

ADVENT 1

3/12/23

CAVES BEACH

ADVENT CANDLES

- Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the Sunday in which we recall the hope we have in Christ.

- The prophets of Israel all spoke of the coming of

Christ, of how a saviour would be born, a king in the line of David. They spoke of how he would rule the world wisely and bless all nations.

- On Christmas day the Christ of our hope was born. On Good Friday the Christ of our hope died. On Easter day the Christ of our hope rose from the dead. He then ascended into heaven. On the last day, the Christ of our hope will come again to establish his kingdom over all things on earth.

- As the followers of Christ, we await his return.

We light this candle to remember that as he came to us as humbly in the manger at Bethlehem and gave light to the world, so he is coming again in power to deliver his people.

- We light this candle to remind us to be alert and to watch for his return.

Light the First Candle

- LET US PRAY - Loving God, we thank you for the hope you give us. Help us prepare our hearts for the Lord's coming. Bless our worship. Help us live holy and righteous lives. We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

A child's eyes light up as she imagines a dancing, laughing time, far, far in the future.

An old person dreams of a day when infirmity and anxiety will cease.

A wise person reflects on the untapped potential within humanity – the potential to build a world where joy and sharing prevail.

And we, gathered in the name of Christ, catch a glimpse of Advent hope.

Opening Prayer

Your presence is revealed in the light of hope, O God. The light of hope shines brightly.

Joyfully we worship, for your graceful gift of Jesus is at hand.

The light of hope overcomes the darkness.

Joyfully we know that the powerful ones, and the terror-bringers, will not have their own way.

The light of hope reveals the needs of home and community.

Joyfully we will work to support the downhearted, and to show friendship to the lonely.

Your presence is revealed in the light of hope, O God.

The light of hope will go before us on our Advent journey.

HYMN 156 Morning has broken

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-QZRsrO06A&t=15s>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Holy One, we turn to you.

Thank you for hearing us

when we call,

thank you for giving us life.

Holy One, you shine

sacred brightness

and we are in awe!

thank you for giving us light!

We have fallen asleep.

We have not watched,

not paid attention – oh,

we waited, but we waited

for *you* to act rather than

acting with you in this time,
this place, in response to the needs
that will not, cannot, wait.

pause

Forgive us, please, each one
and together, for the ways
our inattentiveness has left
people, Creation, in need
that we might have eased.

silence

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Wake up! Listen!

God does forgive.

Wake up! Get up!

Live out that grace

by sharing grace

here, now, each day. Amen.

READINGS

- **1 Corinthians 1:3–9**

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- **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 the 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.”

HYMN 265 O come, O come Emmanuel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKu0or0t8Uw>

SERMON

Well, given everything that is happening around us this this Apocalyptic passage from Mark’s Gospel is certainly one to grab our attention now like nothing else can. Looking back I noticed that the last time we looked at this passage we were in the middle of the unknown with some strange virus called Covid.

Today we have fierce conflict raging again in the Middle East, not just in Israel and the Gaza strip. We are now entering onto yet another year of fierce warfare in the Ukraine. In places as close as Western Papua there is civil unrest within the local population against the Indonesian control of the territory. Across Africa there are ongoing tribal conflicts further stoked by various religious beliefs. No matter where we look there is some sort of ongoing conflict taking lives, threatening the environment and disrupting society.

When we come to apocalyptic parts of the Bible we can have some reservations as we listen to a different style of story telling called hyperbole.

We normally want to take the literal approach to Bible passages. Mark gives us a different approach here.

When we are confronted with this sort of writing in the Bible we can think that the whole world is about to be turned upside down. As I said this is not a literal story but a series of images to shake us out of our complacency.

When Mark was writing this there was a lot happening in the world around him. Whatever Jesus actually said was obviously causing him to reflect in the face of the Roman army having sacked Jerusalem and destroying their beloved Temple. With the destruction of the Temple many people wondered if the Jewish faith would survive.

The world as they knew it seemed to be disintegrating. Hence the reference to apocalyptic statements in Mark's writings.

Now with this background we can move forward in a couple of different ways.

- We could simply think that those events did not occur and simply dismiss it.
- We could suggest that first century Christians were all wrong in their approach as the second coming did not occur as expected and therefore Jesus might still come in the near future.
- Or, we can consider that Jesus' words were not referring to a particular event and, in fact, Jesus not only was foreshadowing the sacking of Jerusalem but also to the fact that these sorts of things keep happening throughout human history.

While it might feel like the end of the world sometimes, like during the Covid lockdowns, each event passes.

Taking the last approach we can see that Jesus didn't just recognise that these things occur but also that His message would in some ways contribute to them. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34) While Jesus in no way wanted to initiate violence however He acknowledged that it might be an unfortunate consequence of His message.

This increase in violence and disruption would occur among people who had not been exposed to Jesus in any way.

Let me take a simple example. In parliament this week there was an apology by the Prime Minister to those who were impacted by Thalidomide. The drug known as Thalidomide was marketed the late 1950s and early 1960s as an effective way of alleviating morning sickness. It worked, and for pregnant women suffering severe morning sickness, that was naturally very attractive.

But then more than 10,000 babies were born with deformed limbs and it was realised that the deformities were due to the use of Thalidomide, so after that, it didn't matter how severe your morning sickness was, no one was going to take Thalidomide to deal with it.

So if you were the scientist who discovered and publicised the dangers of Thalidomide, you could rightly be seen as the saviour of a generation of children, but you could also be labelled as the one responsible for a huge increase in women suffering from morning sickness. And both would be accurate.

While this might seem a weird analogy to use we could think of Jesus being that scientist who uncovered that horrible truth about a common drug. Jesus identified the dysfunctional way that the world deals with violence and chaos. The Gospel then contributes to this with phrases like the 'sun refusing to shine,' and the 'towers falling down,' and the 'earth being shaken to its foundation,' with the 'streets being awash with blood.'

In the teachings which Jesus left with us and in the gruesome manor of His death we have the formula to control excessive violence by recognising that there is no distinction between 'good' and 'bad' violence. Violence is violence. If we follow this then we can prevent events spiralling into an apocalypse.

Some people think that 'good violence' is undertaken by good people and authorised by a good God so that we can stop 'bad' people hurting 'good' people. Even when we all seem to agree who is 'good' and who should be seen as 'bad' that is not the answer. This has been the approach for millennia. Those same people who called out in praise that fateful Passover week soon changed to "Crucify Hi. Crucify Him" a few days later.

The miracle is that Jesus did not stay dead, but He came back full of love and forgiveness. It is here that the old theory of good/bad falls apart. It is here that Hope breaks through. We are very bad at determining the truth between good and bad and many victims of supposed 'good' violence were no more deserving of punishment than any of us.

This separation into good/bad still continues today. Politicians demonise asylum seekers and all too often they attack people who don't fit their ideals. Into this debate comes the voice of Jesus: "When you do that to one of the least of these, you are doing it to me. In fact you are doing what you did to me. Don't you remember how wrong you got that?"

Like the realisation about Thalidomide, we have to understand how our efforts at curing our world can easily create more problems that we are solving. Into the conundrum Jesus comes to us with a new cure, based on universal mutual love and forgiveness, but we are living in a terrifying time lag where the old cure has been exposed, but the new one is a long way from being implemented. Jesus offers hope!

Jesus is not offering simplistic answers. The warning says: "Read the signs. Stay awake. Stay the course." Salvation is not achieved with bigger and stronger weapons systems or more accurate intelligence analysis to target evil. Salvation comes in the form of a baby born in a animal shed.

Rome tried to destroy Him. Jesus just points us to the signs of hope. Stay Awake to those temptations of any attempts to force the law under the threat of God's punishment to ensure security.

Stay the course that Jesus has begun, for although it is seemingly plunging us into apocalyptic violence, the plunge is the same as the road to the cross, it is the road that goes through death and beyond and rises into the promised land of life and peace.

Stay the course because in the end, the world we seek will come, not as an explosion of power and judgement, but as a baby born in a shed, rising in solidarity with all the nameless victims of our misguided attempts to destroy evil, rising not in vengeance, but in overwhelming earth-shattering, apocalyptic love and mercy and grace. And for the advent of that day on this, we work and pray. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

HYMN 158 God has spoken by His prophets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoPiKqKTmbg&t=35s>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Let our waiting for you be active,
Jesus; let it be attentive, let it be
full of understanding that you come
every day, in people who need hope.

Bless what we give to meet
the needs of our world with your hope. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We wait for new life with you, God,
and we trust it unfolds in our midst.

We wait with those who are hungry:
children of war, poverty, drought, famine;
parents feeding their children first;
the Earth, its creatures, for we humans
have taken too much.

We wait for new life with you, God,

and we trust it unfolds in our midst.

We wait with the imprisoned:
those who committed crimes and those
who did not, in imperfect systems
of justice, sentencing, rehabilitation;
those isolated by illness, age, injury,
abuse, in homes more like jails.

We wait for new life with you, God,
and we trust it unfolds in our midst.

We wait with each other,
this community of faith-sharing life
in its sorrows and celebrations,
in our waiting and our enacting
of renewal, healing, welcome,
enacting the story of hope.

We wait for new life with you, God,
and we trust it unfolds in our midst.

Amen.

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 for ever. Amen.

HYMN 693 Come as you are

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0cbQS55RTM>

COMMUNION

This is the joyful feast of Jesus:

bread for beloved children;
a meal for those expecting scraps;
and a banquet for last-minute guests!

Come, your place is at the table.

Here Christ meets you
and calls you God's own.

God of mercy,
look upon us in mercy not in judgment;
draw us from hatred to love;
make the frailty of our praise
a dwelling place for your glory,
in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Hear the words of institution of this sacrament
as recorded by the apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord
what I also delivered to you,
that the Lord Jesus,
on the night when he was betrayed,
took bread,

and when he had given thanks,
he broke it and said:
This is my body which is for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

In the same way also the cup,
after supper, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
for the remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread
and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

And so according to our Saviour's command,
we set this bread and this cup apart
for the holy supper to which he calls us,
and we come to God with our prayers of thanksgiving.

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 our thanks and praise.

With all we are, we give you glory,
Trinity of love, the one and Holy God,
sovereign of all time and space.

We bless you for this wide, red land,
for its rugged beauty,
its changing seasons,
for its diverse peoples,
and for all that lives upon this fragile earth.

You have called us to be the Church in this place,
to give voice to every creature under heaven.

We rejoice with all that you have made,

as we join the company of heaven in their song.

You, eternal God, are the Alpha and the Omega,
the First and the Last.

In you the hope for our redemption was born,
and in Christ Jesus, it is accomplished.

By your Spirit, keep us in faith
until your kingdom comes in glory.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with Choirs of angels
and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn:

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

**Blessed, the One who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

To Adam and Eve, children of dust,
you gave the world and its wonders,
but we misused your gift of freedom:
we reached out rebel hands to be like you.
We bless you for your mercy,
for you never cease to call our restless hearts
until they find their rest in you.

Again and again,
you raised up men and women to speak your word,
to guide, to challenge and convert.

At the last, Father,
you sent Jesus Christ,
child of your love, God with us.

Born as one of us,
he lived our life and died our death,
offering us, both now and forever,
eternal life with you.

And so, in remembrance of all you have done for us,
we take this bread and this cup,

and offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice,
made worthy by the perfect offering of Christ
our great high priest.

By your Word and Holy Spirit,
bless these gifts that we may truly share
Christ's body and blood,
and become, by grace, his body given
for the sake of the world.

For through your Spirit,
the whole earth makes its prayer
in sighs too deep for words,
longing for the day of freedom:
for in hope and by faith we were saved.

Accept our thanks and praise, good Father,
through your Son, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ,
with whom and in whom,
and by the Spirit who dwells in us,
we worship you in joyful song:

Blessing and honour and glory and power
are yours for ever and ever. Amen

Christ is the bread of joy,
who shares food with sinners

The minister lifts the cup in full view of the people, in silence or saying:

Christ is the cup of life,
who revives the faint-hearted.

The minister holds out the bread and the cup to the people and says:

Let us receive what we are;
let us become what we receive.

The body of Christ.

Jesus, Lamb of God,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world,

grant us peace.

Jesus, Liberator of creation,

grant us peace.

Receive this holy sacrament
of the body and blood of Christ,
and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

DISTRIBUTION

Blessed be God who calls us together.

Praise to God who makes us one people.

Blessed be God who has forgiven our sin.

Praise to God who gives hope and freedom.

Blessed be God whose Word is proclaimed.

Praise to God who is revealed as lover.

Blessed be God who alone has called us.

Therefore we offer all that we are

and all we shall become.

Accept, O God, our sacrifice of praise.

Accept our thanks for all that we are.

Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

HYMN 530 Now let us from this table rise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbp1VSpIpNc>

BENEDICTION

Jesus calls us to wait

with attention and staying awake:

Christ will turn up any moment,

so be ready!

As you wait for the story

of Jesus' birth to be told again,

may you know God with you,

Holy One, Holy Hope. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74