

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**'FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT'**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP** *(from Psalm 80; Mark 1 & 13)*

One: Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!

**All: Stir up your might,  
and come to save us!**

One: give us life, and we will call on your name.

**All: Restore us, O Lord God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

One: Of that day or hour, no one knows, only God. Be alert! Keep awake! The  
time is drawing near:

**All: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "People, Look East" GtG 105 *(Verses 1, 2, 4, & 5)*

1. **People, look east. The time is near  
of the crowning of the year.  
Make your house fair as you are able;  
trim the hearth and set the table.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the Guest, is on the way.**

2. **Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,  
one more seed is planted there.  
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,  
that in course the flower may flourish.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the Rose, is on the way.**

*(continued...)*

4. **Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim  
one more light the bowl shall brim,  
shining beyond the frosty weather,  
bright as sun and moon together.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the Star, is on the way.**
5. **Angels, announce with shouts of mirth  
Christ who brings new life to earth.  
Set every peak and valley humming  
with the word, the Lord is coming.  
People, look east and sing today:  
Love, the Lord, is on the way.**

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## **UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**God-with-us,  
even in Advent,  
we confess that you can seem far away.  
You are hidden when we need you near.  
In our hurt, doubt, and fear,  
we do not try to draw closer to you;  
instead, we lash out—  
against you, our neighbor, even those we love.  
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** *(based on I Corinthians 1 & II Corinthians 5)*

One: The grace of God, given to us in Christ Jesus,  
strengthens us to the end  
so that we may be blameless when Christ comes again.

*(continued...)*

**All:** Thanks be to God, who is faithful  
and has called us into the fellowship of the Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord!

**One:** For if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old life has gone; a  
new life has begun. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.

**All:** Thanks be to God! Amen.

### 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

#### LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH: The Candle of Hope

**One:** Advent. Expectation. The coming of the Lord. Hope. We celebrate  
God's coming to us in a most wonderful way. We celebrate the fruition of  
God's promise and the people's hope.

**All:** God has come to us in the babe born in Bethlehem. God comes to us  
as we break bread around the table. God will come to us in glory to  
bring history to its completion.

**One:** So we light the first Advent candle, fanning the flame of hope within us,  
and remembering the sure foundation of our hope in God the Creator. The  
Messiah comes! "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."  
(Psalm 118:23)

Let us pray.

**Unison:** Thank you, God, for being present with us and not abandoning us.  
Your coming to us gives us hope and strength. Help us to share with  
others the hope in which we abide, that together, all the peoples of the  
world may await your final coming with joyful and hopeful  
anticipation. Amen.

**Sing:** O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!

*(next page...)*

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**SCRIPTURE READINGS** Isaiah 64:1-9  
Mark 13:24-37  
I Corinthians 1:3-9

ISAIAH 64:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

- <sup>1</sup> *O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—*
- <sup>2</sup> *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!*
- <sup>3</sup> *When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.*
- <sup>4</sup> *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 you.*
- <sup>5</sup> *You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.*
- <sup>6</sup> *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.*
- <sup>7</sup> *There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,  
and do not remember iniquity forever.  
Now consider, we are all your people.*

MARK 13:24-37 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>24</sup> *“But in those days, after that suffering,  
the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light,  
and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.*

<sup>26</sup> *Then they will see ‘the Son of Humankind coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.* <sup>27</sup> *Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

<sup>28</sup> *“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.* <sup>29</sup> *So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.* <sup>30</sup> *Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.* <sup>31</sup> *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

<sup>32</sup> *“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* <sup>33</sup> *Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.* <sup>34</sup> *It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with their work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.* <sup>35</sup> *Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,* <sup>36</sup> *or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.* <sup>37</sup> *And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”*

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

<sup>3</sup> *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

<sup>4</sup> *I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,* <sup>5</sup> *for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—* <sup>6</sup> *just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—* <sup>7</sup> *so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>8</sup> *God will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* <sup>9</sup> *God is faithful; by God you were called into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**SERMON** “Deep Need, Deep Hope” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Perhaps we simply need to admit that we don’t start with a sense of joy. We start with something more akin to despair.

We don’t begin the pre-Christmas season with hope. We begin more with hopelessness.

For we see hostages held and shootings occur all too frequently and wars drag on and on and on. We know divisiveness and disunity, and “Everyman for himself!”

Lies are accepted as truth, and truth is dismissed as lies.

We see hunger and starvation, abuse and domination.

There is great need on the part of many, and great power on the part of few, and no great sharing on the part of any.

Despair, and depression.

The situation is dire.

The circumstances are dark.

Our plight is drear.

Our vision is dim.

As the nights grow longer and the days seem darker, it is easy for our mood to follow suit. And our muttered prayers to be spoken in desperation.

As someone notes,

**a deep sense of desperation about a situation out of control** (Walter Brueggemann, in *Texts for Preaching-Year B*, p.2)

We cannot do this thing called life, we cannot get out of this mess we are in on our own. We cannot fix our problems or correct our mistakes, we cannot dig our way out by ourselves. We cannot save ourselves.

We need God. We desperately need God. Because our situation – our life – is desperate.

Would that God would rend the heavens and come down and do something about it!

Feels like God is distant. And we are on our own, left alone.

So, as one person writes,

**Advent begins not on a note of joy, but of despair.** (*Texts for Preaching-Year B*, p.1)

Advent. It means ‘coming’. A coming we cannot create, but only hope for.

It refers first off to that First Coming of the Lord: the one we celebrate at Christmas.

But it also looks to the Second Coming of the Lord: the ‘Parousia’, as it is called. And maybe we might hope God would hurry it up!

Our chapter in Mark speaks of that Second Coming in terms and images eerily like today, with “*wars and rumors of wars*”; with various groups and individuals claiming to have a lock on discerning the truth of our situation yet leading others astray; with trials and difficulties for followers of the Lord.

And when all is said and done, the big take away is “Wait!” and “Watch!”

Not much comfort, is it?

Unless we take into account the full context.

For who is it who says these things? Who is it who encourages both that waiting posture and that watchful stance?

It is the very one who embodies the fulfillment of that First Coming: the Coming longed-for by so many for so long, even the author of our passage in Isaiah.

Jesus Christ, the one who fulfills the First Advent hope, is the very one who encourages us to cling to the Second Advent hope.

Jesus Christ – who in his words and work, his ministry and his very presence – reminds us that God was good for that first promise, and assures us that God is good for this second promise, too.

So the waiting he encourages is hope-filled.

And the watching he invokes is purpose-full.  
Because he gives substance to the very hope we yearn for and puts flesh on the very purpose we seek.

And perhaps seeing how God responded to our yearning and our cry for help in that past coming – in an infant, in an itinerant preacher, in a cross, in an empty tomb – may give us clues as to how God may respond (or be responding) even now to our cries for help in the present.

For we pray for security...

...and God sends us an infant, perhaps to remind us that God's might is encountered in weakness.

And we yearn for our needs to be met...

...and God invites us to meet the needs of others. An infant, remember? a cute, sweet, utterly-dependent-on-another infant. *"For as often as you did it for the least of these, you did it for me."* (Matthew 25:40)

And our stomachs growl with hunger (metaphorically speaking)...

...and our Lord gives us a piece of bread and a sip of juice...and the Word of God.

And in strange, unanticipated ways God meets our need and secures our safety and satisfies our hunger.

Not that all our problems – or the world's problems, or the problems of our own little world – are solved.

But we have hope to enter into the fray: to continue to work for justice and speak for mercy and live for love in a world bereft of them all.

And we are not left on our own to do that.

We may simply need to be watchful for how God might be meeting our needs.

And we need to anticipate that we may already have what we need, right in front of us, before our eyes – that God may be coming to us already in the very gifts God has given to you and to me and to others.

God has graced us with gifts – each of us, all of us – that are sufficient for now until *"the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

We each have gifts that we can use and offer, hone and refine, and share for the good of the coming kingdom, and the good of the world now.

Including the gift of each other. For part of the way God graces us with gifts is God gracing us with the gift of each other.

For maybe – in a maze of confusion, not knowing what to do, what path to choose, what direction to go – maybe what I need is an insight from you.

Maybe, when I am down and out, fallen by the wayside, what I need is a hand up from you.

Maybe – knowing what is right but unsure about how to proceed – maybe what I need is to lift up a voice for justice together with you.

We are in this struggle – and yearning – together.

And your giftedness may meet my need

-just as my giftedness may meet yours

-just as the giftedness of others may meet our need

-just as our giftedness may meet the needs of others.  
Your presence for me. My presence for you. Our presence for others. Their presence for us.

And speaking of presence...  
Turns out the word “parousia” (which refers to the Second Advent of which we speak) means ‘presence’.

It reminds us that God has not come once – that First Advent – and then left to come again another time – that Second Advent – only to leave us to our own devices in between times. God is present with us – still present with us – even now.

-in and through each other.  
-in and through the celebration of this sacrament: a tiny cube of bread and a small sip of juice.

-as the Spirit in us and at work among us and through us.  
And I don’t know about you, but...  
I can keep going so many more days and in so many more ways...  
I can do so much more and push through so much more...  
I can fall down and get back up so many more times...  
...as long as I know I am not alone: that someone is present with me.  
Which confirms a central truth of that First Advent: the coming of Immanuel, God with us.

So is there any reason to doubt that truth – God is with us – in the present?  
For that matter, is there any reason to doubt that truth – Immanuel – for our future?

**\*HYMN “The Days Are Surely Coming” GtG 357**

**1. The days are surely coming,  
says God to all the earth,  
when you will see my promise:  
salvation come to birth.  
My righteousness and justice  
will spread throughout the land  
and you will be delivered  
by my almighty hand.**

**2. The days are surely coming,  
says Christ, the promised one,  
when you will read my warning  
in moon and stars and sun.  
Though earth and heaven tremble,  
stand up and do not fear,  
for I am your redeemer,  
and I am drawing near.**

*(continued...)*



**3. The days are surely coming  
when we will know at last  
the fullness of God's presence,  
God's promise, come to pass.  
Then righteousness and justice  
will spread throughout the land  
and we will be delivered  
by God's almighty hand.**

*Text by David Gambrell, 2009.*

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*Tune: LLANGLOFFAN, Welsh folk melody; Llwybrau Moliant,  
1872; harm. The English Hymnal, 1906. Public Domain*

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from "A Declaration of Faith")

**All that we can ever hope for  
was present in Christ.**

**In Christ God gave us a glimpse of the new creation  
God has already begun and will surely finish.**

**But the work of God in Christ is not over.  
God calls us to hope for more than we have yet seen.**

**We do not yet see the end of cruelty and suffering  
in the world, the church, or our own lives.**

**But we see Jesus as Lord.**

**As he stands at the center of our history,  
we are confident he will stand at its end.**

**The hope God gives us is ultimate confidence  
that supports us when lesser hopes fail us.**

**The people of God have often misused God's promises  
as excuses for doing nothing about present evils.**

**But in Christ the new world has already broken in  
and the old can no longer be tolerated.**

**We know our efforts cannot bring in God's kingdom.**

**But hope plunges us into the struggle  
for victories over evil that are possible now  
in the world, the church, and our individual lives.**

*(continued...)*

**Hope gives us courage and energy  
to contend against all opposition,  
however invincible it may seem,  
for the new world and the new humanity  
that are surely coming.**

**Jesus is Lord!**

**He has been Lord from the beginning.**

**He will be Lord at the end.**

**Even now he is Lord.**

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## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**One:** Let your face shine upon us, O God...

**All:** ...and awaken us to your presence.

## **THE EUCHARIST**

### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Christ calls us to live generous and grateful lives. O God, we come with our gifts to be molded in accordance with your purposes; we offer ourselves to be shaped by your will. Make us wake-full and watchful for opportunities to make a difference, to help others be alert for your presence, that our lives may be an outpouring of your goodness and compassion in service to your coming in glory. 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.**

*(continued...)*

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* (Contemporary)

**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.**

*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.)

**Sing** "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" GtG 347 (*Verses 1-3*)

- 1. Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
and with fear and trembling stand;  
ponder nothing earthly minded,  
for with blessing in his hand  
Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
our full homage to demand.**
- 2. King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
as of old on earth he stood,  
Lord of lords, in human vesture,  
in the body and the blood,  
he will give to all the faithful  
his own self for heavenly food.**

*(continued...)*

- 3. Rank on rank the host of heaven  
spreads its vanguard on the way,  
as the Light of light descendeth  
from the realms of endless day,  
that the powers of hell may vanish  
as the shadows clear away.**

Words: From Liturgy of St. James, 4<sup>th</sup> cent.; trans. Gerard Moultrie, 1864, alt.  
Tune: PICARDY, French melody; arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906  
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*Prayer*

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” GtG 104**

- 1. O Lord, how shall I meet you,  
how welcome you aright?  
Your people long to greet you,  
my hope, my heart’s delight!  
O kindle, Lord most holy,  
a lamp within my breast,  
to do in spirit lowly  
all that may please you best.**
- 2. Love caused your incarnation;  
love brought you down to me;  
your thirst for my salvation  
procured my liberty.  
O love beyond all telling,  
that led you to embrace  
in love, all loves excelling,  
our lost and fallen race.**
- 3. You come, O Lord, with gladness,  
in mercy and goodwill,  
to bring an end to sadness  
and bid our fears be still.  
In patient expectation  
we live for that great day  
when your renewed creation  
your glory shall display.**

*(next page...)*

Words: Paul Gerhardt, 1653; trans. Catherine Winkworth and others, 1863, alt.  
Tune: VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN, Melchior Teschner, 1614; harm.  
William Henry Monk, 1861  
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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...  
All: ...Amen.

**POSTLUDE**

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