

Home Service for November 29, 2020 There are no services at the church.

Welcome and Announcements

Although we are worshipping in our church building again, some have health reasons that makes it impossible to do so. Others are worried about those who need them with health issues. We want everyone to be comfortable and to be able to worship so the home services will continue so all may be able to worship Our Heavenly God where ever they are. You might notice a few changes. You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship, just like we are doing in the church building.

As Advent begins, the scriptures speak to us of waiting. We are waiting for God, for the birth of hope, for the arrival of new life. As we wait, we prepare our hearts to receive the gifts God brings. We ask God to shape us, so that our lives may be ready for the coming of the Son of Ma. We watch for the signs that tell us that God is near.

Call to Worship:

We are waiting in the dark of the year we are waiting. We are waiting for the potter to shape our lives. We are waiting to see clearly what lies hidden in darkness. We are waiting, awake and alert; ready for God to come. In the darkness a candle is lit. The light comforts our waiting. The light reminds us of the one who is come.

Opening Prayer:

Almighty God, as we begin this season of Advent remind us again that in the midst of our darkness you are bringing us peace, to calm our anxious spirits and hectic lives. Turn our hearts again toward you. Make us ready to receive your Son our Savior. Slow our pace, and give us the blessing of feeling your peace in our spirits. For we ask this in Jesus' precious Name. AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

It's starting already, Lord. It is only the first Sunday in Advent, and we are caught up in the pressures and stresses of the holiday season. Pursued by the temptation to spend our funds, our energy, our spirits, we feel that there is no peace or rest in the

world. Lord of light and peace, shine on us this day. Forgive us when we have so easily succumbed to the anxieties and fears and temptations of the season. Slow us down. Calm our spirits. Give us an awareness that this is the season of waiting and of preparation. Pour peace into our lives and help us to be bearers of peace to others. For we ask this in Jesus' precious Name. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Even in the midst of difficult times, God is with us, bringing peace to us. Receive God's rich blessing of peace and hope. AMEN.

Read Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth ² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.
³ Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.
⁴ How long, LORD God Almighty,
will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?
⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.
⁶ You have made us an object of derision ^[b] to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.
⁷ Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.
¹⁷ Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.
¹⁸ Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.
¹⁹ Restore us, LORD God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Prayers of the People:

Merciful and Patient God, how we must try your patience. We rush through the seasons of our lives as though we had a mighty schedule to keep. We plot out our days, minute by minute, crowding each moment with tasks, stresses and pressures. And we begin to notice the growing darkness and anxiety in our lives. We proclaim boldly each year that we will not let ourselves get so caught up in the commercial pressures and demands and yet, here we are, back in the same old trap of "not enough time; not enough energy". The very plans we weave become bonds which imprison us. Help us bind ourselves to you, loving God. Help us slow down and reflect on the many ways in which you bless us. Let us drink deeply of your peace. Remind us again of the most precious gift of all, the gift of loving relationship between you and your Creation. May we cherish the people and the peaceful moments you offer to us. As we have lifted before you our joys and concerns, so lift our spirits to remember that you are always with us, offering your healing touch and your compassionate care. Help us to place our trust in you, for we ask it in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

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, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!

²As 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!

³For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

⁴Since 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.

⁵ 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?

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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 ^[b] our sins.

⁸ Yet you, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹ 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.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Mark 13:24-37

“But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;

²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’^[a]

²⁶ “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ 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.

²⁸ “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. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it^[b] is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert^[c]! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ “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. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Message

All of today’s scriptures speak to the Advent Season. We have just come from the Thanksgiving Celebrations and are now called to enter Advent with little preparation. We may feel that we are not ready. We have not considered our spiritual dilemma. Isaiah’s call reminds us of the yearning of the people for God’s intervention in their darkness. Their plea is for God to rip open the heavens and come to save them. They feel incapable of escaping the darkness by themselves. Psalm 80 reminds us that God is a god of power and might and fully capable of saving God’s people. Their prayer is for salvation. Mark’s cryptic words raise images of darkness and the coming light. In Mark’s gospel, Jesus reminds us to be vigilant, for the true light is coming.

Advent begins with shadows of tension between hunger and hope. We hunger to know God’s presence in our lives, but we fear that by our thoughts and deeds we’ve blocked the coming of the good news in Christ. We know that God has reason enough to turn away. And yet, when we look closely, there are signs of hope. Christ is coming, but we won’t know exactly when. We must be ready!

A time of celebration is at hand, a new year begins today!! But wait you say, this isn’t January 1st, it is November 29th. That is true, but just the same, a new year begins today. The new church year begins today. Today begins the 1st Sunday in Advent and the season of Advent begins the church year. Advent is the season of

HOPE, WAITING, ANTICIPATION and LONGING. So, we HOPE, WAIT, ANTICIPATE, and LONG for the coming of the Messiah, the righteous one of God.

Advent is the season of hope, the season of waiting, the season of changing, of repentance, of turning one's life around. It is the season of waiting, of anticipation for Jesus coming into our lives. It is the time of waiting for Christmas, and Jesus' arrival on earth. During this season of Advent we recall Jesus' first coming, we learn what it means to live in the present, in this in-between time; and we wait for Jesus' second coming.

Let us take a look at Advent. Starting with remembering Jesus' first coming, the event that will be celebrating in a few short weeks, the Christmas event. For this season of Advent we wait, we live again the greatest event in the history of human kind, the event that God loved us so much that He decided to come to earth and be like us, we live again. We wait for the glorious birth in the manger, the birth of Jesus. That one event has changed the course of the history of the world, because in that event, God declared that you and I are worth something very special, we count, you and I are worth saving from the brokenness of sin and death.

We celebrate Christmas because in that event, God declares that everyone counts, no one is left out of God's salvation plan. No matter what you have done, no matter what you haven't done, no matter how you feel about yourself, no matter how you feel about others, no matter how others feel about you, God says you count. In all the brokenness, grief, suffering, pain, loneliness, hurt, despair, heartache of the world, God declares in the Christmas event loud and clear that you and I count. We count not because we deserve it, nor because we have earned it, but God declares it so, God makes it so because of His great love for us. It is our worthiness before God that we celebrate during this Advent season and the Christmas season. It is our special place in God's heart that we cherish, we rejoice this time of year.

Now that brings us to the present time. Advent reminds us that we live in the in-between time. This is the time between Jesus' first coming and his second coming into our lives. It is in this time that Jesus and Paul are speaking about in our Epistle and Gospel lessons. We are in a time for making ready, to be on the watch. It is the time of dutifully fulfilling the responsibilities that Jesus had commanded us, to love God and love our neighbor. But this is a difficult time, because we like staying the way we are.

We have experienced God's love in the Christmas season, but not all of it. In this in-between time, we wait for God to finish the work He began in the Christmas story. We wait. We wonder. We live as tiny light in a world of darkness, in a world

of despair, in a world of sin and we wonder if keeping our light lit, is that really important?

Our Epistle lesson reminds us that Paul recognized that the Corinthians had not arrived to complete fullness that they were capable of being, for they were still growing and maturing, but they were in the process. They still made fools of themselves at times, but they knew who they were and more importantly whose they were. The church had been born, but it wasn't finished. The kingdom had come, but it had not come completed.

God is not finished with us either. There is still more glory to be revealed, more surprises in store for us, more birthing to be done. We have not yet arrived. We are between the now and the not yet, stretched between what has happened and what is to come. It means that the changes are not yet finished. His world is not yet what He intended it to be. He still has some creating to do in the world and in you and in me. He has come to us and He is forever coming to us, in spite of us, because of us, for us. He will not stop until our salvation is complete. We who impatiently, groaningly, sometimes despairingly, sometimes hopefully, faithfully wait for His coming, for His continuing daily advent among us.

This in-between time is a time to make ready. It is a time to be on guard, a time to be about the work of the kingdom, knowing full well, we will fail, we will succeed, we will sin, we will be forgiven, knowing all the while that we are redeemed children of the Lord, redeemed by his action, his merit his mercy.

As Advent begins we are caught up in the present, caught up waiting for the future, caught up looking back to the first coming of Christ in the Christmas event.

Yes, Jesus is coming in spite of human pain and human clumsiness, in the most marvelous and unexpected way, Jesus is coming. So we say o come, o come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Benediction:

Be alert! God is all around us! Be ready to joyfully serve God in ministries of peace and justice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Go in peace and may the peace of God always go with you. AMEN.