

Worship November 29, 2020

Welcome

I welcome you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Well friends, how was your Thanksgiving. As Rod and I dined alone yesterday I reminded myself this year was not right or wrong but simply different and that was ok. I hope you can say the same.

Today is the first Sunday of the church year, did you know that. Today begins the four-week season of advent. Advent is a time to prepare for the coming of our Savior. We celebrate His birth at the close of the Advent season and then we continue to prepare for the second coming – a date and time we do not know.

Each Sunday of Advent we display an Advent Wreath, and we light Advent Candles. Lindsay Sigstad, a confirmation student, will begin to build our manger scene and she and her family will provide our opening.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, as we begin this season of Advent remind us again that in the midst of our darkness you are bringing us peace to calm our anxious spirits and hectic lives. Turn our hearts again toward you. Make us ready to receive your Son our Savior. Amen Author: Nancy Townley

Advent Wreath Candle Lighting

There are two segments to this observance of Advent. The first is "building the crèche" — adding characters each Sunday to the crèche scene. The second is lighting the candles of the Advent Wreath.

Reader 1 - Today we light the first Advent candle, the candle of hope.

Reader 2 - Let us pray.

Redeemer God, you are the one who gives us hope. As we wait, we know that you will bring justice and peace. As we wait, we find you have made your wisdom known in our lives. Come, Redeemer, come. Amen.

Reader 3 - The first Advent candle is the candle of hope. We remember the hopeful longing of people waiting for a savior. And we acknowledge our own hope that we, too, might be filled with the light of Christ.

Reader 4 - May the light of hope burn brightly in our hearts all our days.

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Hymn UMH #196 Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Scripture

Jeremiah 33: 14-15 CEB

¹⁴The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land.

Luke 21:25-33 CEB

²⁵"There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. ²⁶The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. ²⁷Then they will see the Human One coming on a cloud with power and great splendor. ²⁸Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near."

A lesson from the fig tree

²⁹Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that God's kingdom is near. ³²I assure you that this generation won't pass away until everything has happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.

Meditation

Prayer

"Slowing Down for Reflection"

Have you heard the saying "STAY ready so you won't have to GET ready." I've heard this saying and even used a version of this saying in reference to keeping a house neat and clean.

This saying is basically what today's scripture says--live your lives in such a way that you will be ready if Jesus should come today. In the Apostle's Creed we say, "I believe that he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Live your lives in such a way that you won't be caught off guard if that day would be today.

How do we do this in our busy 21st century lives when our days are full and overflowing with all kinds of obligations and responsibilities. How can we find time--or take time when everything seems to crowd out thoughts of the spiritual side of life to the point that we think of it as optional? After all we have to go to work, babysit the grandchildren, shop till we drop, and think about the bills and financial responsibilities. Maybe after the rush of the season there will be more time to concentrate on thinking about reading the Bible, praying, attending worship services. After all we do have other priorities too.

Another year is almost gone--the weeks fly by and yet we may not have our lives in order. A time for slowing down and reflecting never seems to come. And yet here we are, The First Sunday of Advent is a special time set aside in the Christian calendar to "Slow down for reflection." Just how prepared are you if Jesus should come today?" Would he break into your live unexpectedly? Would you be ready?

Let's take a look at today's scripture and see how it applies to our lives.

Today we have some fear about the uncertainty of World Events: People in Jesus' time were also fearful about the uncertainty of the times. And today's scripture begins sounding like it came right from this week's news headlines as well.

"Amazing things will happen to the sun, moon, and stars. On earth, nations will be afraid because of the roar and fury of the sea.]
²⁵ "There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. ²⁶The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.

Does that sound familiar? World leaders are not in agreement as to how to go about solving the problems related to the pandemic. People do not know if they feel safe in their own communities or in public places. People worry about the safety of their children and the elderly. There is a greater sense of fear lurking in our minds as we live with the coronavirus. Not only is there the pandemic but there continues to be overwhelming natural disasters in the form of hurricanes, floods, fires and other devastating events. Add fearfulness to the stresses of our already fast-paced lifestyle and we can identify with what Jesus was talking about in Luke. We might think, "What if it lands on my doorstep. What if...?"

Jesus is saying, "Well, WHAT IF..." "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near--the time when God will free you is near."

Jesus then went on to give an example that they could all understand. He said, "Look at the fig tree and other trees. When their leaves appear, you know that summer is near." It's the same way when the kingdom of God is getting near. Know that as you are waiting and looking forward to Christ's Second Advent that it will come in due time just like the First Advent. Once the sequence begins, it will be brought to completion. Jesus gives ASSURANCE concerning these events. He is not going to leave us in a state of fear and anxiety. He will bring us through to completion.

People will ask you, "Are you ready for Christmas?" Most of the time we say, "Not yet." "Still have more shopping to do. Still have more cookies to bake." Well, Christmas is coming whether or not you are ready. The days go by and the events unfold.

Jesus said he would come back, and these events have been unfolding throughout history. One day He will appear. We do not have to be fearful however, if we are ready. He does not leave us at the fear stage. He gives us instructions as to what we need to do.

We need to Be Ready: He says, "But be on your guard. Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties, and drinking, and shopping. Otherwise that day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring in on you suddenly like a trap, for it's going to come on everyone, everywhere at once. So whatever you do, stay alert. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through and end up on your feet before the Son of Man." (Message Bible).

Another bible translation says. "Be careful. Do not spend your time feasting and drinking or don't be too busy with worldly things. If you do that, you will not be able to think straight and then that day might come when you are not ready and it will close like a trap on all people on earth. SO BE READY ALL THE TIME.

Story of Wally: "The Call of the Barnyard"

(Author Unknown)

A flock of wild ducks were flying in formation, heading south for the Winter. They formed a beautiful "V" in the sky, and were admired by everyone who saw them from below.

One day, Wally, one of the wild ducks in the formation, spotted something on the ground that caught his eye. It was a barnyard with a flock of tame ducks who lived on the farm. They were waddling around on the ground, quacking merrily, and eating corn that was thrown on the ground for them every day.

Wally liked what he saw. "It sure would be nice to have some of that corn," he thought to himself. "And all this flying is very tiring. I'd like to just waddle around for a while." So after thinking it over a while, Wally left the formation of wild ducks, made a sharp dive to the left, and headed for the barn yard.

He landed among the tame ducks and began to waddle around and quack merrily. He also started eating corn. The formation of wild ducks continued their journey south, but Wally did not care. I will rejoin them when they come back this way in a few months, he said to himself.

Several months went by and sure enough, Wally looked up and spotted the flock of wild ducks in formation, heading north. They looked beautiful up there. And Wally was tired of the barn yard.

It was muddy and everywhere he waddled, nothing but duck-doo. "It's time to leave," said Wally. So Wally flapped his wings furiously and tried to get airborne. But he had gained some weight from all his corn eating, and he had not exercised his wings much either.

He finally got off the ground, but he was flying too low and slammed into the side of the barn. He fell to the ground with a thud and said to himself, "Oh well, I'll just wait until they fly South in a few months. Then I'll rejoin them and become a wild duck again."

But when the flock flew overhead once more, Wally again tried to lift himself out of the barn yard. He simply didn't have the strength. Every Winter and every Spring, he saw his wild duck friends flying overhead, and they would call out to him. But his attempts to leave were all in vain.

Eventually Wally no longer paid any attention to the wild ducks flying overhead. He hardly even noticed them. He had after all, become a barnyard duck.

Sometimes we get tired of being wild ducks . . . followers of Jesus Christ. It's not always easy to be obedient to God and to discipline ourselves to hang in there for the long haul. When we are feeling that way, that's when Satan tempts us to "fall out of formation" and to join the barnyard ducks . . . the world . . .

But see what happened to Wally. He thought he would just "check it out" for a while and then leave when he wanted to. But he couldn't do it. Sin is like that. Sin is a trap, and it has a way of changing us into people we don't even want to become.

Eventually, we lose touch with whom we really are . . . the sons and daughters of The Most High; We become barnyard ducks.

How Does Your Life Reflect verse 36?: that says "Stay alert at all times, praying that you are strong enough to escape everything that is about to happen and to stand before the Human One."

"So be ready all the time." You might say how can I live in such a way that I would be ready all the time. That does not seem possible. That seems overwhelming to me.

There is a saying that "You can eat an elephant one bite at a time." You say, "What in the world does that mean?" It simply means that as you slow down for reflection on this first Sunday of Advent you can make sure that you are forgiven of all known sin in your life today. You can root out the unforgiveness and bitterness that has crept in over the past weeks and months--things you were not even aware of. You can deal with your current priorities. Take a look at where you have gotten off track--where you have left Jesus behind. Go back and start over again. Get rid of the non-essential things that have moved into your life and that take up your valuable, productive time.

Be ready TODAY. Then move on to tomorrow. Serve him one step at a time. That is like "eating an elephant one bit at a time." It is not impossible anymore. As you slow down and pause for reflection, you can watch to assure sin does not get a foothold in your life. Watching and praying must go together.

Readiness: Get Ready

A mother was explaining, to her little girl, the death of her father. The mother said: "God has sent for your father and will send for us, but I do not know just when." Finally, the little girl said: "If we do not know just when God is going to send for us, do you not think we had better pack up and get ready to go? God might send for us when we are not ready."

Readiness: Clean When He Comes

A man visiting a certain school told the class that he would give a prize to the student whose desk he found in the best order when he returned. "But when will you return?" some of them asked. "I can't tell you that," was the answer. A little girl, who had been noted for her disorderly habits, announced that she meant to win the prize. "You!" her schoolmates jeered; "why, your desk is always messed up." "Oh! but I mean to clean it the first of every week." "But suppose he should come at the end of the week?" someone asked. "Then I will clean it every morning." "But he may come at the end of the day." For a moment the little girl was silent. "I know what I'll do," she said decidedly, "I'll just keep it clean." –McCartney

CONCLUSION: What will you do this week to become better at watching and praying? How will you live READY so that you won't have to GET READY? How will the assurance of Jesus help you to rise about the fearfulness of current events?

II Peter 3:14 in speaking about the coming of the Lord says, "Dear friends we are waiting for this to happen. So try as hard as you can to be without sin and without fault. Try to be at peace with God. Remember we are saved because our Lord is patient..."

Dear friends, you ALREADY KNOW about this. Be careful. Do not let evil take you down the wrong path. But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Glory be to him now and forever. Amen" (v.17)

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

O God, thank you for this new season of Advent that will lead us to a joyous Christmas celebration. We are filled with hope and expectation for the new ways that we will experience your presence throughout these next weeks.

Will we see you as we decorate the outdoor tree this afternoon.

Will we hear you in the music of our December 13 Hymn sing? Will we feel your presence as we hold up our candles on Christmas Eve? O God help us to not miss out on the many ways you are revealing yourself to us in this season of Advent. Help us to stay alert, to pray, and to not miss a thing!

You are present with us in the singing of "Silent Night," but you are also in our bringing of food items for the Kanabec County Food Pantry. Thank you for the opportunity to bless others through food donations.

During this time of year as we think about how you came to the world to be one with us, we lift our prayers for those who are suffering and in need. Help us to not exclude anyone from your unconditional and inclusive love.

We pray for Parisians and Pakistanis, for Refugees and Racists, for Christians and Muslims, for Politicians and Peacekeepers, for Bigots and Activists, for Blacks and for Whites, for Young and the Elderly, for News Reporters and Nigerians, for Americans and Iraqis, for Syrians and Israelis, for the Terrorized and the Terrorist, and for every single person or group that has been given a label, for we all belong to you, and your hope is meant for all the world.

We offer these prayers to you, knowing that your love is more than able to overcome evil with good, injustice with justice, and hatred with peace. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, we pray the words that He taught us to say together,

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

UMH #211 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (verses 1&2)

Offering

We are the work of God's hands the psalmist says, and God continues to shape us each day into a people of goodness and peace. That is why we bring gifts: to be part of creating a more beautiful world through the ministry of the church and the witness of our lives each day. Let us gather our gifts together and present them as an offering to God. Last week I said I was going to acknowledge our anniversary and my birthday by giving an offering equal to the number of years we have been married plus my age. This week I added \$108 to our weekly giving thanks to God for my life and my marriage.

Prayer of Dedication

Holy One, this Advent season we wait in hope.
And we give in hope.
Hope for your coming reign;
Hope because of your presence with us even now.
Receive these generous offerings,
And use them for your work of healing and hope in our world.
Amen.

Hymn UMH #202 People Look East (verses 1&4)

Benediction

Be people of hope.
Let hope live in your heart and share the hope of Christ with all you meet.
Share hope by noticing someone else's kindness.
Share hope by listening to someone's story.
Share hope by praying for our world.
In this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share hope.
As you go out into the wonder of God's creations, share hope with those you meet. Amen.

Announcements

- Tree decorating this afternoon 3-5 in the Mora church parking lot.
 - Bring a decoration to hang on the tree and join in the decorating celebration.
- Each Wed. between now and Christmas of the Mora Sanctuary will be open for personal prayer and communion
- Each Sunday between 9-9:30 the Ogilvie sanctuary will be open for personal prayer
- If you would like a hymnal and The Faith We Sing book call the church office and one will be delivered to you.
- A group of people have committed to pray for any/all concerns brought to them. Call Pastor Deb, 952-240-3836 or Ruth Smith, 763-302-9115