

3rd December 2023 – Morning Service

Advent 1 – Letting Go

Tina Gittings

Candle Liturgy

Our Advent ring stands waiting, for candle light to lead us on. We'll open up traditions, with challenge and with change.

Advent God, **challenge us today.**

A box of decorations stands ready to be explored. We reassess the treasures in the bulging cardboard box. Let's sort the treasure from the trash the needed from the not.

Advent God, **challenge us today.**

Our living is refocused with preparations underway. Our ordinary and everyday will be challenged along the way. Letting go of stuff to do God's will, is here to stay.

Advent God, **challenge us today.**

In the mundane and ordinary, stars will start to fall, challenging and changing us with holy goodness breaking through.

Advent God, **challenge us today.**

[The first candle is lit]

Advent God, as we light this, our first Advent candle may we let go of what swamps us and serves no purpose for us, so that we can meet the challenges that lie ahead of us. May our ordinary lives be enriched by your extraordinary love for us. **Amen.**

In verse two of the liturgy, it speaks of a box of decorations which need to be sorted; the treasure from the trash the needed from the not. I expect most of us have a cupboard, a drawer, box, etc which needs this treatment, but can also be applied to ourselves. Advent is the time to rejoice in a birth, a new life so perhaps it is time to have a sort out of our thoughts, ideas, prejudices and habits to let the light shine on the old and see what is needed and what is not, and rejoice in a new less burdened self, ready to welcome our King

StF 175 – Light of the world

1) Light of the world, You stepped down
into darkness,
Opened my eyes, let me see.
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You.

2) King of all days, oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above,
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

*Ch) So here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God:
You're altogether lovely,
Altogether worthy,
Altogether wonderful to me.*

*Br) And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.*

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Prayer

Almighty God, we adore you and we praise you. We bring our praises and prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord. We praise you for the way he demonstrated your merciful love, for his gentle touch upon our lives, and the hope joy he gives to us, for his coming brought a light into the world for all your people of every age and in every place.

Almighty God, when we come into the light your presence all our pride and self-sufficiency, our self-interest and self-satisfaction are exposed as the self-delusions they are. The selfish way we look down on other people, our vanity and self-righteousness are shown up in all their poverty and emptiness. We forget what Jesus taught us. We take his sacrifice for granted through which we are able to call you Father.

Father, forgive us fill us with your Spirit so that we may celebrate your love made known to us in Jesus Christ and become truly your people reflecting your love to all we meet. Father, we thank you for the hope with which you have filled our lives.

We give thanks that in the coming of Christ you have given us assurance of your sovereign control of all things. We thank you for this Advent Sunday when we celebrate the coming of Christ to be the Saviour of the world and for the promise of his coming again as Lord of all. We are grateful for the hope and light with which Christ fills our lives and uplifts us with the knowledge that you hold us in your love and care. **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.**

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 forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people.

In our reading from Isaiah, we read of a people who have lost their way in their relationship with God. In verse 5 of our reading, they know what they are doing wrong and are asking what they can do to be saved. Throughout the Old Testament God told his people to care for the widows and orphans, most vulnerable members of society at that time. Jesus came with the same message. Our next hymn shows us how to put his message of love into practice.

StF 672 – Where can we find you

- 1) Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We want to serve you, to answer your call.
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?
What should we do in our service to all?
- 2) 'Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
Go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
Out of my plenty, think what you can share.
- 3) 'Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
Go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comforts but what others gave me;
Offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.
- 4) 'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;
Go where my sheep are rejected and lost.
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;
Go and do likewise, and don't count the cost.'
- 5) Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We are your servants who answer your call.
You go before us, and there we will follow,
Taking our cross in the service of all.

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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 rooster 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!'

The following hymn may not be one we are familiar with but it sums up the later verse of our reading about being prepared.

StF 491 – As servants working an estate

- 1) As servants working an estate
Whose owner is away,
And whose return they all await
Though no one knows the day,
So none of us can name the hour,
The season or the year
When Christ with all of heaven's power
Will suddenly appear.
- 2) Our task is not to calculate
What angels do not know,
But faithfully to watch and wait
And Christ's compassion show.
Not loading fragile human schemes
With hopes they cannot bear,
We trust the promise that redeems
The present from despair.

3) For Christ the Lord will surely come,
The King whom kings will fear,
And with God's perfect justice plumb
The justice we do here,
Revealing that the present age
And every age that's past
Are not the final moral gauge
That judges us at last.

4) So guide, Lord Christ, our every choice
That when our hearts shall hear
Your step, your knock, your calling voice
We will not hide in fear,
But welcome you from realms above
To your estate below,
Where justice, mercy, peace and love
Abundantly will grow.

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Sermon

Are you ready for Christmas or does it always take you by surprise? Has it crept up and now you realise that in just over 3 weeks it is the big day and you are not ready, no cards written, no goodies stockpiled, no presents bought?

My family, when I was a child, never had a lot of money to play with, things had to be budgeted for. Often it was very much a choice of either or but certainly not both, so Christmas festivities were budgeted for all year round, small payments made into a Christmas club each week and from September onwards tinned fruit, dried fruit, sugar and small presents were squirrelled away in the Christmas cupboard. I still uphold the tradition of the Christmas Cupboard as does my daughter. However, there are major snags to this approach. I found myself worrying endlessly over whether I was really prepared, had I enough pickled cabbage, should I have bought some pickled walnuts as well, and so on. Awful thing about waiting there is time for doubts to set in, perhaps we aren't as ready as we think we are.

In Advent we are waiting for Christmas and celebrations to mark the anniversary of the birth of a baby who was the Light and Hope of the world. We also look to the future when Jesus Christ returns to earth as King and Lord. The people in Isaiah had over the generations experienced many traumas, war captivity, exile, their faith tested. They found themselves in a situation where their resentment and fear had led to a separation from God. They longed for God to come down and exert his power and glory. At the time of the birth of Jesus they were still waiting for the Messiah long-promised by generations of prophets. They chafed under the brutal rule of their Roman masters and occupiers of their land.

Over the years the Prophets had foretold of the One who would come from God and set them free and while they waited, they built up a picture of this Saviour who would restore their land to them and give them back their pride. They became tense and anxious, impatient and they allowed this to colour their judgment. They looked for a warrior King mighty and powerful. They were so consumed with the tension of waiting that they did not recognize the child born in a stable who grew up to be a man who preached love as the one who they were waiting for.

For years the people of Israel had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, yet when the moment arrived many failed to see it. God had taken them by surprise. They thought they understood what God would do and were unprepared for anything else. They were not prepared to let go of their own ideas and move on. There is a lesson there for us as we wait for Christ to come again. He knew that we would be distracted even bored with the wait. It's not often I keep my husband waiting but what tends to happen if I do is that he wanders off and gets involved with something else so that by the time I am ready he is absorbed in other things, then it is me who is complaining are you ready. How often do we say that in all sorts of circumstances at home and at work often closely followed by well why didn't you prepare.

Jesus knew we would have to wait for him to come again and the time of his coming and what it would involve would be unknown. Our lives have to be lived in a state of preparedness, not an easy task. We live in a broken world, every day around we hear and see the violence of the world, whether it is the elderly person who is ill-treated and the vulnerable taken advantage of just because of nothing really.

Or the young person who is mugged for their latest digital gismo or becomes a victim of stabbing because they belong to the wrong gang or don't fit in. Or the global picture of violence, bombs, rocket attacks, civil uprising, Or Governments, using force against their people, gas attacks the prevention and denial of medical aid and food, driving whole groups of people from their homes forcing them to become refugees.

Is this the behaviour of servants without a master, all for self? Is it any wonder that there are those who see all these acts of violence as the end times, that they are the signs that the end of the world is nigh?

Jesus saw all these as birth pangs that there would be hard times to go through before he returned in glory. Those of us who have had any contact with children can tell of the overturning of our lives, the responsibility they bring, impatience, trepidation and sometimes fear and pain.

We begin to doubt ourselves should we doing this, will we be able to cope, will everything be alright, are we up to the job. All thought processes that we as Christians go through as we wait for the Lord. Jesus used the parable of the fig which in summer bursts into new life growing new leaves and bursting into life to reveal that summer is near. We are the people of the light our lives should not be lived in darkness and dread but lived to the full in hope and joyous expectation.

I have on my notice board words God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah at a time when the Jews were living in exile. Do we see these times that we live in as a time of exile when God seems far away?

For I know have for you, declare the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come to pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Reminder, we should live each day with a sense of expectation and hope living each day as Advent, expecting and recognizing God at work in a host of ways and is constantly able to surprise us. Life has a habit of catching us on the hop and while it can cause problems just imagine how dull life would be if we knew everything that was going to happen, if we had exhausted all its experiences and its ability to offer new views and horizons.

Could our faith grow stale if God was unable to surprise and overwhelm us with his power and glory, if he was unable to stretch us and enable us to achieve things, we would never have imagined ourselves capable of? Would our faith grow cold if God did not challenge us and surprise us into surprising ourselves? Expect the unexpected and though we can't be totally prepared for the unexpected we can keep your hearts and minds open to God. Do this and whenever Christ comes, we will be ready. We can be open to the possibility that God may speak to us and work through us in ways that we cannot begin to imagine

Advent is a time of waiting for the time when we celebrate the birth of our Saviour and a time of anticipation as we contemplate his return. as we look both to the past and the future we need to think of the present 'are we ready'. Ready to let go of all that holds us back on our journey with Jesus and move on. This is the urgent question of Advent.

Let's give ourselves a gift, a gift of time space and quiet as we prepare to celebrate the gift of the birth of the Christ child. Let's take time out away from the hustle and bustle, the chatter of our thoughts as we endlessly rerun lists of tasks and chores. Let's use this precious time in Advent to spend time with God in silence with minds and hearts open. Attentive and alert ready for the ways in which God is trying to reach us. And rejoice that God loves us so much he was prepared to come to us as a helpless baby, live his life among us and die on the cross for us. Rejoice that he is with us. Rejoice that he will come again.

Prayer

O God let me be ready for whatever is your design for me and so that it can be yours and not mine, help me to listen carefully, urgently for your voice. **Amen.**

StF 703 – In an age of twisted values

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| 1) In an age of twisted values
We have lost the truth we need;
In sophisticated language
We have justified our greed;
By our struggle for possessions
We have robbed the poor and weak -
Hear our cry and heal our nations:
Your forgiveness, Lord, we seek. | 3) When our families are broken;
When our homes are full of strife;
When our children are bewildered,
When they lose their way in life;
When we fail to give the aged
All the care we know we should -
Hear our cry and heal our nations
With your tender fatherhood. |
| 2) We have built discrimination
On our prejudice and fear;
Hatred swiftly turns to cruelty
If we hold resentments dear.
For communities divided
By the walls of class and race
Hear our cry and heal our nations:
Show us, Lord, your love and grace. | 4) We who hear your word so often
Choose so rarely to obey;
Turn us from our wilful blindness,
Give us truth to light our way.
In the power of your Spirit
Come to cleanse us, make us new:
Hear our cry and heal our nations
Till our nations honour you. |

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This hymn I see as a prayer of intercession for ourselves. It reaches back through the ages, the words of verse for could have been spoken by the people in our reading from Isaiah. Read it slowly offering up the words to God. We move into our prayers of intercession for the world.

Prayers of Intercession

God of Creation, God of eternity, we bring our prayers for your hurting world.

We take time to hold those who are hurting knowing you not only hear our prayers, but answers them too. We pray for all people who are caught up in war and violence. We pray for the people of Gaza and Israel that they may find the strength of mind to come to an understanding of each other and work towards a peace agreement. For those children who are caught up in the fights and hatred only knowing fear and dread. For those who are orphaned or separated from their families. We pray for all young and old who find themselves alone in the world. Lord, protect them with your love and in the midst of conflict and turmoil. May they know your peace.

We pray for your people throughout the world. Lord there is so much pain and hurt in the world today, earthquakes, flooding landslides, natural disasters, murders, drugs, famine, modern slavery, all these of humankind's own making. We face situations over which we have no say or control. We are powerless on our own but we turn to you as your children and ask you, Father, to shed your peace and compassion upon your hurting people, give wisdom and empathy to the perpetrators of violence and shine a light into their darkness.

We pray, for those who suffer pain and heartache, whether from illness, worry and concern for family and friends, or the anguish of bereavement. And in the quiet we hold up to you those in our hearts.....
We ask that you will bring light and love into their lives.

Father, we pray for ourselves that we may at all times be alert for your voice, and seek to answer your call to serve the weak and vulnerable, young or old, for all are your children. Speak into our hearts and direct our actions. In and through the love of Jesus we pray. **Amen**

The next hymn is a hymn of praise, joy and to me almost a sigh of relief as we think of the coming of the Kingdom of Christ.

StF 185 – Sing we the king

- 1) Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King:
- 2) All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:
- 3) Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
Doubt shall not darken his witness within;
Hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King:
- 4) Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song your creation shall sing:
Satan is vanquished, and Jesus is King:

Charles Silvester Horne

Closing Prayer

Lord, we commit ourselves to trust you and to listen for your voice in the midst of the world's clamour for our attention. We commit ourselves to obey your word and to seek to live always for your glory. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and empower us with your grace. **Amen**

Blessing

The Blessing of our Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and those whom love now and forever. **Amen**