

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon

Sunday 29 November 2020 Order of Service for Worship At Home



Led by the Revd Alistair Cumming
(Church of Scotland minister, Clerk of the Presbytery of England)

Gathering in God's presence

Call to worship

Let us worship God who strengthens us to be faithful always - enlightening our lives with joy and hope.

Hymn – O come, O come, Immanuel

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

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

O come, thou Wisdom from above
who ord'rest all things through thy love;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in her ways to go:

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height,
in ancient times didst give the law
in cloud, and majesty, and awe:

O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save,
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave:

O 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:

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight:

O come, Desire of nations, bring
all peoples to their Saviour King;
thou Corner-stone, who makest one,
complete in us thy work begun:

*Latin, 18th cent. (or earlier), Based on Antiphons from 9th cent. (or earlier)
Tr. J.M. Neale (1818-66) and others; altd.*

Prayer of approach and confession

Stand upright and hold your heads high, because your liberation is near.

Let us pray

Loving God,
We praise you again for this season of advent
this time of preparation, challenge and reflection
open our hearts to all you would say now, Help us to listen.

We praise you that in fulfilment of your eternal purpose
you came to our world in Christ,
revealing the extent of your love showing us the way to life,
allowing us to know you for ourselves;

Open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

We praise you that you came again in Christ
to his disciples after his resurrection,
bringing joy where there had been sorrow,
hope where there had been despair,
and faith where there had been doubt.

We praise you that through your holy spirit
you make Christ real to us each day
filling us with his power, his peace, his love
and we praise you for the promise that Christ will come again
to establish his kingdom, to begin a new era
to bring us and all your people life everlasting
open our hearts to all you would say now and help us to listen.

Loving God
Forgive us that we so easily lose sight of that message of advent
in this season of sales, shopping, and stress.

God of Light, we confess how easy it is to slip off your paths.
We can become so selfish and focused on having good times,
that we forget to take the time to do good for your people.
Forgive us that we forget your promises, we frustrate your spirit,
we lose sight of your love,
we find Jesus Christ an uncomfortable fit for our lives.

Forgive us, and meet with us.
Assure us that the good news is that in and through Christ we are forgiven;
we pray that through this time of worship,
through your living word,
through the fellowship we share, and through the risen Christ
Peace, serenity, healing, hope,
these gifts, and more, are ours in this Advent season of watching and waiting.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

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,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Listening to God's Word

Bible Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

¹ O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

² 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!

³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

⁹ Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.

Hymn – Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
to set the captive free;
to take away transgression,
and rule in equity.

He comes with succour speedy
to those who suffer wrong;
to help the poor and needy,
and bid the weak be strong;
to give them songs for sighing,
their darkness turn to light,
whose souls, condemned and dying,
were precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers
upon the fruitful earth;
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,
spring in his path to birth:
before him on the mountains,
shall peace, the herald, go,
and righteousness, in fountains
from hill to valley flow.

Kings shall fall down before him,
and gold and incense bring;
and nations shall adore him,
his praise all people sing;
for he shall have dominion
o'er river, sea, and shore,
far as the eagle's pinion
or dove's light wing can soar.

O'er every foe victorious,
he on his throne shall rest;
from age to age more glorious,
all-blessing and all-blest:
the tide of time shall never
his covenant remove;
his name shall stand for ever;
that name to us is Love.

Psalm 72

Para. James Montgomery (1771-1854) altd.

Bible Reading: Mark 13: 24-37

²⁴ "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ "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.

²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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,

³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Sermon

Gosh, can you believe that today is the first Sunday in Advent. Christmas is just around the corner. When people say to you "are you ready for Christmas?" I wonder what they mean.

I wonder, are we ready?

Little Jimmy was lying in the middle of a field on a warm spring day. Puffy white clouds rolled by and he pondered their shape. Soon, he began to think about God.

"God? Are you really there?" Jimmy said out loud.

To his astonishment a voice came from the clouds. "Yes, Jimmy? What can I do for you?"

Seizing the opportunity, Jimmy asked, "God? What is a million years like to you?"

Knowing that Jimmy could not understand the concept of infinity, God responded in a manner to which Jimmy could relate. "A million years to me, Jimmy, is like a minute." "Oh," said Jimmy. "Well, then, what's a million pounds like to you?" "A million pounds to me, Jimmy, is like a penny."

"Wow!" remarked Jimmy, getting an idea. "You're so generous... can I have one of your pennies?"

God replied, "Sure thing, Jimmy! Just a minute."

Little Jimmy wasn't ready for that response, was he?

Our text this morning seems an unlikely scripture for Advent. It has nothing to do with Mary and Joseph, the Wise Men, of shepherds watching their flock.

Instead it is story about a wealthy landowner going on a trip. The servants left behind were given charge of the estate, and when the master returned he would check on their stewardship.

It is a story about being prepared, getting ready. In that sense then this is an Advent story, for this is the season of preparedness.

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin "Adventus," meaning "coming." It's a season the Church has used to focus not only on the forthcoming Incarnation of God in Christ, but also a time, when 'warnings' are ushered through Scripture that give us a chance to - well, get our head round the fact that it is almost Christmas.

The Lesson for Mark is about the return of Jesus. It is about that 'second coming' of Christ to bring final judgment on humanity and to usher in the final revelation of the Kingdom of God.

Much has been made over the 'end times.' Practically every year, some people sit on the edge of their seats waiting to see if a small religious group was right that had

predicted Christ's return at 6 p.m. on May 21st! They were wrong and then revised the prediction to October... the fact that I am speaking to you now tells you - they were wrong again.

What are we to make of these kinds of predictions? The Second Coming of Christ is a central theme that runs throughout our Judeo-Christian story.

The Old Testament prophets, the Gospels, the Epistles and certainly the Books of Daniel and Revelation have all pointed to a kind of cataclysmic day when the world as we know it will pass away and the perfect and completed Kingdom of God will be ushered in.

If you were to visit today - Afghanistan, Somalia, Lybia, Syria, Yemen Egypt or even some of the inner city in London - many people living in those places might say - that from all appearances, history as we know it, is coming to a close.

But our lesson is clear, *"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*

So, what then is the purpose of Jesus telling His followers about this "last day?"

He goes on; *"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!"*

Jesus' word was not designed to prompt one so much to fear as it was to action.

What Jesus tries to prod us to get here is that the primary duty of the servant is to care for the house in a way that if the Master were to return today - or a thousand years from now - he would be pleased to find the good stewardship of the servants lived out.

What does that call on you and me to do?

If this world, our lives, are gifts from God, entrusted to us, then simply, it matters deeply to God that we believe in Him and obey Him; that we proclaim Him in word and deed.

It matters that we take seriously the call to follow Jesus - because that was at the core of His teaching.

It matters how we treat this world of ours, because God calls us to care for His creation.

And it matters - matters deeply, how we treat one another - how we live with our families, spouses, children, friends; how we care for our colleagues and work mates; and how we treat strangers, the hungry, the homeless - the lonely.

The calls to get ready that we find throughout Scripture tell us that these things matter very much to God. This means that we should live in what I will call a 'heavenly way.'

C.S. Lewis once said, "Aim at heaven, and you get earth thrown in, aim at earth and in the end, you get nothing."

When we aim only "at earth," when all I am is wrapped up in myself, my world, my issues and my needs, I've lost the meaning of Christ's call.

But when we aim at heaven, life here takes on an entirely different meaning.

We begin to see ourselves as servants of God - preparing for His return - we live in an awareness, perhaps even a constant awareness, that each minute is an opportunity, a gift, to receive, to give, to live in a way that says I believe in more than what I see on earth - I believe there is something bigger, someone better, more powerful than any darkness we humans can devise.

It says, I believe that someone is Jesus and He has come, He is here, and He is coming again!

Here, I believe, I need to be clear. I believe Jesus' teaching on this point has much more to do with how we live than 'when' this will happen.

I feel certain that the Second Coming of Christ is not designed as a way of jerking the carpet out from under inconsistent and imperfect Christians.

No, in a sense, I believe Jesus holds this before us as a reminder of who we are called to be and how we are to live in relationship with God and one another.

If humankind, if the Christian family for that matter, is to be judged on our stewardship of the Master's house as it is today - we may be in for a load of trouble.

A quick whiz through any major newspaper will tell you that.

It tells us we are not perfect and there may be much more of a need to tend to God's world and family than ever before.

But let not the headlines drive us to despair.

Mother Teresa often reminded her sisters that Christians were not called to be successful, but they were called to be faithful.

The call of Jesus - is not to be perfect... it is not even to have success as the world may measure it; it is, instead to be faithful - to live in a 'heavenly way,' in all times - whether they be the 'end times' or not.

All Christ asks of us is that we let Him come - let "Advent" happen - in our hearts - and in doing so, we are empowered to live with our God, our world and our fellow humans in a way that will not cause us to be afraid or worried or even surprised at the Master's return - but overjoyed.

There are several wonderful stories about the great, yet incredibly humble, Ignace Jan Paderewski, the Russian composer-pianist who died in 1941.

It seems one evening he was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall. In the audience of black tuxedos and long evening gowns was a mother with her fidgety nine-year old son. His mother brought him in hopes her boy would be encouraged to practice the piano if he could just hear the immortal Paderewski. So, against his own wishes, he had come.

As she turned to talk with her friends, the boy slipped from her side, and without much notice from the sophisticated audience, the boy sat down at the stool, staring wide-eyed at the black and white keys, he put his small fingers upon the keyboard.

He began to play "Chopsticks." The roar of the crowd was hushed by hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. An angered audience began jeering at the boy, booing and hissing for him to be taken from the stage.

Backstage, the master overheard the sounds out front and quickly put together what was happening. Hurriedly, he grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage. Without one word of announcement, he stooped over the boy, reached around both sides and began to improvise a counter melody to harmonize and enhance the tune.

As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy's ear: "Keep going. Don't quit son. Keep on playing. Don't quit. I'm right here...don't quit!"

That, my friends, is one picture of Jesus. I do not know, maybe to some of you listening, in 2020 with its fires, its floods and now pandemic, it does appear we are living at the end of time.

Perhaps your own personal world may be coming apart and you are at a loss as to how to go on. Jesus bids you to 'live heavenly.'

As the dawn of Advent breaks once again this day, and as we turn our hearts toward the coming of Jesus, may we pause, take a deep breath, and "aim at heaven."

Can we perhaps commit ourselves, again, to the hope that in Christ, life makes sense - even in these strangest of times?

By God's grace, may it be, may this Advent open our eyes to the wonderful hope and joy for us in the coming of Jesus. He has come. And his stay awake call is merely a reminder to live knowing that He is here...whispering, "Don't quit. I am right here. Don't quit. Keep on playing...I love you...I am right...here."

Amen

Responding to God's grace

Prayer of Intercession

Almighty God, we bring before you our prayers for the world and its cares and concerns.

As we begin the season of Advent, with all the hope and joy that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ means to us and millions of Christians around the world, we pray that other hearts will be opened to your Spirit, so that the whole world can share in the good news of the Christmas story.

Where there is pain and persecution may your light bring comfort and hope.

Where there is brokenness, may your light bring healing.

Where there is sadness may it bring joy.

Where there is suffering may it bring comfort

Where there is loss may it bring compassion.

We pray for the areas of the world blighted by war and conflict, that disputes can be resolved peacefully and lives not lost to hatred and fighting. Blessed are the peacemakers, give them the courage and strength to turn others away from violence and destruction.

We pray for world leaders, that they will have the generosity of spirit to share successful Covid vaccines with the poorest nations.

We ask your protection for health workers around the world, and those risking their lives to carry out vaccination programmes in areas where doing so puts their lives at risk.

We share our concerns for those who face brutality while trying to make their voices heard. For the people of Belarus, Hong Kong, and for Poland and Bangladesh, and other areas where women are not given control over their own bodies and their lives. We know that you hear their cries of anguish, and ask that the world hears them too and acts on them.

Even as we look forward to the lifting of the current lockdown, we think of those for whom the restrictions have been the hardest.

For care-givers, both paid and unpaid, and those missing the touch and contact with loved ones.

Those facing a mental health crisis, and the agencies working to help them.

Those facing domestic violence and those offering help and safe spaces.
All working with the homeless, and those in food poverty.

Those unable to heat their homes, and those mired in debt.

You have asked us to demonstrate your care for the vulnerable and marginalised, and we pray for all those known to us, and the prayers placed on our prayer boards.

Loving, caring God, you know that there is so much we want to pray for - take our cares and worries, soothe our souls, give us rest, and help us to go forward into this season of Advent with hope in our hearts and a determination to spread the light that is Jesus Christ so that the darkness is lifted and the world can rejoice.

We ask all these prayers in the name of your son, Jesus Christ.
Amen

Offertory

This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. You might like to put it in a jar for now, ready to be brought in person when circumstances allow. Then say the prayer below (if you already participate in Trinity's Planned Giving scheme via direct bank transfer, then simply recite the prayer - no need for a jar!)

Eternal God, and giver of all good,
we give thanks this day for the gifts of life and love,
family and friendship, and for the joy of the coming of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ to dwell among us.

We bring before you now a portion of the gifts you have given us to share,
And pray that you would take and use them for your glory
and us for the service of your kingdom.

Hymn – Come, thou long expected Jesus

Come, thou long-expected 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 for ever;
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.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Go in peace and walk in love to serve the Lord.
And may the blessing of
God the Father,
God the Son, and
God the Holy Spirit,
be with you
and all whom you love.
This day and for evermore.

Amen

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