with you from all eternity,
 became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth,
 and we beheld your glory,
 Immanuel!
 Therefore, we praise you,
 joining our voices with the celestial choirs
 and with all the faithful of every time and place,
 who forever sing to the glory of your name:

**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.**

You are holy, O God of majesty,
 and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
 Born in humility,
 he came to rule over all.
 Helpless as an infant,
 he showed the power of your love.
 Poor in things of the world,
 he brought the wealth of your grace.

Rejected by many,
 he welcomed all who sought him.
 In his dying and rising,
 you gave birth to your church,
 delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
 and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.
 Remembering your gracious acts in Jesus Christ,
 we take from your creation this bread and this wine
 and joyfully celebrate his dying and rising
 as we await the day of his coming.
 With thanksgiving we offer our very selves to you
 to be a living and holy sacrifice,
 dedicated to your service.

**When we eat this bread and drink this cup,
 we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus,
 until you come in glory.**

Gracious God,
 pour out your Holy Spirit upon us
 and upon these your gifts of bread and wine,
 that the bread we break
 and the cup we bless
 may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ.
 By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
 that we may be one with all who share this feast,
 united in ministry in every place.
 As this bread is Christ's body for us,
 send us out to be the body of Christ in the world.
 Empower us by your Spirit, O God,
 to be Christ's presence in the world
 even as Jesus was God-with-us.
 Give us courage
 to speak his truth,
 to seek his justice,
 and to love with his love.
 Keep us faithful in your service
 until Christ comes in final victory
 and we shall feast with all your saints
 in the joy of your eternal realm.
 Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 all glory and honor are yours, almighty God,
 now and forever.

Amen.

Let us together confess the faith of the church at all times and in all places:

The Apostles Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. AMEN.**

Communion

When the hour had come for him to be glorified
by you, his heavenly Father,
having loved his own who were in the world,
he loved them to the end:
at supper with them he took bread,
and after giving thanks to you,
he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,
"Take, eat. This is my body, which is given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me."
After supper he took the cup, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood,
shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins.
Whenever you drink it,
do it for the remembrance of me."

Holy God, we now celebrate this memorial of our redemption.
Recalling Christ's death and his descent among the dead,

proclaiming his resurrection and ascension to your right hand,
 awaiting his coming in glory,
 and offering to you, from the gifts you have given us,
 this bread and this cup,
 we praise you and we bless you.

Taking of the bread

Take and eat.
 This is the body of Christ, which is [given] for you.
 Do this, remembering him.

Drinking of the cup

This cup is the new covenant
 sealed by Christ's blood,
 which was shed that the sins of many
 might be forgiven.
 Drink from it, all of you

Prayer after Communion

God of mystery and might,
 we praise and worship you,
 for you came in silence, while all lay sleeping,
 to enter our world as a child of humble birth.
 We thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ,
 born of your handmaid Mary.
 In his face we behold your glory,
 for in his life as in his death
 is your gift of salvation.
 By your Spirit,
 make our hearts burn with thanksgiving,
 that we may give as we have received.
 Let our whole lives be gifts of praise to you,
 God of love and peace,
 in the gracious name of Jesus Christ, your Son,
 by the power of your Holy Spirit,
 now and forever.
Amen.

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship.

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #110: “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus”

Come, thou longexpected Jesus,
 born to set thy people free;
 from our fears and sins release us;
 let us find our rest in thee.
 Israel's strength and consolation,
 hope of all the earth thou art,
 dear desire of every nation,
 joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver;
 born a child and yet a king,
 born to reign in us forever;
 now thy gracious kingdom bring.
 By thine own eternal Spirit
 rule in all our hearts alone;
 by thine all sufficient merit
 raise us to thy glorious throne.

Pastoral Prayer

O King of nations,
 your reign spreads through all the lands,
 you defend the cause of the poor
 and plead for the wretched of the earth.
 Fashion us into an obedient people,
 that we may spread the good news
 of your reign of perfect peace and justice,
 until all creation will finally rejoice in your perfect will,
 until all bend the knee to the King of kings and Lord of lords,
 in whose name we pray, even Jesus Christ, your Son and our Savior. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely;
 and may your spirit and soul and body
 be kept sound and blameless
 at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 The one who calls you is faithful,
 and he will do this.