

29th November 2020 – Morning Service

Advent 1 – “Watch”

Martyn Filsak

Advent Candle Liturgy - Candle of Waiting with Hope and Expectation

“Jesus said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

This candle reminds us of the light of hope and expectation that the prophets had as they looked for the coming of a Messiah who would bring peace and love to the world.

After the Candle is lit we pray:

Dear God, our world is in darkness. We need the light of your peace and love to shine. Help us to wait with expectant hope as we prepare our lives and our homes to receive the One who said, ‘I am the light of the world’. **Amen**

StF 173 – Into the darkness of this world

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| 1) Into the darkness of this world,
Into the shadows of the night;
Into this loveless place You came,
Lightened our burdens, eased our pain,
And made these hearts Your home.
Into the darkness once again,
O come, Lord Jesus, come. | 3) O Holy Child, Emmanuel,
Hope of the ages, God with us,
Visit again this broken place,
Till all the earth declares Your praise,
And Your great mercies own.
Now let Your love be born in us,
O come, Lord Jesus, come. |
| Ch) <i>Come with Your love to make us whole,
Come with Your light to lead us on,
Driving the darkness far from our souls:
O come, Lord Jesus, come.</i> | E) <i>Come in Your glory, take Your place,
Jesus, the name above all names,
We long to see You face to face,
O come, Lord Jesus, come.</i> |
| 2) Into the longing of our souls,
Into these heavy hearts of stone,
Shine on us now Your piercing light,
Order our lives and souls aright,
By grace and love unknown,
Until in You our hearts unite,
O come, Lord Jesus, come. | |

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Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Lord our God, we gather here as a people whose eyes are looking to you. We hunger and thirst for your presence. We need you in our lives, yet you have always been present with your people. Our lives are fully known to you, and you chose to dwell among us in your Son. Glory and majesty and knowledge belong to you. Yours are the furthest reaches of the Universe and the smallest elements of matter and energy. You are above all things and yet in every situation. You came into our world in your Son and made us your dwelling place. You are the source of hope and the inspiration for our love. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship you. **Amen**

Lord, you have shown us in your Son what true love is, yet we have turned from it. We have focused not upon you but upon ourselves. You have offered us power and guidance for living, but we have relied upon our own efforts and reasoning. You have shown us the hard way of trust and service but we have chosen the passive way of doubt and misguided activity. Forgive us, we pray, and fill us afresh with your grace. With thankfulness we receive your forgiveness and affirmation of our unshakable place in your family.

Amen

Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved?

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and have given us over to our sins.

Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord; do not remember our sins for ever. Oh, look upon us we pray, for we are all your people.

Reading: Mark 13:24-37

But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!”

Sermon – “Watch”

Do you enjoy waiting? I don't, usually! It's a familiar activity, if activity is the right word, for all of us. We may have waited for a bus, an appointment, traffic lights to turn green, some item in the post, perhaps sat many times in front of a computer screen looking at a little whirling symbol that tells you the machine is busy. We may be waiting on a much longer timescale, waiting for better times to come or waiting for a pandemic to end. It's easy to see waiting as wasted time, yet in the Bible, where waiting is a common theme, it is productive time.

Isaiah tells us that God acts for those who wait for him. This waiting implies faith and expectation. For centuries, Israel waited for the Messiah to come. The prophets had given their message of promise but the fulfilment was a long time in coming. In a few short weeks we will celebrate the incarnation of Jesus, a fulfilment of these prophecies. Yet we are still waiting. The scriptures tell us clearly that Jesus will come a second time, this time to reign as King. Jesus himself talks about it in our passage from Mark, and gives us two aspects of what that waiting will entail.

Watch

Jesus calls his servants to be watchful! It is like a man going on a journey who leaves his servants with a job to do and leaves a doorkeeper on duty. I understand this as Jesus referring to the time between his first and second comings. We are symbolically the servants and the doorkeeper. The doorkeeper's job is to stay alert and watch for the return of the Master. There are signs available to those with eyes to see, signs that his return is near. Mark chapter 13 contains many of them.

Verse 30 may be puzzling. The present generation will live to see it all. To what is Jesus referring? It may be the destruction of the Temple referred to right at the beginning of the chapter. Many of that generation will have lived to see that happen.

Like that doorkeeper, we are called to watch too. I believe that God is giving us clues as to where we stand in history, and we are meant to seek them out and understand them. History is actually leading somewhere. God's purposes are being fulfilled. We can understand them by our study of the scriptures linked to our knowledge of events in the world. I can truly say that I've seen biblical prophecy fulfilled in my lifetime, and it's still happening. We can view world events from God's perspective. I also believe that God has given us tools to help us understand them, people who have studied these things closely and can open up to us God's purposes. I commend to you a weekly news programme on the TBN television channel that looks at world news from a Christian perspective. It's on at 8.30 each Thursday morning. There are Christian teachers that I could recommend to anyone who is interested, who can enlighten us about end-time prophecy. I find that the more I look into this, the less worried I become about what is going on in the world because I see God's purposes.

Jesus calls us to stay alert. I think it's no coincidence that in the very next chapter of Mark, Jesus is with Peter, James and John in the garden of Gethsemane and he asks them to stay awake and pray that they may be spared the test. The three disciples were exhausted and they slept. This is a physical sign of what can happen to us spiritually if we are not careful. Of course, we need our natural sleep and I'm recommending that we continue to go to bed each night, but in this time in history it's all too easy to be lulled by our daily lives into a spiritual slumber where we are no longer alert to what God is doing.

Watch and pray. Study the biblical prophecies. Look from a Christian perspective at what God is doing in the Church, among the Jewish people, and in the world. I do believe that we are in the last days and Jesus is coming soon. It may or may not be in my earthly lifetime, but we are all called to be watchful and alert, just as the doorkeeper in Jesus' illustration.

Work

The other aspect of Jesus' "man on a journey" story is the servants. They each had their work to do and were expected to be faithful in carrying it out, whether the master was there or not. Part of our waiting is therefore our working. God calls us to be faithful in whatever he has given us to do. It may seem to us a humble or mundane task, but it is important. We need to see it in the context of God's bigger plan. Perhaps you don't feel physically able to do much, but you can pray, and that's one of the most important jobs that the Master gives to his servants and friends.

We are here in the world at this time by God's design. I used to think, and would often express it in my prayers, that I felt as though I would be more at home in a past period of history several centuries ago, when stars were easier to see and knowledge of the universe was just opening up, perhaps in the time when the likes of Sir Isaac Newton were making discoveries and publishing their works. I don't pray that any more! I'm grateful to be here, now, in this difficult but exciting time in the story of the world.

Be faithful, but see the bigger picture. Imagine a stone carver shaping a block to be used in a great cathedral. A bystander asks, "What are you doing?" The reply is, "I'm building a cathedral." The worker could have said, "I'm putting decorative relief onto this piece of stone," but instead saw the grand plan. Be faithful in what you are doing but remain focused on the landscape-scale picture too. When you are asked what you are doing, how about saying, "I'm building a kingdom, and the King is returning soon."

The task to which you are called, and the timing of when you are here to fulfil it, are both ordained by God. When thinking of this truth I was reminded of a song that I used to sing many years ago, and which I invite you to sing prayerfully, "I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation". Be assured that you are here, specifically in this time, for a reason and purpose. Let us sing together.

Song – I want to serve the purpose of God

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| <p>1) I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation.
I want to serve the purpose of God while I am alive.
I want to give my life for something that'll last forever,
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will.</p> <p><i>Ch) What is on Your heart?
Show me what to do.
Let me know Your will and I will follow You.</i></p> <p>2) I want to build with silver and gold in my generation.
I want to build with silver and gold while I am alive.
I want to give my life for something that'll last forever,
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will.</p> | <p>3) I want to see the Kingdom of God in my generation.
I want to see the Kingdom of God while I am alive.
I want to give my life for something that'll last forever,
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will.</p> <p>4) I want to see the Lord come again in my generation.
I want to see the Lord come again while I am alive.
I want to give my life for something that'll last forever,
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will.</p> |
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Prayers thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord our God, we give you thanks that you have made us your own, promised us everlasting life in all its fullness, and placed us here and now to have meaningful work whose effects will last forever. Help us to be faithful in all that you have given us to do, as we watch and wait for your salvation to be revealed.

L: Our Lord and our God **R: Come to save us**

Hear our prayers for this world and for nations and earthly authorities. We pray for rulers everywhere, that they may have wisdom and courage in their governance, that all people may live in quietness and prosperity.

L: Our Lord and our God **R: Come to save us**

Guide our own Prime Minister and Government. We pray for wisdom in dealing with coronavirus, shrewdness in international relations and courage to stand for justice.

L: Our Lord and our God **R: Come to save us**

We pray for families and individuals in our nation. We ask that you keep them safe in the coming weeks, especially as they decide whether or how to meet with family and friends over Christmas. Be the helper and healer of all who are ill. Give grace to those who are separated from their families and usual carers, and comfort to the bereaved. Help all those involved in the medical profession. We give thanks for news of the development of vaccines.

L: Our Lord and our God **R: Come to save us**

We pray for your church: our Connexion, District, Circuit, churches, staff, volunteers and members and worshippers, and all of your worldwide community of faith. We pray for guidance in the coming weeks. Above all, make us Kingdom people who share hope with those around us, always ready to give a reason for the hope that we have. Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

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 this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **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.**

StF 169 – Come, thou long-expected Jesus

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| 1) Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free,
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee. | 3) Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us for ever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring. |
| 2) Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart. | 4) By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne. |

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Closing Prayer/Blessing

God grant us eyes to see and a heart to understand his purposes, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us now and for ever. **Amen**