



“Longing for the light”

A service sheet to guide reflections on and around Sunday
29th November 2020

The 1st week in Advent

Introduction

This year at Christchurch through the weeks of Advent we are going to think about homelessness and hospitality. We are adapting the Candle liturgy that the Methodist Church prepared for 2019. Advent is always a time of looking forward and of longing for a better world. In 2020 that sense of longing is compounded by the restrictions under which we are currently living. The Advent ceremony is a sign that time is passing and we are moving forward.

The Advent liturgy

By the time you read this we will have already lit the Advent candle in church and recorded it. It is our prayer that the candles of Advent will set alight a fresh hope in all our hearts. With the help of Jesus things can change for us and for others who are in great need.

Prayer Jesus Christ, we seek you through our Advent journey.

Fill the darkness of our world with your light

and fill the emptiness of our hearts with your love.

Make your home among us and make us a people of hospitality.

Jesus Christ, we wait for you. Jesus Christ, we welcome you.

Hymn Longing for light verse 1 *Singing the faith 706*

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.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

We sing the whole Advent story to the well known hymn tune of “Angel voices”

Hymn Advent candles tell their story *Singing the Faith 165 (Tune Angel Voices)*

- 1 Advent candles tell their story
as we watch and pray,
longing for the Day of Glory,
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness
changed for gladness
on that day.
- 2 Prophet voices loudly crying,
making pathways clear,
glimpsing glory, self-denying,
calling all to hear.
Through their message — challenged,
shaken —
hearts awaken :
God is near!
- 3 John the Baptist, by his preaching
and by water poured,
brought to those who heard his
teaching

news of hope restored :
'Keep your vision strong and steady,
and be ready
for the Lord.'

- 4 Mary's gift, beyond all telling,
was to give Christ room.
She gave God a human dwelling
in a mother's womb.
Who could guess the final story ?
— cross and glory ;
empty tomb !

- 5 Advent candles tell their story
on this Christmas Day.
Those who waited for God's glory :
they prepared the way.
Christ is with us : loving, giving,
in us living,
here today !

Mark Earey (*b.* 1965)

Prayer

God, your name is Love, and in your great love
you have called us into community with each other.
With you and in you and because of you,
we are nurtured in love.
Yours is the name that lasts for ever.
Your love reaches into all corners,
confirming those who wait for you –
that they wait in the name of Great Love.

Amen.

A way into prayer

You might consider writing a private letter to God. In the letter you could tell God how you are feeling, what your worries are, and news of things good and bad going on in your life. You might wish to write about what you are most longing to happen. Seal your letter in an envelope and keep it somewhere safe. Then look at it in a few months' time, to see how things have moved on.

Bible Reading Mark 13: 24-37

²⁴ "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.^[c]

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^[d] 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^[e]! 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!'"

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Comment

Christmas is coming and for the first time ever I have organised the Christmas tree in November! Maybe this suggests that I am longing for Christmas even more than usual. Given all the restrictions caused by the pandemic, I would guess that many of us are especially looking for some of the joy that this season can bring. We are not alone in this. All around us we may be seeing signs that Christmas is on the way. Ilkley Town Council moved the Christmas light switch-on forward a week. Some residents have put their own lights up in their windows already. And the Advent candles that we light this Sunday are one of those signs, Christmas is coming.

Today's Bible reading talks about how in nature we know good things are coming because of signs of growth. Jesus uses a fig tree to tell a kind of parable. He explains to his disciples about the fig tree, "As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near."

In the same way Jesus is saying to his followers you will see signs and know that the triumph of God's kingdom is coming near. However, the signs described in our passage were challenging. The lights would fall from the sky and there would be many other difficulties as outlined earlier in the Mark chapter 13. While the language of our passage is rather gloomy we might well relate to it in our current circumstances. It may well feel as if a lot of the light has gone out of life for us. The usual darkness of the November days is compounded by not being allowed to gather with friends and family which is something that would usually cheer us. The second lockdown and ongoing restrictions mean that even the light we share with each other when we gather at church is dimmed by not being able to gather in person.

The first followers of Jesus who read and heard these words were going through very hard times themselves. They were persecuted for their faith. They had taken a big risk in following Jesus and they expected that God's kingdom would come in with glory and power in their lifetimes. Instead they had to wait. While they waited the words of Jesus about the fig tree may have given them comfort. For the fig tree reminded them that it takes time for good things to come to pass. Looking for the signs can be a help to know that the good is coming.

It is the same for us. We too can look to see signs of God's kingdom around us. We can see indications that it is coming. I wonder what signs of God's kingdom, or of God's presence you might be able to see at the moment? Here are three that I have noticed recently.

The foodbank in Ilkley is perhaps a clear sign of God at work. It was started a few years ago through Churches Together in Ilkley (with our own Chair of Trustees, Wendy Ribbands playing a significant part, I believe). In October when the scandal of children on free school meals not having provision in the holidays came to light, the foodbank stepped in. A coalition of concerned Ilkley people and the schools and churches and other agencies got together. Food parcels from the foodbank were made up and vouchers for a meal in our church café or in other Ilkley cafes were provided for families. That same coalition is even now working to make up 200 Christmas boxes for families who will be struggling over the next school holidays. This work is a real sign of God at work. At the same time we long for a time when such foodbanks and food parcels are not necessary but all have access to financial and food security.

This Advent at Christchurch we will be focusing on the work of St. George's crypt in Leeds. This has been going for 90 years! It was opened in 1930 by the Revd Don Robbins and a team of volunteers who cleared out the church basement for homeless people. Since then St George's has been offering shelter and support to homeless and vulnerable people in our area. Today it offers a range of health care and rehabilitation services and is widely respected. Ann Thake is organising this year's collection of bedding and clothes for St. George's and on December 6th one of the staff from the crypt will be speaking to us at our 10 am service. This work is a truly wonderful sign of God's kingdom with us. And yet of course we long for a time when such work will not be necessary. When there will be no homelessness or addictions. When God's kingdom will be fully realised. In the meantime we want to support St George's with grateful hearts.

Signs of God's kingdom can come in less organised ways. A woman came to my door a few week's ago. She apologised for being cheeky and asked if she might take a few heads of the wonderful hydrangeas that were still blossoming in the manse garden. We got into conversation and it turned out that this woman, who belongs to another church in Ilkley, had given accommodation to our children's youth and family worker a few years ago! I was glad to share the hydrangeas with her and have since brought some in myself. What a sign she was of God's kingdom.

All of these signs are reminders that God does not leave us alone. These days and times may be dark. It may indeed feel as if the stars have fallen from the skies, but if we look, if we are watchful, we will see the light of Jesus all around us and among us. So as we long for light, as

we long for Christmas, may we be ourselves be moved to be signs of the light of God. May we live in the hope and promise that one day God's kingdom will be fully here.

Prayers for others

Jesus Christ,
Come, we pray, and transform our lives,
that we may live in your eternal presence.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Be with our nation's leaders and politicians,
that they may govern
according to your justice and freedom.
May your presence be seen in our country
and its actions.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Be with those who serve the church,
especially our ministers and clergy.
May your caring love shine forth from their
lives.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Be with the poor and disadvantaged,
that their needs would be met,
and your blessings fulfilled.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Be with the sick and infirm,
that encouraged by those who care for
them,
they may find your presence in their
difficulties.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Be with the dead and the dying.
May those who mourn
know they are safe in your arms.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Jesus Christ we are part of your presence
of earth:

help us to transform the world around us,
that people may know the good news.

God is near,
come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

Lord's prayer

Hymn

1 Long ago, prophets knew
Christ would come, born a Jew,
come to make all things new ;
bear his people's burden,
freely love and pardon :
Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring !

Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing !

When he comes,

when he comes,

who will make him welcome ?

2 God in time, God in man,
this is God's timeless plan :
he will come, as a man,
born himself of woman,
God divinely human :

3 Mary, hail ! Though afraid,

she believed, she obeyed.
In her womb, God is laid ;
till the time expected,
nurtured and protected :

4 Journey ends ! Where afar
Bethlem shines, like a star,
stable door stands ajar.

Unborn Son of Mary,
Saviour, do not tarry !

Ring, bells, ring, ring, ring !

Sing, choirs, sing, sing, sing !

Jesus comes !

Jesus comes !

We will make him welcome !

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

Blessing

Gracious God, transform our confused hopes into joyful expectation;
that we may not wait for you passively, but with an active stillness of heart,
confident that your promises are true and your peace lasting.

Cleanse and invigorate our waiting this Advent, and bless our receiving and our responding.
In Jesus' name,

Amen.