

Traditional Home service

Sunday 27th November

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

*Almighty God, long-suffering and of great goodness: I confess to you, I confess with my whole heart my neglect and forgetfulness of your commandments, my wrong doing, thinking, and speaking; the hurts I have done to others, and the good I have left undone.
O God, forgive me, for I have sinned against you; and raise me to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus)

READINGS - Isaiah 2.1-5
Romans 13.11-14
Matthew 24.36-44

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his 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.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (O Come, O Come, Emmanuel)

CONCLUSION

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

2. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.

Refrain

3 O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

5 O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain

6 O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light.

Refrain

7 O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace.

Refrain

Sermon - Adrian Morton

Romans 13:11-14 & Matthew 24:36-44

Advent - Living with Hope and keeping awake!

Its Advent Sunday today!

Advent is a season whereby we focus on the future second coming of Jesus.

That is what both our readings draw our attention to.

And actually the next chapter of Matthew continues the theme.

Its about the end times...

When Jesus comes again, the final judgment and the world as we know it will be wrapped up.

And God will bring into existence a new heaven and a new earth.

With God's people vindicated and glorified..

Its big cosmic stuff...!

Advent also marks the beginning of the church year.

Does anyone know why the church year starts with the end?

We start the church year looking at the end of the story if you like?

<Talk about Bishop Donald at the clergy conference...>

He made a good point...

The Christian life is primarily about the future.

That is our context.

We will live forever, we will be fully glorified...

That is the context of our lives.

That there is a place reserved for me in glory, in heaven.

The resurrection of Jesus creates that reality.

That is God's promise over our lives.

That's the Hope we have and we live with that Hope.

Our context is the future.

So everything we do as Christians points to that reality

It doesn't mean this present life is unimportant, or that it doesn't matter.

And we'll get on to that shortly.

I'm not advocating being too spiritually minded to be any earthly good.

But its just that our context is future rather than past, or present.

So everything we do as Christians should be framed by that reality, that promise of God.

It should inform all we do as a church.

<Wollaston - Whether that is Youth work on Monday, Toddler group on Tuesday, Coffee & Chat on Wednesday, or Film nights on Friday..>

<Bozeat - Whether that is the Winter Fayre yesterday, Little Connections, Coffee mornings..

Whatever we do should be done in the context of the future.

That we will live forever.

We want others to know and experience the Hope we have.

Those who come to... etc etc

The activities and events we do as church can't just be about social gatherings.

Or, heaven forbid, about maintaining an ancient building.

Our ancient buildings aren't going to last...

That's what Jesus said anyway!

Living with this kind of future Hope should mean that any suffering we undergo in this life.

We know, compared to the Hope we have, any suffering will be short lived.

Temporary.

It will pass...

And I don't want to minimise suffering.

And I'm certainly not saying we shouldn't try and alleviate suffering where we can.

But it needs to be seen in the context of the future.

The future reality, for those in Christ, is that we will live forever.

<Talk about missionaries who took their families and coffins... they knew their security, they knew their context was future

<P>

OK, both these readings this morning stress the need to be awake.

Because we don't know when the end times will come.

The Matthew reading compares it to Noah and the flood.

The Romans passage just says our salvation is nearer now...

Both though stress the need to be awake, to be alert.

I said that our present life is important.

Of course it is... we need to keep spiritually awake.

And I want to talk briefly about two ways that will help us do that.

They are two things to avoid, and both come in the Romans reading.

The NIV version of Romans 13:11 simply says this:

understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

The Message version of the whole of our Romans passage is this:

make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

So to concentrate on v11:

make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God.

If we are to keep awake, we need to avoid being distracted by the world.

This is a danger when we are younger.

I hear many stories of people who used to engage with church.

But when they went off to university they drifted away.

And I think there are so many pressures during that stage of life.

Late teens to early adulthood.

We start our careers, we maybe meet someone we want to spend the rest of our life with.

We maybe buy our first house, if we are lucky!

Children come along...

And gradually we get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all the day to day obligations that we lose track of time and doze off, oblivious to God.

And its not that those things are wrong or even unimportant.

It can be God's gift to us to start a career, to embark on a serious relationship, to set up a home..

None of that is wrong of course.

But it all has the potential to become too big in our lives.

I think it was what Jesus was talking about when he gave us the parable of the sower:

He said of the seed that fell among thorns.. this is the one who hears the word but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Its a danger of course not just for younger people.

But whatever stage of life you are at.

We allow the world to distract us.

We start to focus too much on the here and now, on things that don't last, that won't endure.

And it sends us to sleep spiritually speaking.

So avoiding being distracted by the world will keep us awake.

The second thing to avoid also comes from this Romans reading.

I'll go back to the NIV version which Becks read to us.

Let us put aside the deeds of darkness...

Let us behave decently... and lists a few things.

And v14 says:

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, **and** do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Or the flesh.

So we need to avoid sin in order to keep awake.

Sin will send us to sleep spiritually.

I love the Message version of Psalm 26 which exhorts God to examine us. It says:

"Make sure I'm fit inside and out so I never lose sight of your love."

Gratifying the desires of the sinful nature, or flesh, will mean we will lose sight of His love.

None of us want that, I would suggest!

So how do we do that?

How do we "clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

This is what I spoke about when I last spoke here.

And I want to repeat that teaching...

Last time I spoke I talked about seeing ourselves as composed of spirit, soul and body.

Our spirit contains our intuition and conscience.

Our souls our mind, will and emotions.

Our bodies interface with the world via our sense.

When we are born again, God's Holy Spirit breathes life into our spirit and takes up residence within us.

The Holy Spirit will communicate with our spirit and we learn to live and walk by the Spirit.

The issue though is that we have lived a life used to being governed, directed by our souls and bodies.

That is what the Bible calls our sinful nature, or flesh.

That part of our souls and bodies that still wants to govern us.

Rather than our spirit's governing us.

For those who were here, if you remember, I said it's helpful to view sin as something external from us.

And whilst we are no longer enslaved by sin.

Because the cross means its power has been broken.

Whilst we are no longer enslaved by sin, sin still exists and will still try and exert influence over us.

Primarily through our bodies.

So from what we see, or taste, or hear for example...

<e.g. lust...>

Paul in Romans (particularly ch 6 and 7) has been talking about how we can not let sinful desires, our flesh, control our lives.

And simply put, he gives two ways:

Firstly, to know that the cross and our being united with Christ in His death and resurrection, means the power of sin has been broken.

We are no longer enslaved by sin.

That is our position.

That is how God sees us.

Even if that doesn't feel like it.

It's a faith position we have to take.

Then Paul says, "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God."

This is an ongoing, daily requirement.

Applying the cross to each time sin tries to exert influence.

<Talk about lust...>

Knowing our position, we are no longer enslaved by sin.

Counting ourselves dead to sin.

Exercising those beliefs are what it means to 'clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ is keeping what Jesus has done on the cross near to us.

That Romans verse then says, "**and** do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

Now what I think can happen is that we can almost cross a line whereby it is really difficult to stop this cycle of bad thinking and feeling.

In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul says "*take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*"

Lets take another example...

Say you struggle with anxiety...

Your mind is full of fear about what might happen or not happen.

It maybe about your children, or your health, your future, whatever..

And because you are fearful, you experience anxiety in your emotions.

Which in turns fuels your bad thinking, and you find yourself in a cycle of negative thinking and feeling.

How do we take captive every thought?

We need to recognise that our minds have taken over and we are now slaves to our minds.

So we have to be intentional and tell our minds to think differently.

We can do that! We have power to do that.

In Philipians it says "*whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is*

excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."

Even if you can't think of anything super spiritual.

Think about something good and positive.

Start thinking about a nice holiday you went on.

Just anything to change the cycle of thoughts.

But you need to know that when you start to change your thinking, your feelings of anxiety won't change straight away.

You will still feel anxious for a while.

Because your feelings lag behind your thinking.

So you may have to force yourself to think about something else for 30mins.

Maybe even an hour.

Until your feelings catch up...

But you will break out of the negative cycle of wrongful thinking.

<P>

So as we start this season of Advent...

Be reminded that we live our lives in the context of future.

We will live for ever and be fully glorified.

That is our inheritance and God's promise over our lives.

The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that reality.

And as we continue to live in the in between times.

Of knowing our salvation and waiting for it to be fully completed.

When Jesus comes again.

Let us keep awake spiritually.

Avoiding the distractions of the world.

And avoiding the distraction of sinful desires.

Amen!