

ADVENT 1

29/11/20

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

A child's eyes light up as she imagines a dancing, laughing time, far, far in the future.

An old person dreams of a day when infirmity and anxiety will cease.

A wise person reflects on the untapped potential within humanity – the potential to build a world where joy and sharing prevail.

And we, gathered in the name of Christ, catch a glimpse of Advent hope.

Opening Prayer hope: Advent journey: Advent light: of hope joy: Advent

Your presence is revealed in the light of hope, O God. The light of hope shines brightly.

Joyfully we worship, for your graceful gift of Jesus is at hand.

The light of hope overcomes the darkness.

Joyfully we know that the powerful ones, and the terror-bringers, will not have their own way.

The light of hope reveals the needs of home and community.

Joyfully we will work to support the downhearted, and to show friendship to the lonely.

Your presence is revealed in the light of hope, O God.

The light of hope will go before us on our Advent journey.

HYMN 276 There's a light upon the mountain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwal>

ADVENT WREATH

Today is the first Sunday of Advent - the time when we prepare once again for the coming of Jesus.

We light a candle each week to remind us that Jesus brings light into the dark places of the world.

Today, the prophet Isaiah describes a future shaped by peace for all nations as they walk in the light of the Lord. We wait in hope for this prophecy to be fulfilled..

We light the candle of hope to proclaim that God's light is coming into the world

A purple candle is lit .

PRAYER: God of all nations - you spoke to Isaiah and you empowered him to speak welcome words of peace and hope to the people of his time. We need to hear your word anew to us today as the darkness of despair is still experienced wherever peace and hope is absent. Strengthen us with the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may be your prophets in this day and age - teaching your ways and lifting people's darkness through words and work of love and peace and justice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

TIS 286 Verse 1 "Light one candle for hope"

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of all goodness,

receive the praise we bring

in response to your loving kindness.

Though we can only partially understand

all of your ways,

we have learned to trust you completely.

Your wisdom is beyond all understanding.

Your justice sustains life.

In you is the foundation of grace

that leads to eternal life.

We offer you our adoration and praise,

worshipping you and glorifying your name.

How long, O Lord, how long?

How long will it be before we see

justice roll down like waters and

righteousness like an ever flowing stream?

When will you act, O God?

We confess that we are beset by impatience

and frustrated that peace seems so far away.

We confess our own complacency to do our part

and our unwillingness to speak out in your name.

Renew us we pray.

Revitalise us by the power of your Spirit.

Enable us to endure, even when we want to give up.

Let it be, gracious one, that we might wait with greater patience

and be found ready for whatever task you call us to embrace.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Those who wait upon God

receive assurance and empowerment.

So, in faith, I declare Christ's words, we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

READINGS

- **Isaiah 64:1-9**

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 him.

5 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.

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 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.

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.

- **Mark 13:24-37**

“But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.

27 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.

28 “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. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

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

HYMN 123 Be still my soul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqgC1tqifV8>

SERMON

Well, it’s so good to be back with you after the last few weeks. Surgery is never fun and having one arm out of action is very frustrating. I still can’t drive.

It is interesting to me that this week marks the start of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day. Yes, it is that close! We call this time Advent. In terms of the liturgical year it is the start of a New Year! So, Happy New Year!

Consequently we start out the series of themes running through this season this week with Hope! In this respect the passages from both the Old Testament and Mark look at trying to find hope in the midst of chaos.

The last year has certainly brought us a massive dose of chaos. At this time last year, after a long drought, we were entering into perhaps one of the worst fire

seasons in a generation. During that time the skies turned grey and even black and red in places as massive bush fires burned. These fires seemingly defying any form of control by our desperate fireys.

At the same time in China a person caught what was thought to be a cold which has now spread across the whole world. Thousands upon thousands have died. I am sure that we will never know the full death toll, let alone the suffering of those who have caught COVID 19.

At the same time there have been terror attacks across the world, especially in the Middle East and parts of northern Africa.

In the last week or so we have had horrifying reports of blatant murder by Australian Special Forces troops. At the same time the rate of domestic violence doesn't seem to diminish no matter what is done by authorities.

As we come to the end of yet another year, people might be forgiven for thinking that there is no hope. The light at the end of the tunnel has been switched off. It just seems that there is one disaster after another.

In today's readings Isaiah calls down judgement and devastation on a nation which has wandered far from the Ways of the Lord, as he calls it, and he is calling his people to return to God's ways.

At the same time Mark has us reflecting on the mind numbing chaos that he sees as the start of the end of time. Whenever there is a period of escalating disruptions and life changing events many people start to wonder if the world is coming to an end. They wonder if this is what Jesus was warning about in this passage from Mark.

Things seem to be bubbling along nicely then it appears that it all starts to fall apart. What was normal is now a distant memory. The reality which we were comfortable with has now become a grind which keeps us apart, demolished massive parts of our environment and then it starts to kill off people around us.

It was only about 18 years ago that there was a series of planes which were flown into some high rise buildings in the US. Chaos in our world is nothing new. Different things seem to keep cropping up to disrupt our lives over time.

The reason that things seem to be getting to the point that we are worried about the end-of-the-world is that we have not experienced this exact same combination before. However we constantly face massive challenges the same as humanity has done since time began.

The message from Mark is categorised as apocalyptic, that is at the end of time when everything starts falling apart, possibly heralding the second coming.

These sorts of premonitions and movements were not uncommon in Jesus time and before. We seem to have had more than our fair share around the end of last century when we approached the year 2000.

It is very difficult to discern real warnings of troubles ahead from the hyperbole of those who are just panicking over what turns out to be virtually nothing.

When the world seems completely disrupted and our daily lives are shaken by constant rule changes we all tend to feel that the bottom has fallen out of our world. We can start to use overly dramatic and extreme language to try and describe the situation that we have found ourselves in. It is like the sun has refused to shine, the earth is shaking and reality has been turned on its head.

When we read an apocalyptic passage from the Bible we might not be completely aware of the situation being experienced by the author whose experience gave rise to those words at that time.

- Was it a tribal conflict or a full-on battle?
- Was there an earthquake and some meteor shower at the same time?

When the author of Mark recorded the words that we heard this morning there was a very special context. Whatever Jesus had said was viewed in the light of the fact that the Roman Army had just sacked Jerusalem after an uprising about a statue of Caesar being forcefully put into the Temple. The Temple had been demolished in the heat of that conflict.

For Jews the Temple had become the heart of Judaism and that destruction felt like a death blow to the faith, this mood also reflected onto the fledgling Christian church. This mood of despair brought to the fore the words spoken by Jesus foreshadowing events like they were living through.

So how do we approach this passage? We could always take the emu approach and put our heads in the sand and say that those events have long since passed. Therefore we could ignore the message.

We could equally say that the first century believers were mistaken so therefore the second coming is still ahead of us.

Alternatively we could look at the passage as not just referring to a single event seeing that it spoke of a time beyond the sacking of the Temple knowing that disasters and destruction are part of the world we live in.

Personally I am more inclined to the last approach. We live in a world where there are disasters and human conflicts. It is comforting to me to comprehend that Jesus knew this and reminded us that day does follow night.

So what do I think Jesus trying to share with us with this passage?

Jesus not only knew that throughout history that there had been disasters and pain. He equally knew that it would continue and his message might even contribute to the conflict at times. In Matthew 10:34 Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." It is not that Jesus is seeking violence but that it was a probable outcome of his message.

Let me expand on this concept a bit. We all know the terrible toll that the supposed wonder drug Thalidomide took when it was introduced in the 1950's and 1960's. It was a very powerful tool in combating debilitating symptoms for those poor women suffering morning sickness during pregnancy. Later analysis showed that more than 10,000 babies suffered from deformities from that drug.

Once that problem became known there was no way people would take that drug, no matter how sick they felt. The scientist who led the discovery of this situation could have been seen as the saviour of many babies who have subsequently not suffered from deformity but at the same time so many women were now put back into the situation where they suffered terribly from morning sickness.

While some of you might think that this is a strange analogy to use it also highlights that Jesus fundamental message highlights the truth that the world is full of chaos and violence. The Gospel contributes to the unmasking of apocalyptic situations where previously the truth had not been able to be seen through all the other confusion in the world.

In reality through the message given to us from Jesus and the nature of His sacrificial death means that we do have a formula to address this conundrum. The only way to address the violence and chaos of the world is through utilising good to overcome the effects of violence and disasters.

The ability to suppress the evil of conflict comes from people who prevent violence. As we contain violence and the resulting chaos, apocalypse can be avoided. In the turmoil around Jesus the community at the time called out "Crucify Him. Crucify Him." But Jesus did not stay dead, and he came back with love and forgiveness.

From this we can see that vengeful violence and disruption is just our human failure to reconcile. There is no need for vengeance.

Ever since Jesus' resurrection we have been slowly discovering that violence is not the way forward.

"They" are not the bad ones we once thought. In recent times we have come to realise that we should not condemn people for the colour of their skin, or because a woman chose to become a recluse away from society's trauma. We don't need to combine to attack a person of colour or a person who we might have once considered a witch.

The Gospel message is that we need to open our eyes and not always demonise outsiders, like asylum seekers and marginalized minorities. We need to understand the humanity of victims, not objectify them. Jesus keeps whispering to us saying: "When you do that to one of the least of these, you are doing it to me."

Like the Thalidomide analogy we have to keep discerning so that our cure is not creating more problems than we are seeking to solve. The resolution that Jesus offers comes out of mutual love and grace. Even in the most terrifying of times. Violence is never a lasting answer.

When we boil this passage down it simply says that there are no simplistic answers. “Read the signs. Stay awake. Be prepared to adjust and adapt to a constantly changing world.” Fires, drought, pandemics and worldwide chaos have no answer to Jesus constant message.

Salvation does not come in the form of some new weapon designed to destroy life. Salvation comes in the world working together to deploy its gifts to meet and overcome the things that disrupt us.

- Like a pandemic.
- Like an earthquake or cyclonic winds.

Salvation comes in the form of a baby boy born in a cattle shed. A baby so powerful that the authorities could not destroy Him. This baby keeps calling to us to stay awake to “Read the Signs.” All the innocent victims are connected whether they be from violence or from a disease. There is no need for collateral damage.

We need to stay awake to proclaim that Baby and the message of hope in the middle of disaster, drought, pandemic or whatever else comes our way.

HYMN 28 God is our strength and refuge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYkYJ4LJR8k>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Receive this offering, gracious God,
as a sign of our faithfulness
and an expression of our love for you. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Roz Denniss)

2020 CHRISTMAS CAROL.

While listening to ABC Classic FM I heard about a new Australian Christmas Carol – “Christmas with You” written by an Aboriginal lady – Deborah Cheetham. She wrote a carol for 2020 – the year of loss and separation around the world – the longing to be with those we love.

These are the words of the first verse.

“Can you find your way home Christmas Night?

There is a star to guide you

It shines with the light I hold in my heart

O can you find your home Christmas Night”

As an illustration Deanne Gilson has produced aboriginal artwork depicting the Morning Star – when the star is overhead it is said to bring news and hope of the cycle of life, death and new beginnings. We Christians can add the story of the Light from the Star bringing worshippers to the infant Jesus – God’s Son.

This carol is to be sung by an Inaugural Classic Choir – it has online rehearsals for anyone wishing to sing – when the singer is ready he or she must submit a video of singing the Carol – every video will be included in the final film – ready for Christmas.

“From the toughest adversity we create finest beauty .”

Why do we sing? – It’s the core of our being used in communication and ceremonies throughout human history.

Singing has marvellous benefits for body mind and spirit. Participants in choirs speak of a “wonderful feeling” surrounded by and connected to others – it reduces stress, anxiety and depression.

Singers get a hit of body chemicals which support better mental health and immune function.

Research in Sweden showed that when choristers began to sing their heart rates slowed and blood pressure lowered – then their heartbeats became synchronised. In some churches prayers and psalms are sung or chanted.

Let us read the Lord’s Prayer together now as a song in our hearts.

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.

We will now continue with the prayer of the people.

Our God help our humble efforts to communicate with you and one another.

Help us to understand the needs of others as we expect them to understand our needs.

We bring before you each individual gathered before You this morning.

You are perfect – all knowing – all loving.

We are a mixture of human frailties.

Some are aging and suffer aches, pains and discomfort and need Your strength.

Some are sick and need Your healing.

Some are alone and need Your company.

Some are confused and need Your clarity of mind.

Some are lost and need Your guidance.

Some are busy and need Your skills.

Some are tired and need Your energy.

Some are misunderstood and need Your understanding.

Some are sad and depressed and need Your joy.

Some are frustrated and need Your peace.

Some feel forgotten and need Your love.

Some feel fear and inadequacy and need Your confidence.

Some feel doubt and need a strong faith.

Yet, Lord, together we are filled with joy, peace, love, gratitude, strength, faith and enthusiasm.

We pray for the preparations being made for Christmas 2020 in a confused and devastated world.

We in Australia have been so blessed that we pray we might be prepared and careful as we travel through the unknown.

As well as the pandemic and the illness and death resulting – there is huge unrest in the world with demonstrations and violence – breaking out – wars and rumours of wars.

There are mass movements of refugees escaping the horrors of wars and extreme poverty – we pray for those suffering.

We thank You that we are here together and ask that Your Spirit will fill our hearts and minds and guide us in Your love forever Amen.

HYMN 315 Mine eyes have seen the glory

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maty13s_db4

BENEDICTION

People of God,

let us wait with an enduring faith

for the day of the Lord.

May we be willing to serve without restraint

in humility and love.

May the God of justice be honoured in our service,

may Christ's blessing keep us equipped for his mission,

and may the presence of the Spirit keep us strong,

this day and forevermore. Amen.