

Sunday 28 November 2021
Advent Sunday
Led by Michaela McNeill, ALM



Greeting

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn - O Come, O Come Emmanuel

- 1 O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

- 2 O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Refrain

3 O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Refrain

4 O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Refrain

5 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Refrain

Prayer of Penitence

Christ the Light of the world has come to dispel the darkness of our hearts. In his light let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves,
in your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;**

that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.

Meditation

We will now concentrate on these words from Psalm 25

- ¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
my God, in you I trust;
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies triumph over me.
- ² **Let none who look to you be put to shame,
but let the treacherous be shamed and frustrated.**
- ³ Make me to know your ways, O Lord,
and teach me your paths.
- ⁴ **Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you have I hoped all the day long.**
- ⁵ Remember, Lord, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.
- ⁶ **Remember not the sins of my youth
or my transgressions,
but think on me in your goodness, O Lord,
according to your steadfast love.**
- ⁷ Gracious and upright is the Lord;
therefore shall he teach sinners in the way.
- ⁸ **He will guide the humble in doing right
and teach his way to the lowly.**
- ⁹ All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Bible readings read by David Mackenzie

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ 'There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud" with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'

³⁴ 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

Sermon recorded by David Newton

On the left we have the doomsayers. This group proclaims in apocalyptic terms that the end of the world really is nigh, unless and until we take unprecedented and immediate action. COP 26 has been an unmitigated disaster. Huge population movements, shortages of accessible and clean drinking water, and disruptions in food supply are almost guaranteed to break out in warfare. Nations are utterly confused. 'People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world for the powers of the heavens will be shaken'.

On the right we have the blunderbusses. This group keeps thinking positive. Optimism will get us out of this mess. Technological solutions that are still pipedreams will be the answer we can count on. We can take this present moment and with it turn a corner into a new world of prosperity and hope, where wastelands become oases once more, and we walk into a cleaner, healthier and happier future.

I am not wanting to take sides between these two starkly different approaches to the problems before us. Instead, I simply want to point out the quite jarring opposition between this morning's two passages.

Jeremiah – despite usually being the prophet of doom and misery – in the chapters from which we just heard an extract, is the bringer of good news of great joy. Healing, plans to prosper, well-watered pasture from a wasteland, peace are all prophesied. The days are surely coming when 'Jerusalem will live in safety'.

Then we have Jesus. We heard the end of a long passage that begins by prophesying the destruction of the Temple, and then goes on to speak of wars, and famines and plagues, of hatred, distress and confusion.

So, which is it? Which future are we to look to as we sing the Advent Refrain: Maranatha (Come Lord Jesus)?

There is no easy answer to that – the Christian Faith is full of promises of hope and judgement, of things getting worse and of

restoration and renewal. But let's try and make some sense of these alternative visions of the future, that might perhaps give us some bearing on where we should place ourselves in the contemporary concerns of our day as well.

The most important thing to say is that we need both of these visions. If all we had was a vision of chewing hay in the rosy pastures of tomorrow, dancing round some utopian totem pole then we would be utterly lost. Robust action seeking justice would be forestalled by the inevitability of a brighter tomorrow. We would sleepwalk into the future, and so it would never measure up to the optimism of the present.

Equally, if all we had was apocalyptic visions then we would quickly become people of despair. And the Climate Anxiety affecting the younger generations perhaps suggest that any hope for their future is beginning to slide into nihilistic despair. We need the hopes of Jeremiah to be rekindled.

Only by holding out both possibilities, both readings of a future which is still *open*, still *undetermined*, are we spurred to action, to seek justice and seek a better world.

Prophecies are not designed to 'tell the future', so much as open up imaginative horizons today and so make possible certain ways of living and acting NOW. Without hope we would be immobilized. Without a pessimistic reality-shock we might end up in fantasy land (which usually and ironically only leads to a future even more tragic than the present).

We need both visions – together they help us act with hope and realism.

And both visions find greatest clarity in the person of Jesus. In his crucifixion we are presented with both tragedy and unfailing hope. On the cross we see the worst of humanity, we see the tragic reality of creatures – crucifying God, rejecting the creator. Here is a picture of total despair. What hope is there for us if this is what we do to Love? What future is open to human beings who act like this?

Yet the cross is also our hope. In the picture of the Crucified God is the promise of restoration and renewal, even resurrection. Even this cannot diminish the life of God, even this cannot extinguish the light of God. Here is the turning point of history, where God breathes in all the cruelty and idolatry of his creatures and breathes out redemption and wholeness and life for them. We stare at a crucifix and see both of these visions in one moment – here is despair because of our sin; here is hope because of the unfailing Love and Power of God. Here is both, all hanging together at the cross.

And then the final thing to say is this: whilst we need both visions of the future, they are not equal.

As far as tomorrow goes they *do* in fact hang in the balance. Both Jeremiah and Jesus appear to just be thinking about tomorrow, about what is around the corner in the course of history. We cannot guarantee tomorrow, we must look at it with both pessimistic reality and with hope, and let the combination spur us all to action.

But even if they are equal as far as tomorrow goes, they are not, in the end, equally balanced possible futures. In the end – whatever we might quite mean by that – the cross and the resurrection show us that restoration, healing and wholeness are our destiny. The door of hope is always held open, it can never ever be shut. That is what the resurrection both reveals and makes true.

And it is with that hope – no matter what tomorrow might bring – that we cry, ‘Maranatha: Come Lord Jesus’ and utter those words as a spur to action as well. Amen.

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.

Intercessions by Fiona Whelan

Lord of all hopefulness, this morning we bring before you our hopes and fears. We think of Mary and Joseph setting out on their arduous journey to Bethlem and of all those setting out on difficult journeys throughout the world in the hope of a safer future for themselves and their families. Guide them with your loving light as they travel in the darkness of fear.
Lord of all hopefulness, **hear our prayers**

Lord of all hopefulness we pray for those who see no light in their lives, who are lonely and struggling as they create their new lives in a foreign city or country and we pray for all those who have failed to reach their destination safely. This morning we pray especially for all those desperate families that have made the

channel crossing in unsafe boats and have not survived. In silence now we pray for all those seeking to make these journeys – that they may have a safe arrival and acceptance. Father may solutions be found and peace and stability be returned to the places they are having to flee.

Lord of all hopefulness, **hear our prayers**

Lord of all hopefulness we pray for all the many services struggling to provide for people in these difficult times. The RNLI, the coastguards, the local authorities, the health services, the professionals and family and friends caring for those in need. For those seeking to raise funds to support many, many good causes. For all those who are tired and weary after these long and difficult months we pray for your light and love to strengthen them in their work. And we pray now in silence for your wisdom to show us how we may help those in need.

Silence is kept

Lord of all hopefulness, **hear our prayers**

Lord of all hopefulness, guide us as we travel through this period of interregnum. May your light call people to apply to join the Lordsbridge Team and may your wisdom guide those seeking to make an appointment. May your strength support all those who help us to worship in ever more creative ways during these difficult times.

Lord of all hopefulness, **hear our prayers**

Lord of all hopefulness, we pray for peace and stability in these uncertain times. We pray that your wisdom will guide our politicians locally, nationally and internationally and that you will lighten their hearts and direct their minds to make the right decisions for those they represent. May we remember what a

joyful event Advent leads us to – that You so loved the world You gave Your only son. May we seek to selflessly reflect Your love for us in our interactions with all.

Lord of all hopefulness, **hear our prayers**

Lord of all hopefulness, as we celebrate the miracle of Christmas, we pray for all those who find it a difficult or painful time. For families divided by circumstance this year. For those who are lonely. For those worrying about how to pay for things. May we remember the true meaning of Christmas. The simplicity of the birth of Christ in a stable. The meaning of Your love us and ours for one another.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen

Collect

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.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:
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 - Longing for light, we wait in darkness

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

*Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.
Make us your living voice.
Chorus

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.
Chorus

4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stones.

Chorus

5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Chorus

Conclusion

Our Lord says, I am coming soon
Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

May the Lord, when he comes, find us watching and waiting.
Amen.