

ADVENT 3
13/12/20
CB

CALL TO WORSHIP

Joy will be felt around the world,

when the oppressed receive the Good News.

Joy will break out around the world,

when the broken-hearted are given support.

Joy will be celebrated around the world,

when those held captive know freedom.

Joy will be experienced around the world,

when the everlasting joy of God finds expression and purpose in worship.

Opening Prayer Jesus: search for justice compassion

Jesus, we will search among the most powerful nations, and not find you.

Jesus, we will search among the most religious men and women, and not find you.

Jesus, we will search among the momentous events of our time, and not find you.

Jesus, we will search high and low, in palace, in government, and in church, and not find you.

Jesus, you will surprise us.

You will reveal yourself to us in an unexpected call for justice, in an unseen deed of compassion, and in a caring and empowered community.

HYMN 210 O for a thousand tongues to sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dEfz6Vms>

ADVENT CANDLES

Today - the third Sunday in Advent, we hear from the prophet Isaiah.

Of a world where even the desert sings, rejoices and blossoms.

A world where eyes will see, and ears will hear; where everyone will want to dance and sing for joy.

We watch and wait for these signs of the inbreaking of God's kingdom.

We wait in hope and peace, and with joy.

(Two purple candles are relit)

The God in whom we rejoice, prepares our hearts for the coming of the Lord. We light the candle of joy. (The pink candle is lit)

God of grace and truth, may our spirits rejoice in the forthcoming birth of Christ, our Saviour, in whom we are privileged to experience your mercy and see your glory.

TIS 286 Verses 1, 2 and 3: "Light one candle for hope"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWXWNZLock4>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Loving God,

though the night can seem long and dark,

your light is ever present.

Though the plight of the world seems ever greater,

your goodness prevails.

Thank you that, no matter our circumstance,

you come in grace and mercy,

to strengthen, to renew,

to declare justice and restore hope.

Though we may not always perceive your hand at work,

we know your kindness

and therefore we will sing of your greatness.

Merciful God,
though we cling to the words of Mary's song,
holding on in hope for a better world,
we confess that there are many times when we lose heart.
When we see the suffering of innocent ones,
or the plight of homeless or addicted people,
or watch on as reports of great violence are presented in the media,
we want to cry out, "Where are you God?"
When we lose sight of your providential care and goodness,
or feel like giving up and hiding away
in our own sanctuaries,
come to us to renew and restore
our faith in your reign and realm,
for in truth we are but dust without you.
In the name of Christ, have mercy on us. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The Word of God is faithful and true.
To those who repent, forgiveness is assured.
We are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

READINGS

· Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
4 They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
For I the Lord love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

· **John 1:6-8, 19-28**

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²² Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

HYMN 265 O come, o come, Emmanuel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_Q-4

SERMON

This week's readings also includes this short passage from Paul's letter to the faithful in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

²³ May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Both John the baptiser and Paul could have been considered people who were 'before their time.'
Who do you remember as a person who was 'before their time' as we call it?

John Wesley?

Bishop Desmond Tutu?

John Flynn and his flying doctors and the peddle wireless?

How about more recently?

Who stands out to you?

I was interested a few years ago to read the biography of John Flynn. It took several goes before he could graduate from theological college. He wasn't the most intellectual student so he was sent out to the country. Yet his vision for rural Australia has helped to transform out-back life for generations. He was a person ahead of his time!

When people talk about someone who is 'before their time' They are often referring to something that the person did which ended up becoming the normal thing later. At the time when they started their projects they were often seen as non-conformist and a bit batty. 'Why would you do that' is often to phrase of onlookers. These people were often seen as a bit eccentric and trouble makers.

The message of Advent is about being ahead of the times. Followers of Jesus were, and still are, ahead of the pack. We are seeking to live in a way that will one day become normal. Living as Christians might not suit the latest trends in social media, yet these objectives are timeless and will keep making sense.

When Paul wrote to the faithful followers in Thessalonica he asked them to rejoice and be thankful no matter what was happening. The people that he was writing to seemed to have very little to celebrate. They were being targeted by the local community for their beliefs and life was hard for them. Paul was not chastising them for their attitude, rather he was inviting them to look beyond their current difficulties and to celebrate what Christ had given them.

Today we have a word that psychologists use when they speak of this sort of approach to life. They call it 'reframing.' This approach invites us to reimagine our circumstances. Our lives are often restricted by the frame that we put around our world view.

For instance, if you are in serious pain then it can become the whole of your world. Nothing outside of this frame interests you. All too often we are left feeling fearful and despondent about our future. However, suppose that you are recovering from heart bypass surgery then that pain where your ribs have been cut open would seem so much less devastating as you realise that it was a sign that your heart problems were diminishing. Relief from heart disease was on its way. So, we can see that the context, or framing, can have a big impact on our outlook in any situation.

Normally we do this 'reframing' naturally as we talk through our situation. Have you ever heard a conversation like:

- "There's a crippling drought, but you're upset about a bit of rain on your Christmas barbecue?!"

This is reframing. Are we so focused on minor issues that we miss the bigger picture. Paul is asking the faithful to 'reframe' to look at the bigger picture and to put the smaller problems in perspective. All too often people try to do the opposite.

Next we come to that strange character who was Jesus' cousin, John the baptiser. He was being quizzed by the hierarchy from the temple in Jerusalem as to what right he had to baptise people in the Jordan. He admitted to not being the Messiah, nor was he the reincarnation of Elijah or Moses. Rather than being drawn into the loaded debate John reframes the discussion by saying:

- "Look, you lot are so focussed on me that you are missing the bigger picture. I am just giving people a symbolic bath, but right there in the midst of you – rubbing shoulders with you even now – is one you haven't even noticed, let alone recognised. He is the One who is coming to take over where I leave off and let me tell you that when he gets into action, you'll be wondering why you wasted your time worrying about anything as insignificant as what I'm up to. All I'm here to do is point to the bigger picture, and you lot haven't looked any further than the little bloke doing the pointing!"

Isaiah also works along the same lines in the passage that we heard earlier:

- "The Lord has filled me with the Holy Spirit and sent me to bring good news to the downtrodden, to announce freedom to the prisoners, and to heal the broken-hearted."

We need to listen carefully to this message to get the full picture that has been opened up here for us. We are not called to break people out of unfair detention in immigration centres but to reframe the situation so that they can see beyond the razor wire and get a glimpse of the hoped for day when the Lord will come and set captives free.

There is hope that those who have sown multiple seeds with their tears on the dry earth as they will reap their rewards with singing and dancing celebrations. Those who have been constantly put down and had their hopes trampled can one day be lifted up so as to be able to rejoice as they become strong like massive trees planted by the Lord.

It is only in allowing God to reframe our lives to see the bigger picture that we can faithfully live and act out our faith in the here and now. As Paul calls to us we need to rejoice and celebrate and we can be thankful for the many blessings that we have. In this way the pain of today is no longer our focus, it is not the last word.

I want to be clear here that I am not trying to peddle some sort of escapist mirage. There is pain and injustice in our world. We need to recognise that we can reframe the harsh realities of the world and refuse to allow those things to dictate how we live our lives. We have a message of joy, hope and love to share.

The only reason that we still have injustice in our world is because we are living in the time between the message of hope proclaimed by that Baby in a manger and the full realisation of the new age of peace and grace.

Our dominant attitude needs to be one of joyous hope:

· “The Spirit of the Lord has sent us to announce freedom and to celebrate God’s victory over injustice and the powers of death. We have come to bring God’s laughter where despair has reigned, to celebrate freedom in the face of oppression, to hand streamers and balloons and glasses of champagne through the barbed wire and to party with those who the Prince of Peace is coming to set free.”

If we look back at the songs of hope from people like the American slaves and the freedom songs of the South African first nation people we do not hear songs of rage and hatred but simple phrases like: “Freedom, O freedom, O freedom, freedom is coming, O yes I know.”

No matter how we feel today we are all called to be people who are living well ahead of our time. We are being invited to celebrate the coming reign of peace shown to us by that Baby in the cattle shed. When all is said and done we are called to be a people who are well ahead of our time. We can now celebrate the coming of the reign of peace that we see in Jesus’ promises. Jesus suffered the harshest things which the world could inflict on Him but after three days He rose and set before us a whole new frame through which to see our world. This pictures a world of resurrection life and rejoicing in the new freedom that comes with God’s reign.

There are plenty of people in the world who will try to ignore this promise by suggesting that we are too far ahead of ourselves. People have been trying to stop Christians celebrating since Christ’s ministry started. Joyous hope is contagious for those around us and we need to spread that bigger picture with the world in which we live.

The power of death no longer dictates our lives as we concentrate on the bigger picture coming out of that empty tomb. As we move through Advent we can be inspired and empowered to join with our other followers of Christ clearing a path for our loving Lord.

HYMN 312 Once in royal David’s city

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw6IjbOUaJ4>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of eternal love and goodness

receive the gifts we bring
as a token of our love for you. Amen.
(Roz Denniss)

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE SUNDAY 13TH DECEMBER 2020

Christmas Joy.

Christmas has always been a time for singing and music -----

Groups of people singing Christmas Carols. --- grand choirs singing in Cathedrals ----church choirs --
- orchestral concerts in opera houses and city halls --- gigs in hotels, clubs, parks and vineyards.

I always include a visit to the Cathedral to hear Handel's Oratorio, The Messiah, a large musical composition for orchestra, soloists and choir about the prophecy, birth, death and resurrection of Christ using verses from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

It is emotional and uplifting ---- especially the Hallelujah Chorus.

Do you know it was written almost 280 years ago and is performed around the World every Christmas --- a rare occasion this year as Covid 19 has prevented rehearsals.

Have you ever seen Flash Mobs performing? --- maybe on your computer. i phone , iPod or Smart TV. A Flash Mob is a group of people who suddenly assemble in a public place and perform for a brief time and then quickly disperse.

One such Flash Mob presents the Hallelujah Chorus in a dining area in a shopping mall where people are going about their normal activities --- some chatting and eating --- some shopping ---- some walking about --- with some lovers holding hands.

Suddenly

A young lady stands up and sings "Hallelujah"

Then a young man stands up and sings "Hallelujah"

then a couple stands up and sing "the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth"

then three people sing "Hallelujah"

then more and more stand to sing and the volume is increased....

as the words and music unfold people take photos

hold up babies

some look happily surprised and some join in the singing

They all sing

and He shall reign for ever and ever

King of Kings forever Hallelujah"

Lord of Lords forever "Hallelujah"

and He shall reign for ever and ever

then the final "Hallelujah" with all the singers triumphantly raising their hands heavenward.

The Christian Message declared in a shopping mall by joyous Christians proud of their Lord and Saviour.

Let us pray.

Lord we are so honoured to be able to come joyously before You and express our love for You.

We believe that You are the Lord God Omnipotent having unlimited power and that You should reign forever and ever as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

We thank You for the joyous Christmas Message brought by the Angels of the Heavenly Host that Christ is our Saviour and He will bring with Him peace and perfection.

We thank you that Christ is like a gentle shepherd when we are in need of guidance. He will give us rest when we are heavily burdened with the problems of this life we need your peace when dealing

with weaknesses of body and mind as we grow older sickness pain loneliness selfishness grief confusion depression dwindling faith

We know that there is great unrest in the world with riots wars and rumours of wars with resulting hardship in trading and the right for people to live in peace and security.

So we pray for all nations their leaders Kings Presidents..... Chairmen Prime Ministers..... Premiers local leaders that they will lead their people wisely and correctly.

We pray for the youth of the world.

We pray for a proven vaccine for Covid 19 and its wise distribution.

We thank You for all the wonderful things that are being experienced in Australia right now.

We thank You for the rain we thank You that the Australian Government is attempting to help the economy by subsidising work and industry.

We thank You for the joy of open borders and the reuniting of families and friends.

We thank You for music which we are still able to experience on radio, TV, CDs, DVDs, YouTube and Facebook .

We thank You for giving us victory and redemption through the blood of Jesus ---- help us to remain faithful to You in Jesus Name who taught us to pray

The Lord's Prayer.....

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 for ever. Amen.

HYMN 576 O for a closer walk with God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ac2SiQaxKI>

BENEDICTION

Let us go from here in the confidence of Christ's presence.

Sing a new song of hope and faith.

Let all the world rejoice,

for God is not done with us yet

and has wonderful things to birth in our midst.

May God's loving providence reside in our hearts

and Christ's living word be upon our lips

as we rejoice in the song of the Spirit,

this day and forever more.

Amen.