

Worship at Home 13 December 2020 – 3rd Sunday in Advent

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Marilyn Britt

We are using resources from Sara and Sam Hargreaves of Engage Worship. We are continuing our time of waiting for the King. The time is passing slowly holding us in suspense for the coming and we have to be actively patient as we wait with hope-filled expectation.

INTRODUCTORY POEM ¹

A secret seed is rich with promised fruit, for seeds are buried when it's time to grow.
This life begins with one seed, tiny, mute, like treasure in a field, like yeast in dough,
a secret seed is rich with promised fruit.
We wait in darkness, wait in earth, below, seek out the signs of life in root and shoot:
A secret seed is rich with promised fruit, for seeds are buried when it's time to grow.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE ¹ [To join in click here](#)

The third candle in our crown, like John the Baptist lights the way,
Preparing for Jesus coming soon, In ancient times just like today.
Jesus help us make way for You; **O come, O come Emmanuel.**
In words and acts and in our lives. **O come, O come Emmanuel.**

HYMN Songs of Fellowship 83 ² [To join in click here](#)

Emmanuel, Emmanuel,
His Name is called, Emmanuel.
God with us, revealed in us,
His Name is called, Emmanuel.

PRAYER OF ADORATION/CONFESSION

Emmanuel. God of hope and welcome, I praise You for the season of Advent: a time of preparation, thanksgiving, challenge and hope-filled expectation of Your coming. Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David longed for You to send a Messiah and You sent Your Son, Jesus.

I, like those before me have my longings too, and I know some are waiting for answers to prayer. It is time now to examine my life, search my heart, and explore Your word. I praise You for Your constant love and care, and as I share Your good news, ask that others will come to know You.

Forgive me that I so easily lose sight of the message of Advent distracting me from the awe and wonder of You. Forgive me that I lose my sense of expectation, content to settle for things as they are and failing to believe You can change my life and transform my world. I wait with faith that You will come in Your time and I wait with hope-filled expectation. Amen.

READING Isaiah 35: 1- 2 ³

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God

During winter time, the natural world experiences a period of waiting. The leaves have fallen, the flowers are gone, things look grey and bare. We know that there are seeds planted in the ground hidden and dormant, but you might look out at the garden or at the flower beds in the park and wonder whether the colour and life of Spring will ever return. At this time of year, gifts of fruit or jam and chutney are often received. Have you thought of the original grower and the sowing of the seed and the care needed for it to arrive for you? Have you ever waited a long time for something – a parcel or job, some news or something else and at the end of your waiting when it finally came it turned out to be something different from what you expected? Maybe you were surprised, even disappointed, that it didn't seem to live up to all that you had hoped. Some of us have waited on God – for an answer to prayer or to fulfil our dream. Perhaps you have been disappointed with God, if those things haven't come or haven't lived up to your expectations. It is important that, rather than ignoring our struggles, we bring them to God. God can handle us being honest with him about how we feel.

HYMN - STF182 and H+P 84 [To join in click here](#)

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| 1. On Jordon's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings! | 4. Stretch forth Thine hand to heal our sore
and make us rise to fall no more;
once more upon Thy people shine
and fill the world with love divine. |
| 2. Then cleansed be every Christian breast;
and furnished for so great a guest!
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there. | 5. All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
whose advent sets Thy people free,
whom, with the Father, we adore
and Spirit blest, for evermore. |
| 3. For Thou art our salvation Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward;
without Thy grace our souls must fade
and wither like a flower decayed. | John Chandler (1806-1876) |

READING: Matthew 11: 2-3³

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

REFLECTION

John the Baptist is often someone we think about during Advent, because he also proclaimed the coming of Jesus. Isaiah 35: 3-6³

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.' Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

John's disappointment

John would have been well aware of the promises from Isaiah about the coming Messiah. Put yourself in the place of John the Baptist for a moment. You've proclaimed the coming Kingdom of judgement and fire. You've criticised the "powers that be" and called them to repentance and radical life-change.

You've seen Jesus baptised, sent out by the Spirit, and your hopes are well and truly set on him being the fulfilment of hundreds of years of waiting. But then, suddenly, you're thrown in jail. And Jesus, although brilliant, isn't quite doing all the things you expected him to. The Romans are still in power. Corrupt priests and teachers are still in charge of the temple. The vengeance and divine retribution promised by Isaiah is not yet in evidence. Where's the judgement and fire you said was coming (Matt 3: 7,11)? Matthew's gospel reports this. John seems confused, even disappointed. This wasn't quite the glorious future he had imagined. Perhaps we can empathise with him in the areas where we've felt disappointed or discouraged. We should follow John's example of being honest with God about our disappointments - asking questions, lamenting difficult experiences, handing them over to Jesus. We see in this passage that Jesus is big enough to deal with our sadness and confusion.

A Surprising Kingdom

To understand what is going on with John, we can think back to the themes we've already explored in the past weeks. One is that Jesus is a different kind of King to the one everyone expected. His Kingdom is not about power and might, but love and self-sacrifice. His victory doesn't come with swords and chariots, instead it lifts up the poor and sick and vulnerable. He doesn't force or coerce people to follow him, instead he reveals the heart of God to them and invites them to freely choose him as their Lord.

So Jesus responds to John:

Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. (Matthew 11: 4-5) ³

These are all fulfilments of Isaiah's prophesy. They are beautiful, remarkable acts of kindness and justice. They are not, however, the judgement and victory over their enemies that Israel had hoped for. This is not the goal that John had pictured, and he begins to doubt if Jesus is the Messiah after all.

John has his mind so fixed on his idea of the destination that he is missing the journey. He imagined a future of judgement and justice which has not yet arrived, and he is allowing this to distract him from the signs of the Kingdom of God which Jesus is already displaying. Like John, we need to allow God to meet us in our waiting, to see how he is bringing his Kingdom around us even though we've not yet reached our final destination.

A Two-Stage Process

The second reason why John was disappointed is that he failed to see the two-stage process of what God was doing in Jesus. We spoke during the last two weeks about the "now and not yet" of God's coming Kingdom. The promises of the Old Testament appear to say that in one decisive moment God would establish his Kingdom, judge wrongdoing, and put everything right. However, in practice it seems this plan has been split into two stages:

Stage One - Jesus, the Messiah is born to the world. He kicks-off the Kingdom of God on earth, bringing healing and truth and love. He dies to restore all of creation to God, and rises again the victorious King of the world. His resurrection body is like the first shoots of new life and growth coming out of the barren winter soil - a promise and a model of the new life which will come for all of creation.

Stage Two - God will complete the work he began in Jesus. The judgement of sin and injustice; the cleansing of heaven and earth; the putting right of all things - these promises have not yet been realised in their fullness.

The New Testament writers make it clear that we live in between Stage One and Stage Two, and that we are to wait with patience and hope for Stage Two to arrive.

Seeds of the Kingdom

In his letter, James uses an image of seeds planted in the ground to help us with this:

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. James 5: 7-8 ³

God has shown us the seeds of his Kingdom. We've seen glimpses of the new life that came with Jesus, and hope for the restoration of all of God's creation. But right now, most of our seeds are still in the ground, and we won't see the fullness of the crop until Jesus returns. So God calls us to be faithful farmers - imitating Jesus wherever we find ourselves: using our gifts, caring for the sick, reaching out to the lonely, tending God's planet, proclaiming the good news - and trusting in that glorious day when the fullness of the harvest will come, and our disappointment will be no more.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again; help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

We look at our world, so desperately in need of you. Deserts spread, harvests fail and people thirst. We bring to you those who suffer with droughts and famines, that you would provide for their needs. And we pray for those who work for environmental justice, who battle for a better stewardship of your creation.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again; help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

We look at our world, so desperately in need of you. Nations act selfishly, injustices deepen and people suffer with anxiety and depression. We bring to those who suffer from fear and anxiety, that you would bring healing to their souls. And we pray for those who work to strengthen the fearful, the therapists, social workers, counsellors and pastors.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again; help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

We look at our world, so desperately in need of you. Illness cripples potential, causing pain and suffering. We bring you those we know personally who are ill at this time, that you will bring healing to their bodies. And we pray for those who work tirelessly to care for those in physical need: the personal assistants, the nurses, the doctors and the medical missionaries.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come,

and you will come again; help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.

Lord Jesus we see in the gospels how you fulfil Isaiah's prophecies, and we hunger for those promises to be complete. As we wait for your return, help us be your hands and feet on earth.

We proclaim that Jesus, you have come, **and you will come again; help us work for the justice of your Kingdom.** In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Let us share in the LORD'S PRAYER together

HYMN: STF 188 [To join in click here - 3 verses only](#)

There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the Spring,
When our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;
Weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long;
But his triumph day is breaking and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;
And the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer;
For the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way;
He is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day:
But his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above
For the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark we hear the distant music, and it comes with fuller swell;
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel:
Zion, go now forth to meet him: and, my soul be swift to bring
All your finest and your noblest for the triumph of our King!

Henry Burton (1840-1930)

SENDING OUT PRAYER ¹

To have faith that the waiting seeds will bear fruit. **Send us out Lord**
To trust You through our disappointments. **Send us out Lord**
To take joy in the journey rather than rush towards the destination. **Send us out Lord**
To live with the tension of the now and the not yet. **Send us out Lord**
To be patient and stand firm, because Your coming is near. **Amen**

Blessing

In our waiting for His coming, the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will be with us today and always. Amen.

Acknowledgements

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