

ADVENT 2

5/12/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God's promise will be fulfilled!

All: God's promise will be fulfilled, as the faith community: of faith gather, for prayer and thanksgiving.

One: God's promise will be fulfilled!

All: God's promise will be fulfilled, as the suffering are comforted and the poor are empowered.

One: God's promise will be fulfilled!

All: God's promise will be fulfilled, when justice is a priority, and prophets are recognized.

One: God's promise will be fulfilled!

All: God's promise will be fulfilled as the coming of Jesus is embraced, and his Way followed.

Opening Prayer

One: Be alert! God's Promised One Jesus: promised one is on the way.

All: Be ready with your praise; be ready to give Jesus a rousing welcome.

One: Be alert! God's Promised One is on the way.

All: Be ready with your friendship; be ready to make Jesus feel at home.

One: Be alert! God's Promised One is on the way.

All: Be ready to work with others; be ready to discover Jesus in the faith community: of faith.

One: Be alert! God's Promised One is on the way.

**All: Be ready to see Jesus in your neighbour,
and to promote God's justice for our troubled world.**

One: Be alert!

All: We are an Advent people! Amen.

HYMN 272 Come thou long expected Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEEed0uWnDGs&t=32s>

ADVENT CANDLES

Last Sunday we lit the first candle in our Advent Wreath, the candle of hope. We light it again as we remember that Christ will come again to fulfil all of God's promises to us.

(a person lights the candle of hope)

The second candle of Advent is the Candle of Peace. It is sometimes called the Bethlehem Candle to remind us of the place in which preparations were made to receive and cradle the Christ child.

Peace is a gift that we must be prepared for. God gives us the gift of peace when we turn to him in faith.

The prophet Isaiah calls Christ "the Prince of Peace." Through John the Baptist and all the other prophets, God asks us to prepare our hearts so that he may come in.

Our hope is in God, and in his son Jesus Christ. Our peace is found in him. We light this candle today to remind us that he brings peace to all who trust in him.

Light the Second Candle

TIS 289 Verse 1-2 Christmas is coming

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Blessed are you Lord, God of the cosmos,
you have raised up from your people a mighty saviour,

one who speaks your ancient words renewed for this very moment.

One who speaks of your long and faithful commitment to your world throughout the generations.

One who tells of your tender mercies.

One who leads the whole earth out of darkness and into the light.

One who forgives and welcomes.

One who guides our feet in the way of peace.

One who was present before time began and is present with us now.

For this great truth we give you thanks.

God of infinite patience, once again in this Advent season

you remind us that you have never left this world without signs of your love.

You sent the prophets to Israel, you sent John the Baptist, you sent Jesus

and you send your love to us in the world around us and in the lives of other people.

But, like so many who saw Jesus and did not see him as your sign,

we miss your signs of love all around us and within us.

The sun illuminates and gives life to everything on Earth,

and yet we live so much of the time without being thankful for its energy,

we live so much of our lives blind to your illumination and energy that fills our world.

Forgive us for living as if your messengers came only long ago

and not in every moment of our lives now.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

We might be blind to the wonders of God all around us and within us, but we have good news. God can heal blindness. God can restore sight. We

are renewed and we live in the full forgiveness of God's love and grace. We are forgiven. Amen. Amen. Amen.

READINGS

- **Malachi 3:1-4**

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; 3 he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

- **Luke 3:1-6**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

HYMN 158 God has spoken by his prophets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL9eXHSvPr4>

SERMON

It is sometimes interesting to listen to how people describe their 'personal relationship' with Jesus or God.

Some people refer to a personal relationship with God but they have a fairly vague idea about how to define this relationship.

Those who come from a more evangelical approach simply say something along the lines of believing, repenting and accepting Jesus as their personal saviour. To me this sounds a bit like the selection criteria for a job.

Picking up on the concept of a job selection criteria idea some people tend towards the legalistic concept and want to focus on complying with an ever-growing list of Biblical Laws. They think that this allows them to maintain a clear and measured relationship with God.

Then there are the people who approach their relationship with God like one would approach climbing a mountain. It is only by strenuous efforts in a dedicated and disciplined way that they have any chance of building a relationship with God.

While there are some merits in each of these approaches which can assist people develop their faith, there are also some pitfalls which we need to be aware of so that we don't end up with a faith which is harsh and lacking in joy. When we start to lose some of the hope and joy which Jesus left us with we are starting to miss out of the fullness of His message from God. At this time of year it is important to refocus our attention on the hope and freedom which the Advent season offers us.

Let us again reflect on the message from Malachi.

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, ... indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

Then Luke 3:4-6:

Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Then if we pick up on the other reading from Luke set for today we get:
(1:78-79)

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of
death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

And the Epistle set for today: (Philippians 1:6)

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work
among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus
Christ.

If we reflect on all of these readings set for today we can see that we are being given an image of a God who initiates contact with us and seeks to draw us into His arms. There are no complex qualifying requirements demanding us to jump through theological hoops. There are no calls on us to achieve spiritual feats like the mountain climber.

God is coming. God is not sitting back waiting for us to suddenly achieve some Olympic feat of skill or strength. Our connection with God is not some haphazard connection. God is coming and keeps coming to greet us. God is offering a new world of joy and generosity and love and grace. It is not a question as to whether we can achieve the goal, but rather are we ready to grab hold of the promised relationship.

The 16th Century Spanish Saint, John of the Cross, tells us that God's love flows out and it cannot be stopped. God is eager, persistent and could even be described as pushy and intrusive. He speaks of the intruding love of God using images like a waterfall and sunlight breaking through on a cloudy day. For John of the Cross it takes more effort to keep God out than to allow God into our lives.

So, where are we with this voice calling out in the wilderness? This voice is not asking us to achieve massive and spectacular new skills. It is in fact just asking us to do away with anything which might be an obstacle to His approach.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Fill the valleys and level the mountains and hills and straighten out the hazardous turns and make the rough ways smooth so that all flesh may see the salvation of God.

In the 4th Century John Chrysostom, a poet and hymn writer, suggested that the messenger of God needed to have every hill made low, and the hard roads made easy so that when the truth comes down from heaven there would be no barrier to its swiftly covering the whole world.

John Chrysostom tells us that when the prophets said: "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the rough ways shall be made smooth," he is signifying that "it is no longer toils and labours but grace and forgiveness of sins, affording the way to salvation."

Ian Matthews in his commentary of John of the Cross suggests that the pathway to the salvation we so desperately want and need will involve an almost inhuman feat of effort and endurance as we hack a path through the undergrowth, scale forbidding mountains and forge dangerous rapids to get to the place where there is safety and food and shelter. This then is the quest of our earlier options, the legalistic and the heroic spiritualities that have to find their way to God and achieve communion by their own mighty efforts.

After we reflect some more we can in fact think of a rescue helicopter hovering over us ready to rescue us. We are not called on to trudge through insurmountable terrain in order to get to some remote and mystical refuge. We are instead being called on to let go of any obstacles that divert us from the all-encompassing loving God who is already there waiting for us.

Advent then is not about some artificial construct for us to heroically achieve but is in fact about simply making way for the ever-present God who seeks to connect with each of us.

Our central question for this season is not 'What do I have to achieve?' But in fact the question is 'How can I make my path simpler and clearer for me to recognise God's presence?'

The danger remains that we can tend to cut off our lives from the gracious offering through anxiety and busyness. It is no accident that our reading from the prophet Malachi tells us that the approach of God is like a raging fire that purifies us by burning away all that contaminates and complicates us. It is the same raging fire that we often use as an image of a fierce and passionate love that both sets us trembling with anticipation and sets us

running away in fear, terrified of what it might cost us to surrender to it and receive it.

God's love is eagerly seeking you and washing against your defences, ardently desiring to open you up and flood you with joyous love and mercy and grace.

In a few minutes we will be gathered around this table, and that inrushing love will be offered to you as broken bread and poured wine. Your outstretched open hands are a symbol of all that God needs to come flooding in: an open space, cleared and empty and willing to receive. Prepare the way of the Lord. Open up the pathway and receive. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

HYMN 319 Child in the manger

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

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of overflowing love.

We know your abundance in our lives in every moment.

As we dedicate this money here today,

we know that it represents only some of the many gifts

that you have gifted us with.

It is our prayer that this money might be a gift to others in the world.

In the name of the great gift giver.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Today as we bring our prayers before God in this season of Advent we will keep in mind the story of God's loving purpose for humankind in the coming of Jesus: both when he came as our Saviour as a little child in the manger, and when he comes again in glory. We pray that our hearts may be always watchful and ready as people acceptable in his sight.

Let us pray first for the needs of God's world, for peace and justice on earth. As the people of his day heard the cry of John the Baptist in the

wilderness, we pray that in the complex wilderness of international relations that priority might be compassion for those who live in countries sorely in need, whether it be due to natural causes, or any other adversity. We pray for generosity to take the place of greed, particularly in light of the need for fair distribution across the world of vaccines for Coronavirus, and we pray also for effective assistance regarding the onset of climate change to those countries most affected, particularly island countries in the Pacific. We pray especially too, for the people of the Solomon Islands, as voting takes place tomorrow. May the voice of the people be heard and acted upon wisely so that conflict is averted by a peaceful resolution.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for ourselves as we hear the cry of John the Baptist proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Lord, as we are reminded this Advent that your longing is for people to know and to love you, we pray that our hearts will be open to you so that we continually grow day by day in a transforming relationship with you as Saviour and Lord. We pray that you will enable us to be a light and witness to you in this community in which we live. We pray for Mark as he ministers to us, and for Jan and those who lead us, so that this community of faith will grow and draw others to know your grace and love in their lives.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all who at this time are anxious or sad, for those who are lonely, for those who are preparing for a Christmas without their loved ones beside them. Keep us mindful of those we know who particularly need care at this time. We pray for those in our church family who have asked our prayers:..... We pray for healing blessings upon them and your comfort of mercy and wholeness. Give to all who care for others: doctors, nurses, paramedics, those employed in home care - wisdom, patience and gentleness; and to us all, your peace.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Let us now sum up our prayers in the words that Christ himself has taught us:

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 316 O little town of Bethlehem

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_q430z13oc

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.

21 LAMB OF GOD

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 390 Jesus is lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U1MuOCHon4>

BENEDICTION

We go with the words of Isaiah ringing in our ears,

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

Let us go in peace with our eyes open wide.

Amen.

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