

ADVENT 2

10/12/23

CAVES BEACH

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

- LET US PRAY - Loving God, thank you for the peace you give us through Jesus. Help us prepare our hearts to receive Him. Bless our worship. Guide us in all that we say and do. We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

On Jordan's bank stands the prophet John.

John hears God's Word spoken loud and clear.

The prophet listens carefully to the Word and acts.

John's clear message brings people together to face realities.

The prophet recognizes the supreme worth of Jesus Christ.

And we, the followers of Jesus, offer worship and prayer and service, in the name of God's Anointed One.

Opening Prayer

Peace is your gracious gift, O God.

We give thanks for the Advent promise of peace, revealed in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Peace is your cherished gift, O God.

We give thanks for the opportunity to receive peace and to share peace in this faith community.

Peace is your challenging gift, O God.

We give thanks for the ways in which we can share peace, in this nation and in this neighborhood.

Peace is your eternal gift, O God.

We rejoice that, in Jesus, we have the hope of peace, which encompasses heaven and earth, time and eternity. Amen.

HYMN 276 There's a light upon the mountains

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwal&t=10s>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Loving kindness and faithfulness

we find in you, Holy One,

and we are grateful.

Holiness and peace kiss

us when we are in your presence.

Thank you, Holy One,

we turn to you with our praise.

God of glory, you call on us to prepare the way for Jesus' birth. Forgive us if we put our time and energy into making all sorts of material preparations for Christmas; buying gifts; ordering food; baking cakes; writing cards - all important, but preparations which give temporary pleasure compared to the

lasting peace which Christ gives.

God of glory, you call on us to prepare the way for Jesus' birth by helping to make smooth the rough places in people's lives, by seeking to reduce the mountainous problems some people experience.

Forgive us when we fail to become involved with the pain of other people by pleading seasonal busy-ness.

God of glory, you call on us to prepare the way for Jesus' birth by being agents of comfort and mercy.

Forgive us for all the times we put our own personal comfort before that of others.

For confusing being comfortable with being comforting.

God of glory, we confess that all too often we do spend more time on making preparations for our own pleasure than preparing for Jesus to be born anew in our hearts and lives - in our families, our communities, our nation.

Help us to prepare ourselves faithfully to receive the Christ-child. Amen

ASSURANCE OF PARDON Listen to what God promises: salvation happens when love and faithfulness meet together, when righteousness and peace kiss. (Psalm 85:9,10) This is surely the gospel of Jesus Christ. In him we experience salvation.

Thanks be to God.

READINGS

- **2 Peter 3:8–15a**

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a

loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed and the elements will melt with fire? 13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

- **Mark 1:1–8**

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way,

3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord;

make his paths straight,’ ”

4 so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his

sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

HYMN 270 On Jordan’s banks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plr21lLgFpg>

SERMON

Peace!

The lead up to Christmas can be a very stressful time for people, anything but peaceful. Pressures can build up at home and there can be strains on our relationships as we try to cope with everything that is happening.

Even fitting everything in at church can seem a bit of a rush in the few weeks before Christmas. In Advent we are looking forward with anticipation and hope with our prayers for future salvation. Combined with all of this are the usual rounds of festivities and preparations for the holiday season.

Let me ask to same question that I ask every year at this time.

Have you finished your Christmas shopping?

Those who are still contemplating it might be starting to feel some pressure as in other places children start to look longingly at those presents wrapped

and placed under the Christmas tree. In the Epistle reading Peter suggests to us that even God experiences the same conundrum in timing when some things seem to happen too fast and other things seem to take a painfully long time.

“Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,” says Peter, “that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”

All too often we only take notice of the second part of this passage but if we take the time we can see that God can sometimes feel a bit like that kid waiting for the time to open those Christmas presents.

So, what is it that God wants so expectantly to unwrap?

There is the new you, the new heavens and the new earth.

God is looking to the fulfilment of His creation and salvation. God is looking on expectantly waiting for us to become all that Jesus lived and died for. That is, to enable us to be the fulfilment of God’s promises. To put it simply God is waiting for all things to be completed and perfected to bring joy to the universe.

Sometimes it can seem a bit like the old saying that a watched kettle never boils. It can seem interminable waiting for the chance to open a Christmas present, how much more so would it be for God to see creation fulfilled.

In the passage we heard from Peter we have this image as he is sharing his thoughts about the end of time. Like Jesus, Peter uses apocalyptic

imagery that was common in those days. The fledgling churches of those times were developing new concepts of the nature and purpose of Christ's death and resurrection.

Peter shares his new insights: "The Lord is not being tardy, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance." And then a few verses on he says, "regard the patience of our Lord as salvation."

Going back to the first line we have a call to seek to have the patience of the Lord and Peter suggests that this shows that the Lord does not want anyone to be lost and He is prepared to give them every chance to get on board the salvation boat.

We now have a change in perception about God. Previously it was believed that God was looking to burn sinners but Peter is now urging the faithful to listen to Jesus' teaching that God is doing everything to avoid that sort of tragedy for each of us. The end time will be a time of welcome and freedom not a time of vengeance.

Turning now to the reading from Mark we can see this message being proclaimed by John the Baptist. He calls out to people to be baptised to repent so that their sins may be forgiven.

Here is the first sign of this change. Notice the order in which Mark gives us the teachings of John the Baptist. Listen to it as it is so often repeated by Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven, now go and sin no more." Forgiveness comes first and then we are invited to respond to that offer of free grace. It is through God's free gift of forgiveness that we can repent.

So many people seem to want to portray God as some angry deity who wants nothing more than to punish the people who have not yet repented. For them people can only be saved by spilling sacrificial blood and dramatic lifestyle changes. Looking at our reading from Peter we can see that God is desperate to save us from our own pain and suffering for which we have constructed our own fire pits. In fact God is doing everything possible so that we can simply be saved and offered freedom.

Those offered this act of grace do not need to fit into some restrictive list of acceptable people. It is freely offered to all of God's family. Look at Jesus on the cross. He was speaking the words of forgiveness even as the nails were being driven into his flesh. "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

There is not even a hint of holding back mercy unless payment is first offered in life-style change. In the Gospels Jesus preached and lived this message, that is freely given forgiveness that creates the opportunity for anyone to change.

The importance of these differences is not just something that is seen out there in public debates about personal morality. It is crucial in how we understand and relate to ourselves and to one another right here.

I know from my pastoral conversations with many of you how many of us vacillate between these two conflicting views of God and of God's forgiveness. Many of us still use huge energy trying to earn God's mercy and then, every time we fail, we quickly lose patience with ourselves and write ourselves off on behalf of God.

Then there is the fact that when we are not doing this to ourselves we can turn on one another. We think that the other person needs to change. What

is so often missing is the preparedness to simply share God's saving patience and forgive and love those people first.

Sometimes the things that frustrate and irritate us about ourselves or about others seem to be taking forever to change. We want results and we want them to be big and we want them now, and every day we are kept waiting feels like a thousand years.

But you know what?

God has already forgiven us and welcomed us into the world of grace, and every day we sullenly hold back from accepting that embrace and surrendering to the power of that transforming mercy probably feels like a thousand years to God.

Jesus is not asking you to wait. The gift is given. It is for now. There is nothing you have to achieve first. And every gift of abundant mercy comes with a free set of gardening tools which can be used for sorting out your life and producing the fruits of repentance.

God's promise is Peace!

HYMN 409 O breath of life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3bsgoPjcg4>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

May our gifts of money,
of time, of service,
bring peace – your peace – we pray,
Holy One. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Today, we pray for this world where so much we see and hear horrifies us, and yet also there is so much goodness; there is so much destruction and inhumanity and wanton disregard for all that is good and fair and just, and yet too, there is much love and care and understanding that goes beyond what is normally asked or anticipated. We come into this mix, opening our own hearts and minds in prayer to God who loves us even so, abundantly and beyond measure. Let us pray:

Loving God, as we hear of John the Baptist again today, we give thanks that he understood that people needed changed hearts and minds, so that lives would be transformed. Lord, today we see twisted leadership across our world, people saying that bad is good, and good is bad and there is confusion and lies. We pray for discerning minds and clean hearts O God, and we pray for truth and justice.

We come to you O God, seeking peace. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, as we journey through these weeks of Advent, we give thanks for the beauty of creation, for your provision of all we need for food, clothing and shelter. We take much for granted, and fail to appreciate the abundance we enjoy here. Today we pray for those who have little, who sleep in unsafe places, who have little to eat, who live in fear. For mothers and fathers unable to care for their children properly. We pray that we might have the courage to be generous, to share, to live more simply.

We come to you O God, seeking compassion. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, thank you that in Jesus your Son we find the good news of salvation, the good news of reconciliation with you, the good news that you are love. The world looks elsewhere, everywhere but where it is found. Refocus our eyes, amend our hearts, so that we see you in creation and all of life, so that we see Jesus in our neighbours, so that we acknowledge that he alone is Saviour and Lord.

We come to you O God, seeking truth. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we come to you because you bring wholeness and purpose to our own lives and to those whom we love and know personally. But some are at present feeling sad, lonely, anxious, unwell; some are waiting for a diagnosis of health issues, some are in hospital recovering operations, some are grieving those they love. Comfort and heal we pray all who are experiencing those and all such difficulties in their lives. We'll take a time of silent prayer now for you to name and bring your loved ones before God..... We pray too for those who have the caring roles - grant them wisdom, patience and gentleness, and to us all, your peace.

We come to you O God, seeking comfort. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

We ask these our prayers, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

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 390 Alleluia Jesus is Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zz8SPM9Vlw>

BENEDICTION

Prophets cry out in the wilderness:

Prepare! Get ready! Pay attention!

The Holy One of peace arrives,

even now – open the gates!

Let peace come in.

As you prepare for the story

of Jesus' birth to be told again,

may you know God with you,

Holy One, Holy Peace. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzpJ0rLtufA>