

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

Lighting the First Advent Candle

One: We shall light the Advent candles/place this candle ring,
praying that our preparation for Christmas may help us
to look outward in love,
and look forward in hope.

**All: Living Christ, light of the world,
give us the warmth of your love.**

One: There are five candles.
We shall light a new candle each Sunday from now until Christmas.

Candles are useful.
They give light and warmth when electricity fails.

Candles are simple, yet ingenious.
They show us the inventiveness of people in the past
and connect us with generations before us.

Candles are special.
In the dark, they give bright light and warm shadows.

Candlelight brings us together
as we talk and laugh and listen.
**All: Living Christ, light of the world,
give us the warmth of your love.**

One: In Isaiah, chapter 64, a prophet cries out to God:
O that you would tear open the heavens,
and come down, . . .
to make your name known. . . .

You have hidden your face from us. . . .
Yet . . . we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

We light our first candle
as a prayer for our suffering world,
that God, who is often hidden,
may be revealed to us and to all.

Living God, come to our world.
**All: When you hide your face, help us,
to trust your promises and wait in hope.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Immanuel:
All: God with us.
One: Incarnation:
All: God in the flesh.
One: Into this world...
All: ...God comes, with us, in us, for us.
One: Come, let us worship the God who comes.

OPENING HYMN “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” GtG 93

One: Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates;
All: behold, the King of glory waits;
One: the King of kings is drawing near;
All: the Savior of the world is here.

One: Fling wide the portals of your heart;
**All: make it a temple, set apart
from earthly use for heaven's employ,
adorned with prayer and love and joy.**

One: Redeemer, come!
**All: I open wide
my heart to thee;**
One: here, Lord, abide.
**All: Let me thy inner presence feel
thy grace and love in me reveal.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God-with-us,
even in Advent,
we confess that you can seem far away.
We have blamed you for hiding from us,
rather than admitting we have failed to see you
in the thousands of ways you are revealing yourself every day.
We have not called on you,
and we have not listened for your call to us.
Without you, we have become tiny islands of self-concern.
Forgive us, we pray, and come to save us!
Let your face shine until our tears are dried,
our sins are faded, and our hope is restored.
After all, we belong to you,
and in your hands, we can be made new.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: His name is Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins."
All: **This is indeed "good news of great joy for all the people."**
One: So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.
All: **Thanks be to God!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Isaiah 64:1-9
 Psalm 80:1-7,17-19
 I Corinthians 1:3-9

Isaiah 64:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version +)

¹ *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
 so that the mountains would quake at your presence—*
² *as when fire kindles brushwood
 and the fire causes water to boil—*

to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
3 When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
4 From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for God.
5 You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
you hid yourself when we did wrong.
6 We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
7 No one calls on your name;
no one bothers to hold on to you,
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins.
8 Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
9 Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Psalm 80:1-7,17-19 (New Revised Standard Version)

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
3 Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
4 O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 *Restore us, O God of hosts;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

17 *But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
 the one whom you made strong for yourself.*

18 *Then we will never turn back from you;
 give us life, and we will call on your name.*

19 *Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

I Corinthians 1:3-9 (New Revised Standard Version +)

³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
⁴ *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been
given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in Christ, in speech
and knowledge of every kind—⁶ just as the testimony about Christ was confirmed in
you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift while you wait for our Lord Jesus
Christ to be revealed. ⁸ God will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be
blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were
called into the fellowship of the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “In Tension...and Intention” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Can you feel it? The tension.

Walter Brueggemann calls our Isaiah passage a prayer, and notes,

The prayer exhibits the two main features of genuine Advent hope: on the one hand, a deep *sense of desperation* about a situation out of control is sounded. On the other hand, a *bold and confident trust* in God is voiced, addressed to a God who can intervene (if God will) to make life peaceable and joyous. Life without God is unbearable. That is the present tense. Life with God can be completely transformed. That is the urgent hope of the prayer. (Texts-2)

Can you feel the tension?

Another way of saying this:

-We recognize life is not what it should be: we see the tears in the fabric of community; we sense the undue burden of life for many; we experience the broken hearts and lives.

This is not life as it should be. No matter how warped may be our perspective on life or our sense of goodness, there is something within us that recognizes the twisted, out-of-shape reality of life.

“That is the present tense,” as Brueggemann puts it. This is our ‘now’.

-But we also sense that there is something better to come: something more fulfilling, something more equitable, something more genuine for each of us and for all of us and for all of creation, for that matter.

But that 'something better' has not arrived, as of yet. We may see glimpses of it, snippets of it here and there. But the full-blown experience of life that is good and full and true is not now, not yet, not fully.

And this is where we live: in this tension between what is and what shall – and should – be.

And we do not do well living in tension.

Family Systems Theory highlights how each group, each family, each system desires homeostasis: equilibrium, balance, calm. Much is to be said for equilibrium, for balance, for calm in life.

Except when that equilibrium is, in reality, skewed. Except when that balance is, in reality, out-of-balance. Except when that calm conceals a festering within.

This year – at some times more so than others – for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, we have witnessed many cries of how our world is not what it should be.

-When lives of one color skin are more valued than lives of another color skin.

-With people gasping for breath in overcrowded hospital wards, separated from those they love as they die a slow death.

-With lines stretching around the corner and down the block, for miles, as people seek a simple bite to eat.

This is how life is.

Yet we know, with that "bold and confident trust," that something better is coming, will come, is already beginning to make itself known.

How live in this tension?

The way to live in this tension is to live with intention: a purpose, an aim.

The way to wade through the murky waters of stress and strain and chaos that is this tension, is to know where you're going and what you're doing and what you're about.

And what's the standard for this our intention?

Our intention is shaped by God's intention. How we are called to act and live is shaped by how God acts and lives and works among us.

The God who shepherds the people, leading them like a flock.

The God who is gracious and generous, gifting the people so they are enriched in every way.

The God who strengthens and gives life.

The God who is faithful, and calls us into fellowship.

The God whom we know in our Lord Jesus Christ: in his coming and giving, in his compassion and grace, in his sacrifice and service.

Douglas John Hall affirms that

The God of the exodus and the cross has goodwill toward, and good intentions for, the world. (“Looking into the Lectionary,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 2020)

So Roger Gench speaks of ‘agitation’ – the agitation of this season, and even of this tension:

...those points where God’s future is struggling toward realization now...where God is already at work – ...in need of our participation.
 (“Looking into the Lectionary”)

That is a tall order, a high purpose, a higher calling. And that is a sharp focus, a good aim.

But let’s be honest. Though at first it may seem exciting, when we see the immensity of the task – the disparity between what is and what should be – it seems exhausting: this intention, this calling, this life and purpose.

How do we keep going?

How are we sustained?

Remember: our intention is shaped by God’s intention ... and remembering how God’s intention has played out before.

Some would note allusions in our Isaiah passage to the exodus story.

In calling ...for God to “tear open the heavens” and come down to do “awesome deeds” (“Looking into the Lectionary”)

one can discern God’s work in the people’s release from slavery in Egypt, and the wandering in the wilderness that followed.

God’s intention was to free the people to true life in obedience to God, and to lead them to a broad and fertile land.

And God provided for them all along the way

-with manna from heaven

-with quails from the sky

-with water from the rock.

God guided them with

-a pillar of fire by night and

-a pillar of cloud by day.

And God provides for us.

-like providing spiritual gifts for the Corinthians so that they are not lacking in anything but are enriched in every way.

-like providing a community for us, calling us together.

-like providing words of encouragement and guidance in the scriptures.

-like providing God’s own life for our life: “This is my body; this is my blood.”

The call to embrace God's intention is always a call to wrestle with the tension of life as it is and life as it should be.

It is always a call to wrestle with that "deep sense of desperation about a situation out of (our) control."

But the call to engage God's intention is never a call to go it alone. It is never a call to a sense of hopelessness because we have to rely upon our own meager wits and resources.

It is always a call to "a bold and confident trust in God":

-the God "who can intervene...to make life peaceable and joyous."

-the God who "can...completely transform...life"

-the God who "is the urgent hope of (our) prayer" and our life.

In this season of Advent, when we reflect on the comings of God,

-we can look forward in hope to that 'who-knows-when' coming of good and full and true life – and we can look forward to that hope with "a bold and confident trust" *because* we know the coming of the Lord in a baby in a manger.

-We can look forward to that future coming *because* we experience the coming of the Lord in a crumb of bread and a sip of juice, in words of encouragement and words of challenge, and in people who also seek to walk this Advent journey and do so together.

How do we live in the midst of this tension?

We live it with the full intention of being alert and awake to God's coming to us now, God's work among us now, God's calling to us now ... even in the midst of the tension.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(Today's version of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Let your face shine upon us, O God...
People: ...that we might be saved.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

Unison Prayer of Dedication

God of unchanging truth, your promise is eternal, your benevolent care spans the ages. We offer our gifts to be molded in accordance with your purposes; we offer ourselves to be shaped by your will. Fill us with wisdom, and make us vessels of your truth. Make all that we do an outpouring of your goodness, spreading compassion on the afflicted and care to all who may be in need. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: **And also with you.**
Leader: Lift up your hearts.
People: **We lift them to the Lord.**
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Traditional)

**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 debts,
 as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Prayer

SENDING

CLOSING HYMN “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” GtG 82

One: Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
 born to set thy people free;
**All: from our fears and sins release us;
 let us find our rest in thee.**
One: Israel's strength and consolation,
All: hope of all the earth thou art;
One: dear desire of every nation,
All: joy of every longing heart.

One: Born thy people to deliver,
 born a child and yet a king,
 born to reign in us forever,
All: now thy gracious kingdom bring.
One: By thine own eternal Spirit
 rule in all our hearts alone;
**All: by thine all-sufficient merit
 raise us to thy glorious throne.**

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CHARGE AND BLESSING

One: Be alert and watchful, serving faithfully day by day.
All: We will look around us for signs of God's presence.
One: Use the gifts you have been given to the glory of God.
All: We will open our eyes to ways to be helpful.
One: Grace to you and peace, from God and Jesus Christ.
Know that God is faithful and Christ walks with you.
And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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