

6th December 2020 – Morning Service

Wait with patience

Rev Alan Combes

Advent Candle Liturgy

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

Advent 2 - Candle of Waiting with patience

The first candle reminds us of the light of expectant hope of the prophets. The second candle reminds us of the patience of John the Baptist who proclaimed Christ’s coming in faith.

[After the Candle is lit we pray]

Dear God, our world is full of impatience and greed. May we wait patiently to receive the love you offer us in your Son our Saviour. **Amen**

Song – Watching and waiting with tired eyes

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| 1) Watching and waiting with these tired eyes
Whither the horizon lies
Watching and waiting with these tired eyes
Waiting for the sun to rise. | 4) There so dimly as in a mirror Lord
We see visions of the rising sun
And a little growing shoot of the age to come
Is emerging in the present one. |
| 2) Carrying the burden of our days and years
With us inside our hearts
Carrying the burden of our days and years
Quietly along the path. | 5) And it’s love that doth span from these
broken days
To the glory of the days to come
And it’s hope and faith that along the way
Hold on to what the love has done.
And it’s hope and faith that along the way
Draw toward the rising sun. |
| 3) In all of our days and along our ways
There’s been too many sorrows Lord
Too many stories of such brokenness
Too many hurts to hold. | |

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Take a moment to sit quietly and reflect with thanks to God for God’s glorious grace in loving you, me, each one of us more deeply than we could ever know or imagine...

Prayer of Adoration

Let’s pray together – remembering that amazing God, creator of all things and all time is here with us, with you in this moment...

God of all glory, you brought the universe into existence, and in due time you came in Jesus as the living embodiment of your love. You sent the Holy Spirit as witness to the truth of Jesus the Son. God three in One Creator, Saviour and Witness, we praise and adore you.

As the days shorten and the anticipation mounts, we give thanks for the waiting time.

As the message sharpens and the truth comes out, we give thanks for the restoring time.

As Covid life continues and we seek creative ways to be church, we give thanks for the witnessing time.

As the nights lengthen and the vision sharpens, we give thanks for the dreaming time.

As the day dawns and the possibility is born, we give thanks for the birthing time.

In the waiting, repenting, witnessing and dreaming, but most of all in the birthing, we give you thanks for coming to us, Emmanuel, God with us, now and forever.

Prayer of Confession

Today, as we hear the voice of John crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.' May we listen, and turn to the Lord in penitence and faith for when the Lord comes, he will bring light to those things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of our hearts. Lord - we remind ourselves of our broken position before your Holiness, not to depress ourselves or to fall into the pit of despair, but rather to recognise our utter need for you in the sacrificial love of your son Jesus. Therefore in the light of Christ we bring our weakness, our lack of faith and our failure. Especially in Advent we bring our lack of patience and our inability to listen. Gracious God we are sorry and in silence we offer our own confessions.

[Silence]

The grace of God has dawned upon the world through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for us to purify us as his own. May almighty God, who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring us his pardon and peace, now and for ever. Amen.

Reading: Mark 1:1-8 - John the Baptist

This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It began as the prophet Isaiah had written: "God said, 'I will send my messenger ahead of you to clear the way for you.' Someone is shouting in the desert, 'Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!' " So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. "Turn away from your sins and be baptized," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins." Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the River Jordan. John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. He announced to the people, "The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection 1 – What are we waiting for?

It's Advent – the season of waiting... active waiting as Martyn Filsak reminded us last week. But I find myself asking – what are we waiting for?

I saw a film last week that really left its mark. It's called dark waters. And it tells the real life story of a massive American pharmaceutical company that contaminated a town with unregulated chemicals in their water supply. The company knew for 40 years that this chemical causes cancer, birth defects and is very dangerous to human and animal health. AND YET they did nothing about it. Even worse, when confronted with evidence from a study of 68,000 people showing irrefutable proof of the dangers, the company twist and turn trying to avoid doing the right thing of helping those affected. The victims in this story know all about waiting! It took 15 years of legal battles to get anything from the chemical company. 15 years – after more than 35 years of already knowing it was dangerous! Denial of responsibility across generations of leaders... was there no one with a righteous heart? Those affected were – and in some cases still are waiting – waiting for justice.

What are we waiting for this advent?

- A world without Covid?
- A world where the powerful and wealthy are not corrupted by that power and have servant hearts, seeking justice for all?
- A world with more compassion – especially for those born into terrible places and contexts beyond their control?
- A world more connected and respectful of difference?
- A world where plants, animals and our precious oceans are respected?
- A world without 80 million people displaced by war and famine, without 10 million children caught up in slave labour...
- A world without 780 million who cannot access clean water.

John the Baptist knew that the people of his generation – just like ours – were also waiting for freedom from oppression and peace. And he proclaims – get ready, clear the way [in your hearts and in your lives], turn away from your sin, turn back to God – for someone is coming, greater than me... And he will bring about the start of the Kingdom of God. Of God's way and God's values. This is what we are waiting for...

StF 706 – Longing for Light

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| 1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see. | 3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. |
| Ch) <i>Christ, be our light!</i>
<i>Shine in our hearts.</i>
<i>Shine through the darkness.</i>
<i>Christ, be our light!</i>
<i>Shine in your Church gathered today.</i> | 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. |
| 2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. | 5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come. |

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Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

"Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them! Encourage the people of Jerusalem. Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven. I have punished them in full for all their sins." A voice cries out, "Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord! Clear the way in the desert for our God! Fill every valley; level every mountain. The hills will become a plain, and the rough country will be made smooth. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and the whole human race will see it. The Lord himself has promised this." A voice cries out, "Proclaim a message!" "What message shall I proclaim?" I ask. "Proclaim that all human beings are like grass; they last no longer than wild flowers. Grass withers and flowers fade, when the Lord sends the wind blowing over them. People are no more enduring than grass. Yes, grass withers and flowers fade, but the word of our God endures for ever." Jerusalem, go up on a high mountain and proclaim the good news! Call out with a loud voice, Zion; announce the good news! Speak out and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah that their God is coming! The Sovereign Lord is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued. He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers.

Reflection 2 – How do we wait?

Our Advent series this year is focused on aspects of 'how' we wait. Today we focus on waiting with patience...

The Bible is packed full of patience!

Proverbs 14:29 says: "*Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.*"

We see God's patience in the Old Testament

In Nehemiah 9:29–30 (NRSV) – we hear the story of Israel's return from Exile:

They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. 30 Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets...

And in the New Testament St Paul writes:

Romans 12:12 *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

There are many, many verses that describe patience and call us to patience. BUT sadly, it seems that patience is one of the virtues most lacking in God's people! In that classic story we know so well in Exodus, when Moses goes up onto the Holy Mountain to meet with God the people wait below and we read: Ex 32:1 *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered round Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'*

God has worked amazing miracles before their very eyes through Moses, to enable them to escape from slavery in Egypt. They even acknowledge this as they speak YET – in their impatience - they almost immediately betray all that they have seen and heard. And poor Aaron is weak and led astray and fashions a golden calf for them to worship. Their lack of patience corrupts them and turns them away from God's path.

Personally – I can't say I am much better! I ordered something from Amazon the other day, and even though it was due to be delivered within 24 hours I still found myself looking online to check that the order had been processed and then again to see if the package had been dispatched...How sad is that! Many will smile to hear this, when in years gone by the idea of 24hour delivery was almost unheard of. We live in an immediate world with instant news, instant comment, and a growing expectation that whatever we want or need is provided immediately. But for the farmer, the painter, the gardener, the sculptor and the baker – they all know that patience is a virtue. That good things come to those who wait.

In the old Testament patience is rooted in the Hebrew words that mean slow to anger, long-suffering, bearing all things and enduring..

Isaiah 40 says *Encourage the people of Jerusalem. Tell them they have suffered long enough ... They have been patient and soon will come a time when the glory of God will be revealed.*

What I find so wonderful and helpful to us in our current context is that in the New Testament we see patience given a new definition, in fact a new base upon which to stand. It's no longer about just surviving or enduring... In the New Testament, patience is rooted in steadfast hope - Greek hupomone (English pronunciation: hu-po-mon-neh) and patience is born out of love - Greek makrothymia (English pronunciation: ma-kro-thu-mee-ah).

We can hear hopeful patience in Colossians Ch 1: where Paul Thanks God for the Colossian Church saying: *May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father...*

And patience rooted in love in Ephesians 4:1-2

I [Paul], a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...

It's Advent and 'how we wait reflects what we believe...' How we live in and through Covid reflects outward to the world the nature of our faith. We wait for Jesus, not as down trodden people 'bearing up under the burdens of this life', we wait not as cracked vessels long suffering the effects of our brokenness. No... As Christians, we acknowledge our brokenness and we face the burdens of this life waiting patiently for Jesus in love and hope. Indeed – it is Christ's love for us, shown to us through the forgiveness of the cross, which enables us to be a people of true, patient hope. For we know the outcome, the glorious end, even before this story begins. Jesus has come, lived and died and risen again. So we wait in hopeful, steadfast patience for his return. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

At each '.....' please allow the Spirit to prompt you what to pray about at this time about the suggested theme in brackets.

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray:

Lord Jesus, come to your Church as Lord and judge. Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

We pray for.....*[ourselves and our own journey with God]*

L: Come, Lord Jesus. **R: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Lord Jesus, come to your world as King of the nations. Before you rulers will stand in silence.

We pray for.....*[those who rule and govern ours and other nations]*

L: Come, Lord Jesus. **R: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Lord Jesus, come to the suffering as Saviour and comforter. Break into our lives, where we struggle with sickness and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever.

We pray for..... *[those we know who are ill, troubled or in need]*

L: Come, Lord Jesus. **R: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Lord Jesus, come to us as shepherd and guardian of our souls. Give us with all the faithful departed a share in your victory over evil and death.

We remember.....*[those we know who have died]*

L: Come, Lord Jesus. **R: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Come from heaven, Lord Jesus, with power and great glory, do not delay; give new courage to your people, who trust in your love and who wait with patience.

[Silence]

Come - lift us up to meet you, that we and all the faithful who have gone before us, may know the peace you offer - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever now and forever. 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 188 – There's a light upon the mountain

- 1) There's a light upon the mountains,
And the day is at the spring,
When our eyes shall see the beauty
And the glory of the King;
Weary was our heart with waiting,
And the night-watch seemed so long;
But his triumph-day is breaking,
And we hail it with a song.
- 2) There's a hush of expectation,
And a quiet in the air;
And the breath of God is moving
In the fervent breath of prayer:
For the suffering, dying Jesus
Is the Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit
Is the travail of his own.
- 3) He is breaking down the barriers,
He is casting up the way;
He is calling for his angels
To build up the gates of day:
But his angels here are human,
Not the shining hosts above;
For the drum-beats of his army
Are the heart-beats of our love.
- 4) Hark! We hear a distant music,
And it comes with fuller swell;
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus,
Of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet him;
And, my soul, be swift to bring
All your finest and your noblest
For the triumph of our King!

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Blessing

Lord God, your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Saviour, who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin. As we leave this place, by your grace, pour forth your blessings upon us that we may reflect the splendour of Christ to the world.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen – thanks be to God.