

Order of Service - Fareham 29/11/20 - Advent Sunday

Welcome

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^{us} 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

Hymn - 174 - Light a candle in a darkened place - vs 1+2

Light a candle in a darkened place
In its flame see hope on every face
Christ our Saviour will be born
heralding a brand-new dawn
so, let it burn

In the darkness, see the coming light,
Word of God speaks through the darkest night,
keep a watch, the time is near,
time for hope and not for fear
so let it burn.

Those words of the prophet Isaiah that are the OT reading for today may be words that we might normally skate over as being very much of a different time and context to our own. And yet after the experience of these past months do some phrases have a renewed significance as things we may have thought or said - "Oh that you would rend the heavens

and come down", "Come down to make your name known" "Oh look upon us we pray, for we are all your people". And like Isaiah, like the Jews awaiting the Messiah we have waited this year, waited indoors because we have been told to, waited for churches to open, waited for a vaccine. And so, as we enter Advent more attuned to waiting and more aware that this year, we light a candle in a darkened place we pray (there is a response to God of waiting - **Wait with us**):

God of birth,
we watch in fear for your coming.
scared of the pain and risk,
the struggle of new life emerging
and our own capacity to bear it.
God of waiting
Wait with us

God of the future,
we watch in hope of your coming.
anticipating an unknown future,
uncertain of the unnamed reality,
not sure of the form it will take.
God of the waiting
Wait with us

God of celebration,
we watch in joy for your coming.
expectant with promises of freedom,
eager for new possibilities,
delighting in the gift of birth.
God of waiting
Wait with us

(Jan Berry)

Hymn - StF - 173 - Into the darkness of this world

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

*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*

Into the longing of our souls
Into the 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

Come with your love to make us whole.....

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

Come with your love to make us whole.....

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

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!'"

StF 179 Chorus - 'My Lord what a morning'

My Lord, what a morning!
My Lord, what a morning!
Oh, my Lord, what a morning
When the stars begin to fall
When the stars begin to fall

We live between two advents. Our readings this morning remind us of that. We look backwards and forwards in the season of Advent, and especially on the first Sunday of Advent. We look back to the first coming of Jesus, and we look forward to celebrating that anew at Christmas. But we also look forward to Christ's coming again - my Lord what a morning.

When I was a teacher, we often encouraged the students to get a handle on any story or series of events by asking of it the 5Ws - Who, what, when, where and why? The 5Ws of the first advent are of course much easier than the second. Who? - Jesus, What? - was born, When? - a bit harder, was it really December 25th? - and possibly in the year we call 4BC. Where? - Bethlehem. Why? - That's requires a longer answer doesn't it? How would you answer that? Would you be content with John 3:16-17 "For God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him", or would you say something else?

The 2nd Advent is harder of course because it hasn't happened, some doubt that it will. Mark records Jesus words on it in the passage we have heard and just before, Some Ws are dealt with quickly: When - no one knows - don't worry about that. Who - Jesus of course, Where - everywhere at once. What - is a little harder, people have speculated based on passages, including this one, in scripture. It's not entirely clear in passages like this whether it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and shouldn't be taken more widely, or whether it speaks of Christ's ultimate return. Maybe it's meant to be uncertain and mysterious. Perhaps though the why is easier? Because, however we react, picture, or make sense of Christ's return what it points to is that great hope that one day

all will be as it was meant to be. That one day that sense that we have of the world being corrupted, damaged and flawed will be gone and it will be as God intended, free from the maleficence of sin, and love will be fully and eternally triumphant. We live in that hope, a hope first manifested in the birth of a baby in Bethlehem.

Yet in all this sweeping theology the solid reality is a tiny baby enfolded in love by first time parents in Bethlehem. Like any first-time parents other questions fade into the background beside the all-embracing question 'what' - What must we do to love this gift which God has given us? Although it's a stark and pressing question for new parents it's the wider question that faces all of us - what must we do in response to the gift of God to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?

In this passage Jesus says watch. That might sound a bit passive, as if we might be looking to the skies for Jesus's return. Actually, what Jesus says is 'keep watch'. To keep watch is to be active, and react to situations, as the watch that guarded the city in former days would do. It's certainly more than that Christian fridge magnet joke - "Jesus is coming - look busy". In every situation that arose the watch would ask "What must we do?" and it's the question that each follower of Jesus and each church must ask, living as we do between the two advents.

Some of you may have seen this book 'God and the pandemic' by Tom Wright - only 70 odd pages - well worth a read. He addresses the questions we might have been asking ourselves these last few months. My summary here doesn't do it justice at all, but he argues that trying to answer the why question is fruitless and could even be dangerous, if we claim to know the mind of God. The only real question for us is "What must we do in a time of pandemic?". Wright's response is captured in three words, lament, pray, act. That's even better than hands, face, space isn't it?!

First that we should lament, taking the psalms of lament as a model. Lament what is happening and lament with others. This leads on to prayer, again both for the situation and especially for those who have been hard hit by the pandemic in any way. Finally, alongside lamenting and praying we should act; act as churches and individuals with our food banks and our individual acts of kindness, our nurseries and our regular phone calls to the isolated. Often these may be small acts but the birth of a child in a small town was a small act, but an act which announced that God was with us.

So, as we live between the two advents, as we prepare to celebrate the first coming of Jesus and all the love, hope and joy that flowed from that we continue to ask ourselves "What must we do in response to the love of God in Jesus" as his watch in this time and place? Amen.

Woodies DIY advert

Intercessions.

In joyful expectation of his coming to reign we pray to our Lord, saying,
Come Lord Jesus.

Come Lord Jesus

Come to your Church as Lord and judge.

We pray for all churches meeting in different ways this morning and seeking to maintain a witness to your saving love and we remember those Christian communities who are fearful of meeting because of persecution

We pray for our ministers and deacons as they seek to provide leadership in these difficult times.

This morning we especially pray for the congregation and minister of church here in Fareham.

And Lord, we pray for ourselves

Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing for your kingdom.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come Lord Jesus

Come to your world as King of the nations

We pray for those in government as they make difficult decisions about lockdown and our personal freedoms. Grant them wisdom and understanding and give them courage to act in the interests of us all.

We pray for the negotiations with the European community that compromise may be found and that the peace in Northern Ireland will not be endangered.

We pray for the people of America that there may be a smooth transition of power to the new administration and that democracy will not be harmed.

We pray for all those places in the world where conflict and violence are rampant. Give strength to the peacemakers.

Before you rulers will stand in silence.

Come Lord Jesus

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come to your people as Saviour and bearer of pain.

We pray for all those ill with the Corona virus, both in hospital and in the community. We pray for medical staff and care givers as they look after them.

We give thanks for the skill of scientists in creating vaccines

We are asked this morning to pray for

In a moment of silence, we bring before God those known unnamed in need of our prayers at this time

Enfold us all in your love and mercy,
Wipe away the tears of failure, fear, or distress,
And set us free to serve you for ever
Come Lord Jesus

Come Lord Jesus

Christ, come into our world of darkness
Light up our lives with your coming.
Fulfil all our longings with the joy of your birth
Strengthen our resolve to work for change in our world
And to share the hope of your birth that each Advent brings.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

And so having focused on what must we do living between the two advents, and our response in the here and now we finish by raising our eyes again in hope and expectation of the return of our Lord in glory, with Charles Wesley's great Advent hymn - 'Lo, he comes with clouds descending'.

Hymn - StF 177 - Lo, he comes with clouds descending

Lo! he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears, on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in glorious majesty;
We who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing
Deeply wailing
Deeply wailing
Shall the true Messiah see.

Yea, Amen! let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory:
Claim the kingdom for thine own:
Come Lord Jesus
Come Lord Jesus
Come Lord Jesus
Everlasting God, come down

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing - Be people of love.

Let love live in your heart and share the love of Christ with all you meet.

Share love by loving those you see regularly and those you do not know. Share love by praying for the world. In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share love.

As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share love, joy, peace, and hope with those you meet. And may the blessing.... Amen.

StF 171 - Hark the glad sound

Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas, Prince of peace,
thy welcome shall proclaim,
and Heaven's eternal arches ring
with thy beloved Name.

Paul Doddridge (1702-1751)