

Parish of Central Exeter

Advent Sunday

28 November 2021

'Stand up!...your redemption is drawing near!



Welcome everyone.

Our reflections this morning are by Sheila and the Intercessions provided by Keith. Many thanks to you both.

The Lighting of the Advent Candles

This period was first called Advent in the fourth century and quickly developed into a month-long season of preparation not just for the birth of Jesus, but also for his second coming. The lighting of candles is another ancient tradition – the advent wreath is nineteenth century from Germany. Each candle symbolises a different aspect of the purpose of this season.

The first candle is often called the candle of hope and we recall the words of the prophet Isaiah who looks forward to a new hope for the whole world through the coming of a Messiah.

If you wish to light a candle at home, do so now with these words, and we all join in with you:

Jesus is the Light of the world
A light no darkness can ever put out.

We light this candle as a sign
that heaven and earth may pass away,
but the word of God will be present in the world for ever and for ever.

Call to Worship

It doesn't matter whether or not you have faith;
whether or not you are cynical or despairing,
hope-filled or hope-less:
what matters to God is simply that you are here.

We are entering the time of Advent,
in preparation for Christmas.
Advent reminds us that if God is to be born again

in the most ordinary parts of our world and our lives
then we need prepare for it.

We need to make the space in our lives
where love might be born.

Welcome to this tiny corner of a harsh and dark world.
Together, let us practice being ready
in the faith that Christ will come.

(written by Cheryl Lawrie and posted on [hold this space].)

Gathering Hymn

'Hark a thrilling voice is calling'. Words are on the screen.

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

Confession

Lord,
we have pulled out the Advent wreath,
the Christmas tree, the poinsettias.
We dusted off the hymns, unsung for a year,
and unearthed the words of your prophets.

Yet, in your eyes,
these efforts are for nothing
without the regular, persistent, deep pursuit
of justice for all people.

Our efforts are hollow without consistent work
toward peace, reconciliation,
and participation in your mission for creation.
In our hearts, we do long to be your people,
to carry out your mission,
to be lights in the darkness—
proof that no darkness can overcome your truth.

Awaken us to action.
Stir us to courage.
Rouse us to prepare a way in the wilderness for your coming,
clearing the brush of oppression, racism,
injustice, and hopelessness—
so that all may see your light and perceive your coming. Amen.

(written by lutheranjulia and posted on RevGalBlogPals.)

The collect for Advent

Almighty God,
give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light,
now in the time of this mortal life,
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in
great humility;
that on the last day,
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.



New Testament Reading 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

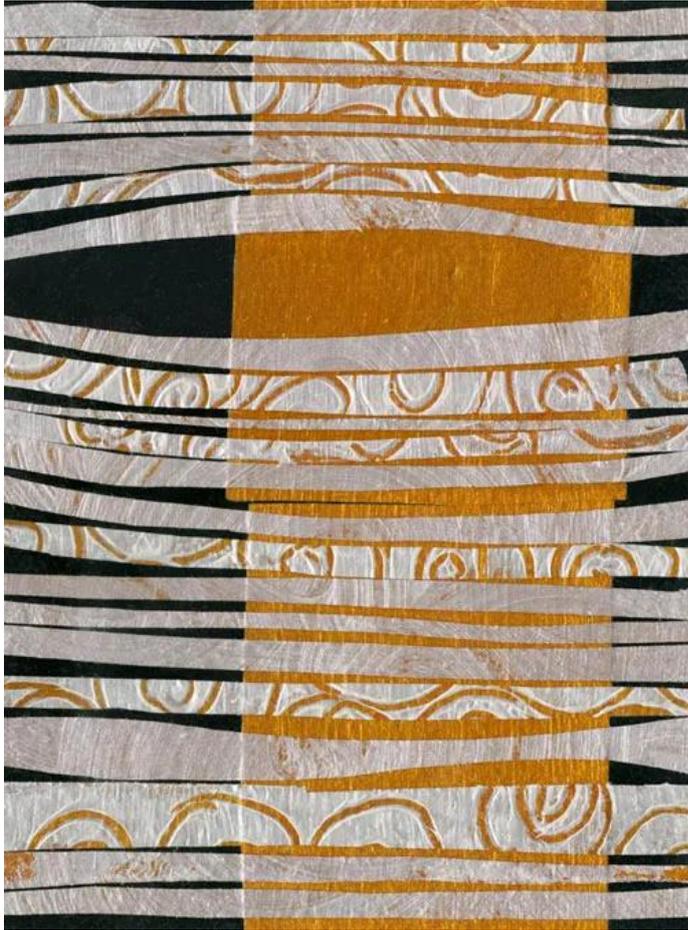
Gospel Reading Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ 'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying

that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'



Waiting for the Revealing

By Jan Richardson, 2008

Reflection

Each year our Advent Sunday readings draw our attention to 'the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints' and that you may (be able) 'to stand before the Son of Man'. Earlier in verse 28 of our gospel reading Luke states that 'when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near'. Today I want to focus on that call to 'stand up' but first a quote and comments from James Edwards' commentary on Luke.

He concludes his introduction to the whole section Luke 21:5-36 with these words. 'Its primary purpose is to provide a view of the ultimate End in the distant future through the lens of the destruction of Jerusalem in the immediate future'. He notes the difference with Jewish apocalyptic writing as Luke concludes with words of exhortation. These words of encouragement occur in the first section of today's passage as Luke describes the fear and dread of people to the coming of the Son of Man with those words 'stand up and raise your head'. Edwards comments that 'stand up' is unique to Luke and only occurs with Jesus'

healing of the woman bent double in Luke 13 and the next phrase is a Hebraism which 'enjoins believers to optimism and hope'. He also notes that 'redemption' is a Pauline word which only occurs here in the gospels. Thus, the coming of Christ is a fact to welcome rather than fear as it brings release from oppression and sin.

Yet 'standing up' can be difficult both physically and spiritually. For many people old age means that the mobility of earlier years is lost while others lose strength with illness. (Obviously some people are never able to stand up physically but can be very strong spiritually.) Exercise can help. During the November lockdown a year ago, I started a body conditioning class where we are given exercises to strengthen our core muscles. How may we strengthen our spiritual muscles?

Jesus' words at the end of the gospel passage provide two exhortations. The first is a warning 'be on your guard' or 'take care of yourselves' that you are not overwhelmed either with all the distractions and pleasures of life nor with all the routine daily cares. The first warning occurs elsewhere with the condemnation of drunkenness and greed, but we cannot be smug and think that does not refer to ourselves. Each of us will know what distractions take us away from following Jesus. The second warning reminds us that the ordinary necessities of life can also prevent us from strengthening our spiritual muscles. They may stop us from giving the time to follow the second exhortation to 'be alert' and pray.

In the first letter to the Thessalonians after praying that he might visit the church again, Paul prays for them. First, he wants their love for each other and for all people to increase and overflow. Then he prays that God may 'strengthen your hearts until you can stand in blameless holiness before our God and Father when Jesus comes with all those who are dedicated to him' (William Barclay translation 3:13). Here our core spiritual muscles are love and holiness.

I was reminded of the hymn 'Stand up, stand up for Jesus' by my 102-year-old neighbour when she stood up after getting out of my car to go to St James' church. The original words though very militaristic remind us that we cannot face the difficulties of the world in our own strength but need to pray for God's help. Jean Holloway has written a new version which describes how standing up for Jesus leads to sharing the good news of forgiveness and showing love to those on the margins. It also includes working for justice and caring for those in pain. If our spiritual muscles are strengthened, then this is seen in our lives of love and holiness, and we will be able to stand at the coming of our Lord.

I will close with the words from Cranmer's collect for the last Sunday before Advent in the modern version.

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people,
that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works
may by you be plenteously rewarded;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer

Help us to realize,
as we fill stockings,
Christmas is mainly
for the old folks —
bent backs
and tired eyes
need relief and light
a little more.

No wonder
it was grown-ups
who were the first
to notice
the star.

(Adapted from a prayer on Journey with Jesus website.)



Affirmation of Faith

Jesus taught us to speak of hope as the coming of God's kingdom.

We believe that God is at work in our world
turning hopeless and evil situations into good.
We believe that goodness and justice
will triumph in the end
and that tyranny and oppression cannot last forever.
One day all tears will be wiped away;
the lamb will lie down with the lion,
and justice will roll down like a mighty stream.

True peace and true reconciliation are not only desired,
they are assured and guaranteed in Christ.

This is our faith.
This is our hope.

(20th century South African creed.)

Worship song

Stand up for Jesus.

This is not the version you will be expecting! You can try to dance along with it!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaQhxcb82Lw>

Intercessions

Into our troubles and weaknesses,
Into the barren places of our souls, Come Lord,
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the war torn and the refugee,
Into those who live in conflict, Come Lord,
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the homeless and the unemployed,
Into those who feel abandoned, Come Lord,
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the sick and the disabled,
Into those with Covid and with cancer, Come, Lord
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the poor and the starving,
Into those who are oppressed or abused, Come Lord
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into the lives of loved ones,
Into those from whom we are estranged, Come Lord,
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

Into our joys and celebrations,
Into our work and our achievements, Come, Lord
Come down, come in, come among us and make us whole.

(written by Christine Sine on Godspace)



The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Wait for the Lord sung by St David's church choir. Words are on the screen. Thank you Nigel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M89oWjt0Ok>





Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Post Communion Collect

Father in heaven,
who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:
give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that, when he comes again,
we may be ready to greet him
with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commission

darkness still grows
(but the light is gathering)

bread has been broken
(but justice is slipping through)

economists are today's oracles
(but the word is now ready to speak)

blood has been spilled
(but the moment is turning)

the journey is lonely
(but the angels stir)

the handmaid labours
(but the child waits)

go into advent
with expectation
the headlines are being rewritten

(written by Roddy Hamilton, and posted on the New Kilpatrick Parish Church website.)

Blessing (derived from the NT reading for today)

As you go from here,
may God flood your lives with a deep love for one another,
and for all people.
And may he keep your hearts strong, blameless and holy,
as we together wait for the day when our Lord Jesus will appear again.
Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

Closing Music

We close with 'People look East'. A favourite for many people, and certainly one of Averil's.
Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGAW_qhH9NE

