

Dec 6 2020 ADVENT II Service of Word and Prayer

We are using the Service of the Word liturgy this morning, from your green hymn book, the Lutheran Book of Worship, page 126. The prayers are based on Sundays & Seasons. Shut off all the distractions in your home. Enjoy the quiet for a bit – take in some deep breaths. Light your candle. May your family be blessed in this time together. Include your Advent wreath as part of your home worship centre. If you don't have a table wreath, you could use 4 candles, (or battery operated votives) for the Advent season. Usually there are 3 blue candles and 1 pink one. Many people also add a white candle on Christmas Day.

The Gathering

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Hymn: ELW 254 & LBW 30 - Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Dialogue p.127

Blessed is he who comes as king, who comes in the name of the Lord.
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
I will hear what the Lord has to say - a voice that speaks for peace.
Peace for all people and his friends and those who turn to him in their hearts.
His help is near for those who fear him, and his glory will live in our land.
Blessed is he who comes as king, who comes in the name of the Lord.
Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

God has made us his people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

The Apostles' Creed

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 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.

The Lord be with you ~ and also with you.

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lighting the Advent Wreath: Advent II

Use this blessing when lighting the first two candles.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe.
John the Baptist calls all people to prepare the Lord's way
for the kingdom of heaven is near.
Bless us as we light the candles on this wreath.
Baptize us with the fire of your Spirit,
that we may be a light shining in the darkness
welcoming others as Christ has welcomed us,
for he is our light and our salvation.
Blessed be God forever. **Amen.**

The Word

The Old Testament lesson is from Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13 is found on page 254

The New Testament lesson is from 2 Peter 3: 8-15

Please rise for the gospel lesson.

Holy, Holy, Holy, our hearts adore you. Our hearts are glad to say the words: you are Holy God.

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8 Glory to you o Lord / Praise to you o Christ.

Sermon ~ Rev. Norine Gullons

This past Tuesday I called an older cousin in Brighton, (this is on my Dad's side of the family) to have a chat about our annual Christmas dinner and gathering of the clan. Actually, the conversation was to agree and affirm that we needed to cancel this event as it always takes place in Markham, Toronto, at another cousin's home. Of course, we all agreed. Hopefully, we will be able to see each other again in person next summer.

I know many of you are having to make the same decisions and phone calls. These calls make us sad – to break with long held traditions that we hold dear and with those we hold close to our hearts. We are all trying to cope with Covid – fatigue, increased anxiety about the future, and some days we feel muted and stuck in place. It may feel like we are living in a wilderness. This image of a wilderness perhaps describes how we feel out of step with the pressure to have a merry holiday spirit surrounding us and our families.

In such a barren place, though, we still hear God's promise! We encounter again the strange figure of John the Baptist. It seems odd to be talking about this when we already have our nativity stable standing ready to receive the baby Jesus. But God shows up in unexpected places! There is a complexity to the season this year.

Mark's gospel does not tell the Christmas story. He instead invites us to extend the significance of the entire gospel beyond the confines of Christmas time. The meaning and significance of Christmas does not end on Dec. 25. It really just begins then! So, Mark starts with the words "*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" God's work is not done yet! God is still at work, even and especially through us.

During this Advent season we are preparing to hear the Christmas story! And the Christmas story is not the end of the movement, but rather the beginning! We are invited to hear the story again, so that we can leap into another year of the beginning of our calling, by participating and carrying on being vessels for God's ongoing work to love and bless the world!

God calls us all to a ministry very much like John the Baptist's. God calls us all--not just pastors and preachers but all of us--to bear witness to Him. If we do not tell people about the baby Jesus, they will not know him! Our witness to Christ today plants the seeds of faith tomorrow.

There are lots of ways to bear witness to Christ. I recall a marvelous old legend about St. Francis. Dec. 3rd is designated his memorial day. Brother Juniper said to St. Francis, "*Teach me to preach as eloquently as you. I am not good with words.*" "*I will teach you to preach more eloquently than I,*" said St. Francis. "*Meet me tomorrow and I shall teach you to preach.*" Brother Juniper dutifully met Francis early the next morning. To Juniper's surprise, they began walking. They walked through the marketplace, smiling at the laborers, the merchants, the children. They helped an old woman carry her wash up a set of stairs. They walked. Finally,

an exasperated Brother Juniper asked, "Francis, when shall you teach me to preach?". St. Francis replied, "*Why, we are preaching.*"

What does that story mean? It means that God is still with us, working through us when we carry on His work, when we obey his commandment to love one another. It means that we witness to Christ when we show compassion for the marginalized and the vulnerable. It means that our service to others in the name of Christ is very much like John's preaching in the wilderness. It might not seem like preaching at all because there was nobody to hear the sermon--at least in the beginning. But, when John was faithful to his calling to cry out in the wilderness, God blessed his ministry.

The story of the good news of Jesus Christ continues on, in and among you. The ongoing work continues in all gestures of love or service, big or small. Our gestures, offered in love, participate in the ongoing work of God. God is love, and sent Jesus both to exemplify that love but also to redeem the world in and through God's love.

Let us, as individual Christians and as the church, the faith community commit ourselves to continuing the story for Christ. Let us commit ourselves to living--and loving--and serving in ways that will show people something of Christ's life--Christ's love-- and Christ's service.

So just for today, whether it is refraining from gathering with loved ones, or phoning someone who is living alone; remember we are not helpless during this time of our country's history. I pray that you find yourselves renewed in your energy and your faith by offering small gestures in love to others. Let us

remember that everything Mark told about Jesus was just for this end; to invite us into this ongoing story and that we may continue it here and now. Now it is our time to carry that story forward. Amen.

Hymn: ELW 256 LBW 29 - Comfort, Comfort, Now My People (tune Genevan)

Our Response

OFFERING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.

You have set before us these gifts of your good creation.

Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with food and drink, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Prayers of the people are led by Randy Zimmerling

God of power and might, comfort your people and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. *A brief silence.*

Faithful God, you teach us to wait for you with faithfulness and patience. Sustain and support us in our doubts and questions. Nurture our faith as we discern and enact your mission. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Loving God, you set the stars in the sky and breathe life into the earth. Renew the face of creation where it is in need of your healing touch. Mend the wounds of environmental damage and restore balance to ecosystems so that all creation can declare your praise. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Steadfast God, you never tire of seeking justice. Where people suffer from discrimination, judgment, and injustice, speak words of truth and comfort. Lead us toward a world where faithfulness will sprout underfoot and righteousness rain down from above. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Leading God, you ask us to make uneven ground smooth. Make even the disparities between your people. Sustain and support people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Accompany disability advocates who work for a world accessible to all. We pray for those we know who are ill

Teach us to celebrate the great diversity in our midst. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Tender God, you know sorrow and joy alike. We pray for those in our families and congregation who are not joyful in this holiday season. Comfort those who grieve, be a companion to all who are lonely, tend those who are sick or struggling with depression, and gather all people in your healing embrace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for the saints who have prepared your way in the wilderness and taught us to continue their faithful work . Make their generous lives an example for all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The peace of Christ be with you always and also with you.

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray **The Lord's Prayer:**

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: ELW 253 - He Came Down

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.