

ORMOND UNITING CHURCH



1 DECEMBER 2024

ADVENT 1 YEAR C



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.

GREETING:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all

And also with you

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to worship everyone.

Today is the first Sunday of the Christian Year for Year C - and we will be concentrating on Luke's Gospel throughout the year. Luke's Gospel was largely written for the Gentile world. That is important to note because, of the 4 Gospels, it is the one which shows Jesus as the Saviour of the Gentile world – that is the world beyond Judah (Israel). Luke is very committed to relating the Gospel to the 'outside' world.

But today we have a 'doosey' of a start to this year. It does not feel like the sort of start we might expect for the first week of Advent. Advent means arrival – the arrival of that baby born in Bethlehem long ago. But the Gospel reading for the first week of Advent seems to be more about 'doom and gloom' than the anticipation of the birth of a beautiful baby boy!

And to make matters even more questionable the theme for Advent 1 is hope – yet, this reading seems to have a lot more to say about hopelessness than hope.

Well let's get on with it and see where it all goes!

The call to worship

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Children of God, pay attention! The days are coming when God's peace will reign and all creation will flourish under the reign of our Creator.

The days are surely coming!

Children of God, prepare your hearts! The days are coming and are already here when God will come near and show us how to recognize God's reign among us.

The days are surely coming and are already here!

Children of God, be alert and listen! God has come near to build the kin-dom on the earth here and now. Will you join in?

The days are surely coming and are already here! We come to prepare our hearts to pay attention, to listen, and to follow God's call to play our part in building the kin-dom of earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, UMC Discipleship Ministries,

CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY:

ADVENT 1 - Pay Attention! - HOPE

Reader One: From deep in the past, Jeremiah calls to us, "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (*Jeremiah 33:14*). Beloved, the days are surely coming when the yearning of the

land; the longing of the sun, moon, and stars; the desperate need of the people of earth for flourishing and peace will receive their fulfillment.

While fear, anxiety, misinformation, and suspicion surround us on every side, we choose to watch and wait in hope, preparing our hearts to notice and cooperate with God's grace already at work in our midst.

Reader Two: We light this candle of hope as a sign of our commitment to pay attention and prepare for the days that are surely coming and are already here—the days when God's kin-dom of love, justice, and mercy will reign.

Light the first candle of the Advent wreath.

SONG: The Candle of Hope: TUNE: PADERBORN (TiS 470)

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.

Carolyn Winfrey

PRAYERS: ADORATION, CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS:

ADORATION

Let us pray

We praise you for surely-coming days when you will execute Shalom: love, peace, health, and well-being for the people who walked in darkness. We await with assurance the surely-coming days when AIDS is cured, when every gun is beaten into tools for rebuilding, when every child has the opportunity to develop God-given gifts, and when every adult sees every child as a gift from God. We desire, O God of our Hope, surely-coming days when no city fears hurricanes, no country fears nuclear bombs, and no tribe fears annihilation by another. We thank you for the surely-coming days when no person fears another because God chose to create all people in the diversity of God's image. We thank you for our hope and for your surely-coming days. Amen.

Marilyn E. Thornton in The Africana Worship Book, Year C (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), 162.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

Holy God, we confess that we are busy with many preparations. We are busy with parties, with feasts, with giving. We are busy cleaning our houses and wrapping presents. We are busy with the stuff of the holiday. And we confess that our busyness may be misplaced, that we spend more time preparing for things than preparing for You. Draw us back to the centre, which is You. Remind us that our hearts and souls have work to do, too. Enable us to let go of that which does not matter, and to see what does matter. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Written by Beth Merrill Neel on her blog, "Hold Fast to What Is Good." Used with permission. <https://holdfasttowhatisgood.com/liturgy/prayer-of-confession>.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

My sisters and brothers in Christ you have confessed your sins to God. Therefore, in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I assure you that you are forgiven. You are set free from your sins by the power of Christ, who raises you up to new life in the Spirit. **To the only God our Saviour, who so graciously forgives and sets free, be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all ages, now and forever. AMEN**

THE SERVICE OF THE WORD:

Your Word, Oh Lord, is a lamp to our feet;

A light to our path

JEREMIAH 33: 14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

LUKE 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The gospel of the Lord

Praise to you. Lord Jesus Christ

HYMN TIS 272: Come Thou long-expected Jesus

SERMON: IN THE MEANTIME - PAY ATTENTION!

Each year of the 3 years of the RC Lectionary, the year begins with similar Gospel passages – strange and difficult passages! As we have just heard.

Consider this excerpt from today's gospel

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

What in the name of goodness were the authors of the revised Common Lectionary doing putting these passages as the gospel readings for ADVENT 1!?!?

ADVENT is the season that points towards the imminent arrival of a beautiful baby child who we all know and believe will grow into the Saviour of the World, so why such apparent gloom and doom at the very start of the Christian Year?

You know for that very reason – all this doom and gloom – I have always resisted preaching on these sorts of passages! Remember, as Mardie will tell you, I am by nature a pessimist, a half-empty glass type of person. So, I usually preach on one of the other Lectionary readings that seem more hopeful – I see enough doom around me in the world to more than fill my plate without this as well!

But, on closer examination, the question is: 'Is it just a passage about gloom and doom?

OR could it possibly be a message about HOPE!?!?' Impossible you say!

Yes, you heard right, and this is Ron the pessimist speaking!

I'll come back to this idea of underlying hope in a few minutes, but first a touch of terrible reality!

Just the mention of two names should be enough to fill us all with Doom, Gloom, Pain and Grief!

Bianca and Holly

The two Australian girls who died in Laos a couple of weeks ago, poisoned by Methanol! 6 in all have died!

This terrible tragedy has touched the hearts of so many around the world. Yes, of course, many are angry with whoever did this, whether by design or accident. But for most of us there have been overwhelming feelings of disbelief and hopelessness. Maybe even a sense of despair at the state of the world. If we feel like that imagine how the families feel.

The Acting Principal of Beaumaris Secondary College, Peter Barnett said in relation to former student Holly Bowles, 'We are all heart-broken, you could not find a kinder soul [than Holly].'

While discussing all this doom and gloom, Mardie offered a really thoughtful insight.

She said: 'There is no hope without hopelessness.' (repeat)

I guess it is a bit like saying you can't have 'North' unless you understand that it is the opposite of 'South,' or you can't understand the concept of 'full,' unless you grasp the understanding of 'empty.'

'There is no hope without hopelessness.'

That idea actually offers a good window through which to view the Lucan passage we read this morning, (and there are lots of these apocalyptic passages throughout scriptures – it was part of the world back then).

This is not a doom and gloom passage, but actually it offers a message of HOPE in the midst of our hopelessness and despair! In fact, a fierce and resolute hope in the face of what seems impossible or at least improbable.

Let me explain.

In the world of 2000 years ago, but also in our world today, we may see a world beset by woe and desolation, but those with eyes to truly see and hearts to really understand, ie, eyes and hearts of faith - in the midst of our hopelessness, we discover the creation's most earthshaking gift bursting through:

- The arrival of the Son of Man
- The drawing near of the redemption of all things
- The approach of the Kingdom of God
- The eternal Word which will not pass away"
- The victory of life over death

Real hope in the midst of all our hopelessness and despair!

The arrival of the one who will conjure life out of death, peace out of war, joy out of sadness and hope out of hopelessness!

Do you believe that!?

Well, here's a confession: I've been struggling to "SEE" and believe that!

I'm a pessimist and I have been going through a period of hopelessness, (maybe that's a bit strong) and not just because the Australian Cricket side got slaughtered, nor because Trump got re-elected – they didn't help – but also I have been feeling pretty crook lately (problems down under – I know, too much information!) – yer, all that, but overwhelmingly I truly got hooked by despair when those young flourishing lives were abruptly cut short in Laos. It just got to me!

But then, the Spirit of the Living-now God rescued me – in three ways – very Trinitarian:

1. Mardie loves me and she is annoyingly optimistic but a bit of it occasionally rubs off on me – oh and of course, that love expresses itself in lots of caring acts and ways.
2. I've been reading a most amazing book which is so full of hope, so full of hope for the world: It's called 'NOT THE END OF THE WORLD: HOW WE CAN BE THE FIRST GENERATION TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE PLANET' by Dr Hannah Ritchie, a 25 year old British Data Scientist. I won't start quoting from the book or we will still be here at midnight – just two short comments

- a. First a preview from Rutger Bregman who wrote: ‘Humankind: A Hopeful History.’
 - i. ‘[This book] shines with practicality and positivity. It will banish your feelings of doom, help you focus on what is really important and make you want to be a part of the most effective solutions to our greatest challenges.’
 - ii. For me this book confirms that God, through the Holy Spirit, is at work, through the lives of millions of people out there, and is bringing God’s Kingdom on earth closer and closer.
3. Holly Bowles’ father, stricken with grief at the loss of his daughter’s life, still managed to share the following in a press conference – comments of hope in the midst of terrible despair and hopelessness:
 - a. ‘We find comfort and solace in knowing Holly brought so much joy and happiness to so many people.’

WOW!

Awakened from my doom and gloom I was freed to consider the themes of ADVENT: HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE from a more faithful perspective

Of course, it would be naïve in the extreme to believe that HOPELESSNESS and DESPAIR, DIVISIVENESS and WARRING, SORROW and BROKENNESS, HATE and APATHY are going to relinquish their power over the world without one hell of a fight.

And it is for this battle that the Baby Jesus arrives. Sweet Baby Jesus in the Manger arrives for this, yes this and this battle will take him to death on a cross – but by God’s grace and love, and through his own Son’s life death and resurrection all creation will be re-made! That’s the truth, Ron! Indeed it is!

Thus

I implore you – pay attention!

The ADVENT of Jesus signifies the arrival of HOPE despite all our and the world’s HOPELESSNESS and DESPAIR.

The ADVENT of Jesus signifies the arrival of PEACE despite all our and the world’s DIVISIVENESS and WARRING

The ADVENT of Jesus signifies the arrival of JOY despite all our and the world’s SORROW and BROKENNESS!

The ADVENT of Jesus signifies the arrival of LOVE despite all our and the world’s HATRED and APATHY!

And what do we get to do and be as Advent people? Much more than make the Christmas cake and buy all the presents and get the food ready.

WE Pay attention!

“Stand up and raise your heads,” Jesus says to us. Our instinct when things are going badly or when the moment is difficult, is to keep our heads down. But Jesus tells us to raise up our heads, to look up, to trust, to have confidence, to pay attention. To pay Advent attention!

Pay attention!

The prophet Jeremiah understood this: listen to him with ADVENT attention:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Pay attention!

Let us pray

SONG: God's World Is Changing

Tune: TIS 156: BUNESSAN 5.5.5.4 D ("Morning Has Broken")

1. God's world is changing; where is it going?
Nations are raging; look at their fear!
Many are anxious, filled with foreboding;
We wait in faith, for God's reign is near.
2. "Look at the fig tree!" See what it's doing.
Look at the signs in heaven above.
God is at work here, building, renewing;
Some are afraid, but we know God's love.
3. This world is drifting, filled with distraction!
Many are wandering; some fall away.
We wait in faith! We're ready for action.
We're on our guard to greet God's new day.
4. What should we do, Lord, while we are waiting?
Some just sit back while troubles increase.
Others respond by fighting and hating.
We hear your call to work for your peace.
5. Lord, may we use each day that we're given —
Helping the hungry, homeless and poor.
Then we'll be ready for what you're bringing
When Christ will come and reign evermore.

Biblical References: Psalm 25:5-10; Luke 21:25-36; : Copyright © 2015 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: Prepared by Mardie Townsend

"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.*

Let us pray

Almighty God, we come to you today from a world which is beset by troubles: wars, famines, natural disasters, political upheavals, personal tragedies.

And yet we know that you sent your son so that we might have life abundantly. Help us to see through the trauma and trouble of our human condition to recognise that, in the birth, death and resurrection of your son is the hope that transcends all trials, the love – your love – that lights the darkest hour.

We pray for the peoples of all nations, especially for the people of Ukraine, Russia, Palestine, Lebanon, Israel. We pray too for those whose lives are beset by violence of other kinds – the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence; those impacted by gang violence; the refugees and asylum seekers who flee from their homes and who lack the security and safety they need. Bring to an end all war and oppression, that your people may be set free to live in safety and harmony.

Come, Jesus, and in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders of nations and all in positions of authority. Teach us and them your ways of righteousness and truth, that all may enjoy wise government and live in a spirit of generosity to all people.

Come, Jesus, and in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We pray for all whose bodies hurt, whose minds are confused, whose hearts are sad. Bring comfort and relief to those in distress and to those who care for them, that they both may know themselves held in your tender care. As we move towards Christmas, we think of those whose tables will be missing a loved member this year. Bring them the gift of comfort. In silence we bring to you the names of those known to us who are in need of your healing and hope.

Come, Jesus, and in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We pray for your church, its people and leaders. Guide and strengthen us as we await a new minister; inspire and awaken us to the needs in our community as we consider ways to use our new and renovated premises; encourage all in Assembly, Synod, Presbyteries and congregations to truly live out your command to “love one another”.

Come, Jesus, and in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Loving God, strengthen us to follow you in faith, hope and love, and to share the message of your gift of hope in the face of hopelessness with those around us. We pray in the name of your beloved son, Jesus Christ.
Amen

SENDING OUT

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray together, saying:
**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 and 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**

HYMN TiS 276: There's a Light Upon

DISMISSAL:

Beloved, go from this place blessed with a hope that takes root and grows,
preparing us to notice, listen, and join in with God's kin-dom work among us. Amen.
© Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries,

BLESSING:

Christ is our Hope!
He is our HOPE indeed!
The Advent of Christ Jesus uplifts you,
the everlasting love of God embraces you,
the inner warmth of the Spirit encourage you, today and ever more.
Today and evermore. Amen!

WORD OF MISSION:

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

RECESSIONAL HYMN TiS 779: May the Feet

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

Aubrey Podlich 1946-

Postlude

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

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Presider: Rev Ron Townsend

Music: Peter Hurley

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NEWS & NOTICES