

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



10 DECEMBER 2023

ADVENT 2



WORSHIP AT HOME

This time is an opportunity to be still, seeking to be aware of the presence of God within.

Set aside a time for this practice; prepare yourself, as you might for a usual Sunday morning and remember that there are others from the congregation gathering at the same time as you. There are also many from the church around the globe who are gathering to seek the presence of God as we are. We join with them all.

Prepare a space in the house; find a comfortable chair, light a candle, turn off distracting noises and close the door if that will help you to be still. This is something that does not need to be hurried.

A TIME FOR GATHERING

Acknowledge and give thanks for the Country of First Peoples on which you worship today

invitation to Worship – from Psalm 126

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

²Then our mouth was filled with laughter
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

³The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

And in this spirit of rejoicing ... let us worship God!

First song: (TiS 188) When wide sky rolls down

Advent – a time to remember, to wait, and to get ready ...

Today is the second Sunday in the time before Christmas called Advent – this means waiting. It has long been a tradition in the Christian Church to light a candle on each of the four Sundays of this season. You might like to share this custom at home ...

Last Sunday – first candle - ‘Hope’

Today – second candle - ‘Peace’

Voice 1: During Advent we progressively light four Advent candles over the four Sundays of the season leading up to the lighting of the Christ Candle on Christmas Day.

Voice 2: Perhaps you could consider following this practice at home, as well? Let’s light the candle for the second Sunday of Advent – the Candle of PEACE.

Voice 1: The prophets call, and an apostle writes that peace comes from God.

Voice 2: “For a child has been born for us... and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ... and there shall be endless peace.” (*Isaiah 9*)

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (*Philippians 4*)

Voice 1: The world, our relationships and our lives are all too often torn by conflict and injustice. Advent calls us to pray and work for peace—shalom—in the world God loves and to which Christ came. But God’s shalom is not simply the absence of conflict. Shalom is the peace that comes when we live life in the balance, loving God and one another.

Voice 2: Holy are you, Source of all new life among us.

Jesus Christ comes as the Prince of Peace.

Voice 2: We join with all creation and lift our hearts in joyful praise.

We light this candle to shine for peace.

(Light the candles of HOPE and PEACE)

Sing verse 1 & 2 of CANDLE OF HOPE

1. The candle of hope we light in this hour
proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,
when Christ in his glory will make all things new.
2. The candle of peace shines bright with God's plan;
the wolf will lie down and dwell with the lamb.
Our guns and our weapons, our hatred and war,
will give way to gardens that heal and restore.

Prayer of praise, thanks, and confession

“Open our eyes” an Advent prayer #1 (Cloth for the Cradle p 35)

Open our eyes, Lord, especially if they are half-shut because we are tired of looking, or half-open because we fear to see too much, or bleared with tears because yesterday and today and tomorrow are filled with the same pain, or contracted, because we only look at what we want to see.

Open our eyes – Lord to gently scan the life we lead, the home we have, the world we inhabit, and so to find, among the gremlins and the greyness, signs of hope we can fasten on to and encourage.

Open our eyes, in yearning, for Jesus ... on the mountains, in the cities, through the corridors of power, and streets of despair, to help, to heal, to confront, to convert. O come, O come Emmanuel!

Confession

- ⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
- ⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
- ⁶ Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
**shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.**

A TIME FOR LISTENING

Reading from the Bible (Lorraine Denniston)

Your Word, God, is a lamp for our feet
A light for our path.

Mark 1.1-8

¹ The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

² As it is written in the prophet Isaiah: “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way,³ the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

⁴ so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In this may we hear the Word of God ... **thank you God!**

Contemporary word – Tony Floyd: *In the Fullness of time – walking we make the way*

For those who gathered the stories about Jesus under the title “MARK”, the **Good News** begins in the wilderness of Judea with an ‘old time prophet’ named John. John is the first real prophet to turn up in Judea for 300 years!

This collection of “...good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!” begins in the desert place, the wilderness of Judea. And surely this is a statement of some kind. If we had never heard any part of this story before, all we would know was Jesus’ name and the title (Christ) given to him, he makes no personal appearance!

“Mark” has no apparent interest in the supernatural birth narratives of Luke and Matthew. For this story of the “...good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!” it seems to be enough that prophecy is **revived** and then **fulfilled** with the appearance of John the Baptist.

We could make much of John’s odd choice of clothing, his diet, and his down-market address in the wilderness. Insofar as “eccentric” means “off-centre”, his odd behaviour and mannerisms is precisely the point.

He does not dress or speak like the Jerusalem priests do. He is as far from the Temple as he can be, and it is there – in the wilderness – that he is calling people to prepare the way of the Lord. And today we listen to that message, again.

Prepare! Again!

John sets up shop in the wilderness, and anyone who wanted to hear what he had to say had to go to a lot of trouble just to get there. Such a traveller had to take enough water and travel on foot (or on their or their neighbours donkey), through roads thick with robbers.

Why do it? Why go? After all in Jerusalem there were priests aplenty, all the accumulated wisdom of the establishment was available. Anyone who would turn away from all that and head off into the wilderness to see this oddball was clearly looking for something else, something the temple processes simply could not, or would not provide.

John apparently had it.

He did not have many details. Did not name 'who' it was that was coming, or what he looked like. But he knew that the changes that would come would be just as if the old world ended and a new one came spinning into existence carried in the arms of God’s chosen one.

This would be a world built out of new materials, not the rearranged stones of the old religion and religious ideas. The flame of the Holy Spirit was just about out under the weight of all those expectations and preconceptions about how God is known, what exactly God could and would do, and just who God accepted or not.

So God moves out into the wilderness, where the air was clean and fresh, out under the starlit skies where that Spirit was fanned by the most socially unacceptable character anyone could imagine.

That was the good news that started with John. And his message lit him up like a bush fire. People were drawn there by what he said **and** by what he offered them – a chance to stop pretending and start over – to be clean!

Setting up in the wilderness John called people to wake up, to turn around, so they wouldn’t miss the new things God was doing right in front of them.

It has always been true that ‘Good’ news, Bible good news, Gospel, always begins with a messenger.

Sometimes that mysterious messenger is named ‘angel’ (which simply means messenger) and is found whispering in the ear of an unsuspecting teenage woman or older man.

At other times that mysterious messenger is named ‘parent’ and found telling a story.

Or maybe it is a skinny ‘prophet’ with no dress sense standing knee deep in a muddy river.

This messenger was nowhere near a church, and those who insisted on staying where the church was didn’t get to hear him.

Only those who were willing to enter the wilderness were able to discover the promises for themselves, and many of them were still there when the spectacular “someone” arrived, far from the civilised centre of town.

I suspect that all of us have a pretty good idea where our piece of bush wilderness is, and a long list of good reasons why we should avoid it. We may not be really comfortable where we are, but it is familiar, we know how things operate here, we can predict how things will go – pretty well anyway.

Why should we go off and look for God somewhere else?

However, if we only listen for God in the Church, we will miss most of what is being said. The good news is always beginning somewhere in the world: for those with ears to hear and hearts to go wherever the way may lead them.

RESPONDING TIME

Prayers of the people – (Warwick Barry)

"As we prepare for our prayers for others, we light this candle to remember all those who are part of our church community but who are not at worship with us today."

Light the candle

Creator God,

You have entrusted us with the fragile beauty of the earth.
Break open our hearts to the lives and lands laid waste by human action,
the tide of storm and tempest, fire and flood.
Be beside all in the midst of climate disaster –
losing homes and loved ones through famine, fire, flood, and desolation.
Enable those who cherish the earth,
and encourage all calling for climate justice.
Change the hearts of people polluting lands and sea for profits –
to act justly, wisely, quickly, that together we may heal the earth.

Transforming God,

whose Spirit brooded over the face of the waters before the world began,
we hold before You the wounded places of this world.
Naming before You Israel and Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, the Middle East
and all places affected by violence.
Hear the cries of our hearts.
Bring peace in war.
Restore hope in despair.
Loosen bonds of oppression, injustice, and fear.
Inspire all who bear burdens of leadership to love mercy
and use their power for good.
Enable us to pray for our enemies
that Your ways may be known upon earth,
Your saving power among all nations.

Abiding God,

be beside all who are far from home
and any who have no home to go to.
Protect those fleeing violence, disaster or poverty.
Cherish all who've left loved ones behind
or have lost themselves on the journey.
Encourage those coming to marginal places
seeking refuge, opportunity or belonging.
Open our hearts and minds,
transform fear of stranger into welcome of brother and sister
that all may find a home.

Loving God,

comfort all who mourn.
Give peace in despair,
restore lives laid down by regret or longing for purpose.
Be alongside any who feel anxious, lonely, or abandoned.
Encourage all in mental distress,
those living with trauma or addiction,
those who hear voices
or who cannot see Your light within their darkness.
Uphold all in pain or fear
and those facing violence or living with injustice or death:
may they know themselves safe in Your love,
their story enfolded in Your eternal story.

Healing God

We remember in the silence those we know who need your healing, presence and peace at this time...

Embolden us Lord Jesus to participate in the risky acts of listening, dialogue, hospitality, service, justice and compassion this Christmas and beyond. Then, as we give ourselves to create peace not just for ourselves but for others, we discover that peace will find us and God's reign is truly within us.

God of many names,

send Your Holy Spirit to pray in our hearts with sighs too deep for words.
Accept these prayers for the sake of Your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

(**Source:** Church of Scotland resources adapted)

Lord's Prayer. (Please feel free to pray that version you are most familiar with)

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 forever. Amen.

TIME FOR SCATTERING

Word of mission: (2 Peter 3.14-15)

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

Song: (Tis 164) AHB 105 The great love of God

Blessing

God go with you in all that is gentle.
Christ go with you in all that is brave;
and the Spirit go with you in all that is free. **Amen!**

Go in peace - **to love and service the Lord!**

Thoughts to ponder in this next – third – week of Advent ...

Peace is There

Peace is there, God.
Peace is there when we look for it
It may not be in stillness.
It may not be in silence.
It may not be when things quiet.
It may not be in the way that we would have it,
But peace is there if we just stop and see it.
Peace is there when we choose to stop agitating.
Peace is there when we stop ruminating.
Peace is there when we stop complaining
Peace is there when we stop coveting.
Peace is there when we stop arguing.
Peace is there when we stop agitating.
Peace is there when we stop disturbing.
Peace is there when we stop provoking.
Peace is there when we stop harming.
Peace is there when we stop fighting.
Peace is there in our agency.
Peace is there within our power.
Peace is there when we choose to act for it.
Peace is there when we work for it.
Peace is there, found when we find forgiveness for others.
Peace is there, found when we find forgiveness for ourselves.
Peace is there when we find satisfaction in what we have instead of what we have not.
Peace is there when we accept things as they are, but with faith and hope still abounding.
Peace is there in justice.
Peace is there in equity.
Peace is there in sharing.
Peace is there in reconciliation.
Peace is there in meaning and purpose.
Peace is there in striving.
Peace is there in doing our best.
For peace is there,
Always waiting patiently,
Because you are there,
For you are where peace is.
Peace is there when in faith and hope we are in connection with you,
Peace is there with you,
And you can lead us into peace.
There may still be chaos.
There may still be trouble.
There may still be struggle.
There may still be hardship.
There may still be sadness.
There may still be grief.
Things may still be wrong.
There may still be evil.
But, with you we can be peace-full.
There is peace with you.

There is peace to teach us.
There is peace to learn.
There is peace to be found.
Find us when we have lost our peace.
Teach is where our peace can be found.
May there be peace in us,
So that there may be peace with others,
And there may be peace in the world.
There is peace, we pray.
Amen.

Rev Jon Humphries

Living in the Now

What's gone has made you what you are
So don't fear what's ahead
Put trust in what will be, will be
And choose to live instead
Don't live in the now worrying
What may or may not be
Take this moment in your time
And live it totally
There's no time like the present
Breathe deep and feel alive
Living in the here and now
Will help you rise and thrive
Now is all there ever is
It's the only time that's real
Let the future take its course
And leave the past to heal

Vanessa Hughes

Postlude

You can find a copy of today's sermon along with other congregational information on the church website.

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