

Morning Praise @ Home 3rd December 2023

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *cf Psalm 51*

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading

Mark 13: 24 – end

Reflection from John

Advent comes in with a bang! These verses have come to be known as Mark's "Little Apocalypse," a snapshot of the turning point that ends this world and begins the new. We can get lost in these devastating or destructive depictions in these verses and miss entirely God's word of hope. These are texts that must be read slowly, thoroughly and carefully so as not to miss the potency of the figurative language and its declaration that in the end God is our hope and our salvation.

Figurative language is meant to stretch our minds and enlarge our expectations. Our opening verses prove the point: neither the sun nor moon emit their light, the stars fall from the heavens, but without these basic biological and chemical processes, life on earth ceases to exist. And yet! It's also the picture of the city of God in Revelation 22.5, "And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord will be their light..." None of us knows how to make literal sense of the image because it is so far from the current reality in which God has designed and placed us.

And yet, we *can* understand its meaning. This world and its way ceases as the powers in the heavens are shaken, letting loose the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man coming on the clouds with his angels, gathering his children to him. We are rescued by God from a world that we cannot survive as the Creator re-creates all reality.

The imagery of danger and woe can be piled on in the text, but it only takes one sentence to turn the story. This is advent hope.

Having given us the overarching story of creation's forthcoming history in this word picture, Jesus hones in on another image to imbibe hope, that of the fig tree budding with leaves. Fig trees sprout and grow their leaves for what is an excruciating long time compared to when their fruit is actually ripe for enjoyment. The leaves are quite lovely to look at, but we need to look through the leaves for signs of fruit.

I think this is exactly the sense Jesus means to evoke. When the fig tree starts to sprout its leaves, we know good things are on the way—"Jesus is near, at the very gates!" It is exciting and hopeful,

we are mouth-watering in anticipation. We don't know when the figs will turn ripe, but we have to pay attention and be ready to strike or risk losing out. Advent is an active waiting.

Which brings us to the third image Jesus uses to set the tone for his beloveds as they await his return and endure suffering and hardship. He likens us to servants who don't slack off while their master is away, but keep at their work, anticipating that their master may return at any moment. These servants want to be "caught" doing their job well.

Jesus emphasizes that, in the end, not knowing *when* is no excuse. It really makes it hard for us to procrastinate, doesn't it? Each time Jesus talks about us not knowing, he uses the perfect tense—our not knowing *when* has consequences for what we do right now. Jesus' four commands spell out that consequence: "beware, keep alert" (v 33), "keep awake" (v 35), "and what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake" (v 37). So no procrastination *and* no sleeping on the job.

But what is this job? What does it mean to keep awake? The spiritual reading of the text throughout the history of the church draws from the word awake's definition as "watchful." Advent people are watchful.

We are watchful for what is happening around us—like watching for the fig leaves to give way to yummy figs. We are watchful for signs of the turning of the light as the world's lights end and Jesus comes in power as the light of the world.

But we are also watchful towards ourselves: watchful for the encroachment of sin, of malaise, of temptation and negative forces on one side and of the positive on the other, noting our obedience to God, blessings from God, and signs of the Holy Spirit at work in us and our lives.

Watchfulness is a way of being that is like standing on a tower so that we can warn ourselves of enemies approaching—but also makes us able to welcome true friends. Being watchful allows us to protect our souls from becoming prey to sin, leads us to establish right relationships with earthly things, and helps us be ready to entertain angels.

So we are to watch over our souls the way that God watches over us. In other words, we image God by tending and caring for our souls, just as the Holy Spirit does so for us. We partner with the Spirit's tending and caring by mimicking God's watchfulness. Like Jesus teaches, we anticipate the future and live as much of its reality in the here and now as we can. This is what it means to be awake in peace, hope, love, and joy. This is what it means to live with Advent faith. **Amen**

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Heavenly Father, as we come together on this first Sunday of Advent, we pray for the church that she may be ready for the coming of Christ. We pray for Christians around the world and ask you to help us all turn our faces towards you once again. Help us God to not lose sight of you in the worldly busyness of this season, but help us to prepare our hearts and minds, so that we may be ready for the coming of your kingdom. We bring before you our brothers and sisters in Christ, who face persecution for their faith – for whom this season does not bring twinkly lights and celebration, but instead an increased fear and risk of persecution.

God of our world, we pray for all nations, that they may be subject to your rule. We pray for those people and places in the world where there is war, famine, and natural disaster and we bring before you the leaders and decision makers of those places, asking you to send your spirit upon them so that progress can be made to bring about peace, justice, healing and reconciliation. We pray especially for the people of Gaza and Israel, Ukraine and Russia, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and so many more countries. We pray for Peace – for an end to human suffering and for humanity and compassion for all. We pray too for those who live in poverty, hunger and disease.

Father God, we pray for those amongst our families, friends and neighbours who will only see in Advent a hectic and worrying run-up to the excesses of a secular Christmas. Help us as we try to set an example of a true spirit of preparation for that incredibly precious gift of the Christ-child.

Advent Lord, as we move into a new liturgical year, draw near to us, strengthen our faith, deepen our love for you and for our neighbours and open our eyes to the wonder of your creation, so that when our Saviour comes he may find our hearts ready to receive him.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**