

Order of Service Sunday November 29, 2020
First Sunday of Advent
St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Lebanon, OR
A homily by The Rev. Sb. AJ Jonah Buckley

Lighting the Advent Wreath

Lector: Today is the First Sunday of Advent, in which we recall the hope we have in Christ. God told Abraham that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed, because he trusted and put his hope in God. The Old Testament spoke of the coming of Christ, of how a Savior would be born, a king in the line of King David. He would rule the world wisely and bless all the nations. We too believe in God's promise to send Jesus again to this world to establish his kingdom upon the earth.

The first purple candle is lighted, as the Leader continues.

Hope is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle we celebrate the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

People: God of Abraham and Sarah and all the Patriarchs of old, you are our Father too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth, and to prepare for when he comes again, to make our hearts ready and to place our hope in you. Help us today and every day to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your hope with others. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. **Amen.**

Verse 1 of 'O come, o come, Emmanuel' Hymn 56 (in Unison)

O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

Acclamation

- ❖ Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ❖ And blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Trisagion (in unison)

- ❖ **Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy Upon Us**
- ❖ **Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy Upon Us**
- ❖ **Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have Mercy Upon Us**

Collect for the Day (in unison)

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of

light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

First Lesson

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence-- as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil-- to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

❖ Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

❖ *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

- 1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; *
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- 2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, *
stir up your strength and come to help us.
- 3 Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- 4 O LORD God of hosts, *
how long will you be angered despite the prayers of your people?
- 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; *
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.
- 6 You have made us the derision of our neighbors, *
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
- 7 Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- 16 Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, *
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.
- 17 And so will we never turn away from you; *
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.
- 18 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; *

show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Second Lesson

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind-- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- ❖ Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.
- ❖ ***Thanks be to God.***

Gospel

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus said to his disciples, "In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake-- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

- ❖ The Gospel of the Lord
- ❖ **Praise to you, Lord Christ**

Sermon *"The Doorway Between"* The Rev. Sb. AJ Buckley

When I imagine the season of Advent, I see it as a doorway. The doorway between what is and what is to be is often a threshold of anguish as we look back towards what was. When we're caught looking back towards what was, we miss what is and what will be. Therefore, keep alert. Keep awake. In anguish, in despair, in hopelessness, remain painstakingly aware. This year, more than ever, we hope for a Christ who was, and is, and is to come, because this year, more than ever, we need a God who is present and active in our lives. This is where the anguish comes from in the first reading. God appears to be aloof, distant,

absent, and yet Isaiah remembers times gone by when God WAS present and active. So he cries out in anguish and hopelessness for RESTORATION.

It reminds me of our dining room chairs we had growing up. They were my dziadzu's (my Great Uncle) chairs that we inherited. They were wooden chairs with a fabric seat that was removable. As the chairs aged, there were some necessary repairs that needed to happen to the seats. My dad went about carefully taking apart the old seat so he could fix it, when he discovered that my babcia (Great Aunt) had simply covered the seat over and over with new fabric each time rather than getting rid of the old.

Those chairs were a reminder to me that often when we think of God restoring things, we forget about all the layers we've added, all the nuances, all the changes that have happened, and we cannot simply go back to the original state. There won't be a return to normal sometime in the future as Isaiah hoped for; it simply cannot be, and the same goes for us, here and now, there cannot be a return to how things were before the pandemic. We've added too many layers, too many nuances, too many changes.

But that doesn't mean all hope is lost.

That doesn't mean there's nothing but despair that remains.

It means that we are in a doorway between what was and what is to come which can only happen by living through what is, here and now.

I can think of no better way to illustrate the kind

of times these readings describe than that of Charles Dickens novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, which begins

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.."

Life is full of these layers, like the layers of fabric on the chairs from my Dziadzu. Things build up over time. Advent is a time of revealing, of peeling back those layers, of all the things we've put onto our understanding of God, of Jesus, our theologies and doctrines and dogmas, to see Jesus as he is. We keep alert, we keep watch because we may not recognize Jesus if we were to come among us. That's the truth of the matter. We don't always recognize Jesus among us. But, that does not mean that God is absent. God is NOT absent. God has not left us to figure things out on our own. When we sing "O come O come Emmanuel," It is a song of lament, of anguish, of despair, but also of that deep down KNOWING that God is among us, that Christ WILL come again.

C.S Lewis puts it this way: "The Christian faith is a thing of unspeakable joy," "But it does not begin with joy, but rather in despair. And it is no good trying to reach the joy without first going through the despair."

The despair of Isaiah, of the psalmist pleading that God REMEMBER us, is real.

It's on my heart these days. It's okay to not be okay, to lament, to despair, to want things back the way they were before the pandemic. It sucks that we couldn't be with family for

Thanksgiving. It sucks that we cannot be with one another at church. It sucks that we cannot hug each other. We cannot deny the despair, but we must also be awake to the hope that Christ will come again, that Christ is among us, with us; that we are not in this alone. We may not be in church but Christ is not confined to the church walls. God cannot--will not--be contained.

Dr. Willimon, Christian Century says that: "The hope for us, says the church in Advent, is that we are out of hope, and we know it. We know, in our better moments, where our quest for self-affirmation has left us. Now, lost in the cosmos, victims of the monstrous technological toys we have created, we wander. America, with our bombs and bombers, our deficits for defense, our cheese and wheat stockpiled before the scandal of the poor and hungry shivering in the cold again this Christmas -- our ancestors wouldn't know us. The Advent prophet leads a sad litany made all the more sad because it is reality: "All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. . . . our Iniquities, like the wind, take us away. . . . thou hast hid thy face from us" (64:7-7).

That's why the church generally refrains from singing Christmas carols during Advent. That's why purple, the color of penitence, adorns our altar and the neck of your preacher. We dare not rush to greet the Redeemer prematurely until we pause here, in a darkened church, to admit that we do need redemption. Nothing within us can save us. No thing can save us. We've tried that before. No president, no bomb, no new car, no bottle, no white Christmas can save."

Redemption is revealed as our way forward. Our way through the doorway, through the threshold. But for now we stand in the doorway of the already and not yet--of the what is and what will be. We need to look forward towards what CAN be or we'll miss Jesus among us, here and now. If we only look backwards out the door, hesitant to step inside, we'll never know the hospitality and love and warmth of God. I know it's not comfortable, I know it doesn't feel good to be between things. It's very human to want a sense of stability. But that's not what we get in Advent.

So, it seems more often than not that we are on the threshold---the doorway between---being saved and saving, between forgiving and being forgiven, between grief and healing, between heartbreak and loving again. And that's what I think Advent is for. To remind us of that time that's so full of the not quite yet, when we're not quite yet healed, and we're not quite yet ready to move on, when we're not quite yet....

When we yearn for the Kingdom, yet it's not quite yet here.

When we yearn for Christ's coming again, yet it's not quite yet here.

When we yearn for justice and peace, yet it's not quite here.

And, yet, at the same time, it is already here,

As God works through us, with us, in us.

And, so we're charged to continue on in joyous expectation of Christ's return,

To carry on God's work in the world.

To act in faithfulness,

To teach and guide others in the way of righteousness,

To watch and be on guard,
Not because, Jesus, like Santa Claus, is coming to town
And so we better not pout
And we better not cry.
No, nothing like that.
Be watchful, not so we know when he's coming so we can "look busy."
Be watchful; Be on guard because that in itself is an act of faithfulness.
Be watchful because it's an act of hopefulness.
Be watchful because in being attentive you can see that God's already here,
Be watchful because you'll miss out on God's presence in your life.
The text warns about not being distracted to avoid dissipating, or, in chemistry terms to
expel energy without accomplishing useful work.
Put more simply, to become less.
Distractions keep us focused away from God and others, and on ourselves.
That's why they're a problem.
Distractions can keep us from joy, from love, from hope.
Be watchful, not distracted, not to be on some "nice" list,
Not to brag to others how watchful we are,
Not to brag how much less distracted we are,
But to see where God's at work around us,
To be aware of those in need,
And to experience the joy of our redemption,
To stand tall in the knowledge that our redemption draws near,
To know that have been redeemed,
That all situations and people are redeemable,
And that, somehow, even amidst ominous and foreboding signs,
God is there, redeeming.
That, in all things,
Light can be found,
Wounds healed,
The bad turned good,
Anger can become understanding,

There's a musical I saw last year with my family called Dear Evan Hansen about the
aftermath of a suicide of a teen boy and the experience of his friends and family dealing
with that loss. There's a song in the musical called "You will be found", which speaks to the
heart of why we remain awake and aware, because in doing so, in living through the
anguish and despair and agony, God finds us and heals us.

Some words from the song "You will be Found" go a little like this:

*There's a place where we don't have to feel unknown.
Every time that you call out you're a little less alone.
If you only say the word. From across the silence, your voice is heard.
Even when the dark comes crashing through, when you need a friend to carry you,
when you're broken on the ground, you will be found.*

Let the sun come streaming in, you'll reach up and you'll rise again....

My friends, God is not absent now nor ever. God has not abandoned us. Let us hold onto hope, clinging to it desperately, keep our eyes and hearts and minds open to the voice of God. I promise: You will be found.

Amen.

Prayers of the People A Special Form for Advent 1

As we keep awake for the coming of the Lord, let us offer prayers to God who prepares a light for our path.

For the coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory.

Lord, hear us.

For the coming of Wisdom to teach and guide us.

Lord, hear us.

For the coming of Emmanuel, the hope of all the peoples.

Lord, hear us.

For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

Lord, hear us.

For Michael our bishop and all bishops, clergy, deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Lord, hear us.

For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

Lord, hear us.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

Lord, hear us.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

Lord, hear us.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison and especially those on our prayer list and those we remember at this time.

Lord, hear us.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the departed especially those whom we now name:

Lord, hear us.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Lord, hear us.

Joining our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and with St. Martin, and all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

O Rising Sun, brightness of light eternal, sun of justice, come and shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Glory to you for ever. **Amen.**

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Prayer for St. Martin's

God of Love, open our eyes and ears to perceive you at work in creation, the church, and our parish. Fill our hearts with your love that we may reach out in love to others. Stir up our imagination with your Holy Spirit that we may find new ways to live into life with you. Give us a vision of your mission that we may share your love and your spirit in all the places where we work and play and worship you. In Jesus' holy name, **Amen.**

Blessings and Dismissal