

Traditional Home service

Sunday 11th December

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:

Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you. We are not worthy to be called your children. We turn to you again. Have mercy on us, bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead but now have life through 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 (Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord!)

READINGS - Isaiah 35.1-10
James 5.7-10
Matthew 11.2-11

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 For a Thousand Tongues to Sing)

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 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of His Word;
In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His name!
Make known His might, the deeds His arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy Name, the Lord, the mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight;
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of His Word!
Firm is His promise, and His mercy sure.
Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and forevermore

1 O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

2 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread thro' all the earth abroad
the honors of your name.

3 Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease,
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life and health and peace.

4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.

5 To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever given
by saints below and saints above,
the Church in earth and heaven

Sermon - Peter Smethurst
Isaiah 35.1-10; James 5.7-10;
Matthew 11.2-11 **Advent week 3**

As I read and reread the lectionary readings for the third week of Advent, I found my thinking about this season shifting and developing. Whenever we read the Bible with serious intent – looking for answers - the Word of God interacts with us. As we think and meditate on what we are reading we can often find our minds being changed, which in turn can lead to a transformation of our lives.

I used to think that there were two advents. The first was the long-anticipated arrival of the Messiah starting in Genesis straight after the devil conned Adam and Eve out of their dominion over the Earth when God told the serpent that one of Eve's descendants would one day crush his head.

There then followed all the prophecies about the Messiah over hundreds of years culminating in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The second advent identified in the New Testament finds its roots in the prophecies of Jesus himself when he talked about when he would return to the earth in glory at the end of this age.

I now think that there is an advent in between these two spectacular events that takes place in the heart of every believer from the moment that he or she decides to put their trust for salvation in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

The passage in Matthew's Gospel is an important insight into the doubts that can so easily attack the mind of a believer.

John the Baptist's role was to proclaim the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah. John was hand-picked by God for this role and was filled with the Holy Spirit when he was in Elizabeth's womb.

When John was baptising at the Jordan and saw Jesus he proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world and when he baptised Jesus he heard God's audible voice proclaiming that Jesus was His beloved son, in whom He was well pleased.

John's job description was to point people towards the Messiah and he pointed them to Jesus.

After Jesus had been baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit he started his public ministry by proclaiming himself to be the Messiah when he went into the synagogue at Nazareth and claiming to fulfil the prophecy after he read from the scroll of Isaiah:

Luke 4:17-21 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18-19 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

In today's passage John is in prison and can only hear about what Jesus has been doing. He will have heard that part of Jesus's job description was **to give freedom to prisoners** and John is wondering whether he might be one of those who will be freed from prison so he sends his disciples to Jesus with the question that Jesus doesn't answer: **"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"**

God Himself had revealed to John who Jesus was but because of his imprisonment he could not see for himself what Jesus was doing and he had started to doubt what he had known was true.

Jesus sends John's friends back with a progress report: **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.** Jesus was fulfilling all the prophecies!

Jesus also told John: **"Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."** Other translations say **"is not offended"** or who **"falls away"** because of Jesus.

The Truth of Jesus - of who He is, is fundamental – to everything. He is the rock

on which we are to build our lives, and if everything is not going as we think it should this does not change the Truth of who Jesus is and what He says. It is when we know and trust in the Truth of Jesus' words that we become free. His Good News enables us to see, to hear, to walk with Him and ultimately to be raised from death.

Like John we cannot see everything that is going on. We have to trust in Jesus.

This is why Paul wrote the 28th verse of his letter to the Romans: **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.**

There is a bigger picture that most of us will never see in our time on earth, which is why there are so many scriptures telling us to have faith in God – to trust in the finished work of Jesus.

John struggled with this when he was in prison and St James' flock also suffered from persecution when he wrote his letter to them.

At the beginning of his letter James calls for patience in trials, tribulation, difficulties, and dangers, because this results in a firm, precious, and perfected faith which cannot be shaken by doubt or fear.

The patience about which James is speaking produces a life that honours the Lord in thought, word, and deed - through good works and godly living. It is demonstrated by one who believes God's Word and applies it in every area of life.

In today's passage James starts to bring his letter to a close with this encouragement:

"be patient until the coming of the Lord. Be patient like the farmer who waits for the precious produce of the soil and remains patient until the field receives the early and late rains."

Not only should we be patient every day of our earthly lives, planting prayers and good deeds like seeds, but we are to keep it up to the very end of our life **"until the coming of the Lord!"**

John the Baptist must have suspected that his life on earth was not going to be long and Jesus did not want this great prophet to stumble at the end. But Jesus went on to say:

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We have a blessed hope in Christ and a promise of eternal reward and our eyes should be fixed on Jesus. We have many precious promises that are 'yes' and 'amen' in Christ, and He has promised to come back to take us to be with Himself forever, and James exhorts each one of us to **"be patient until the coming of the Lord."**

Only God sees the bigger picture. So, trust in Him and enjoy your own personal Advent.