



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

ELW Holy Communion, Setting One

Stir up your power, and come! The psalmist's plea in Psalm 80:2 has become familiar to us in the Advent prayers. Isaiah wants God to rip the heavens open. Both cry out for an apparently distant, angry God to show up, to save, to restore. When we hear Jesus describing the coming of the Son of Man with stars falling from heaven, it can sound dire and horrible, not like anything we would ever hope for. But when we really look at the suffering of people God loves, we can share the hope that God would tear open the heavens and come.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BLESSING OF WORSHIP FURNISHINGS

Friends, today we give thanks to God and we ask for God's blessing upon these worship furnishings that we have put up for this new church year and Advent: this tree put up and decorated by Adele and Jean, this wreath put together by Elfriede, and this candle that reminds us even in this time of anticipation and hope, that Christ is with us now and always.

Let us pray.

We give you thanks, O God, creator of the universe,
for you have enriched our lives with every good and perfect gift;
you have revealed your beauty through creation
and your peace through our communities;
and you have invited us to praise you
with lives of love, grace, and joy.
And we especially give you thanks
for the transformation of our worship space,
that we are reminded of your presence,
the hope we have in you,
and your eternal light shining through
the darkness of the world, of this pandemic,
and in all the broken relationships between us, creation, and all living things.
May our faith be ignited with these candles.

May our spirits be illumed with this tree.

May we be reminded that you are our God, living with us, among us, and in us, filling us with the sure and certain hope in your redemption and salvation through Christ, at the time such as this and always.

Amen.

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

And so we praise you, O God, for this evergreen crown
that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent.

As we light the first candle on this wreath,
rouse us from sleep, and give us hope in you
that we might be ready to see and recognise Christ
when he comes with all the saints and angels.

Enlighten us with your grace,
and prepare our hearts to welcome him with joy.
Grant this through Christ our Lord,
whose coming is certain and whose day draws near.

Amen.

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240, verse 1)

GATHERING HYMN: Beneath the Tree Of Life (p. 3)

GREETING

May the inspiring grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the calming love of God, and the hopeful fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 4)

HYMN OF PRAISE (p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of power and might, if we had our way, we would have you tear open the heavens to enter our lives. We would have you quake the mountains, boil the oceans, and cause the stars to fall until the nations tremble at your presence!

But, in your own way, you come in the sound of silence. You enter in the stillness. You speak in the quiet. Born among us as an infant.

You show us how love is made perfect in weakness.

Keep us alert, that your face be not hidden from us but we see, recognise and proclaim your glory, living in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 64:1-9

A reading from Isaiah.

This lament comes from a people who have had their hopes shattered. The visions of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed people of God, spoken of in Isaiah 40–55, have not been realized. Instead, the people experience ruin, conflict, and famine. This lament calls God to account—to be the God who has brought deliverance in the past.

¹O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—

to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

³When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

⁴From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

⁵You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.

⁶We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

⁷There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;

for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

⁸Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

¹Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

²**In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
stir up your strength and come to help us.**

³Restore us, O God;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

⁴**O LORD God of hosts,
how long will your anger fume when your people pray?**

⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

⁶**You have made us the derision of our neighbours,
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.**

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

¹⁷**Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one you have made so strong for yourself.**

¹⁸And so will we never turn away from you;
give us life, that we may call upon your name.

¹⁹**Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.**

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

As the Christians in Corinth await the advent of Jesus, Paul reminds them how the Lord has already enriched them through spiritual gifts and will continue to strengthen them until the coming day of the Lord.

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: Mark 13:24-37

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.

[Jesus said:] ²⁴“In those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Gracious God, we know that your Word shall never pass away but shall stand forever. May we be attentive to it, so that by the power of your Spirit we might remember your teaching and do what is right, meeting you wherever and whenever you appear, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sure is getting dark out there, isn't it? I mean literally dark, not figuratively. Literally, it's dark by around 4pm. The kids are home from school, cleaned up, and fed, and I'm just sitting down at my desk to start my work day, and it's already dark. I have to turn the light on in my office so I could clearly see the backlit monitors of my computer. It's just crazy how early it gets dark. But that's winter for you, right? Well, winter as you move further away from the equator, that is. The days get shorter, and the nights get longer, and sometimes on those really rainy days, it

even feels like it is just perpetual darkness from morning to night. Cold, wet, perpetual darkness.

And it sucks.

But now that I think about it, it sure is getting figuratively dark out there too, isn't it? Like we know it is literally dark, but it is figuratively dark as well. Figuratively, it seems like the world is now capable of more evil, people aren't good like they were in the good ol' days, and it is harder and harder to watch the news because let's be honest, we're pretty fed up with this pandemic, the political state of our country and especially of our southern neighbours, and the angry and potentially violent crazies that so often get caught on camera.

But that's the world for you, right? Well, the world nowadays, that is. People are less moral, more evil, and sometimes it just feels like on those really bad days, it is just perpetual darkness. Evil, hopeless, perpetual darkness.

And it sucks.

We wonder if this is even it, is this how the world ends? I mean we have this plague of the coronavirus, we have nations against nations in some way or another, and the global climate is on the fritz. It's like all the boxes for the signs that point to the end of the world are being checked off. Or at least, all the signs that we read about in the apocalyptic literature we get in our bibles.

I mean, look at the gospel text we get for today, Jesus himself says, "the sun will be darkened (check), and the moon will not give its light (check), and the stars will be falling from heaven (sort of check, depending on how you define "stars"), and the powers in the heavens will be shaken (also check, depending on how you define the powers that be)." That is sort of 4 out of 4, right there.

And let's face it, somehow the world has this infatuation with its own end. People like hearing about the end-of-world predictions, watching end-of-world movies, and consuming all the documentaries and other media that talk about the world ending. Because like what we talked about last week, we just want to know. We want to be ready. We want to have a handle on it all so we can come out on top. Well, could this be it?

The thing is that we aren't the first ones to ask this question. We aren't the first to check off those boxes and cross off the items on the list and calculate just how dangerously close we are to meeting all the requirements. We aren't the first generation to think at the end is coming during our life time. In fact, every generation since Jesus said these words thought that, because he literally said "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place."

So what does all this mean? Is this it? Is the world doomed? Is it all ending?

To be blunt, yes. Yes, this is it. Yes, the world is doomed. Yes, it is all ending.

But at the same time, this isn't the first time that this was it. This isn't the first time when the world was doomed. This isn't the first time that everything came crashing down and it pointed to the end.

See, we get this kind of apocalyptic reading every 1st Sunday of Advent, regardless of what year it is. We get Jesus talking about the end in some shape or form. And somehow every year I'm still surprised and wondering how any of this has to do with Advent, with the upcoming Christmas season that Advent leads to, and especially the start of a new church year.

This year though, I noticed something that I never noticed before in this text for various reasons that I don't really want to get into. But this part that caught my eye is at the end, where Jesus says to keep awake because we don't know when the master will come. And then he gives options as to when that might be: in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn.

Hm.

You mean in the evening... like when he sat with his friends for a meal?

At midnight... like when he went to the garden to pray?

At cockcrow... like when he was denied 3 times?

Or at dawn... like when he was put on trial, mocked, and led out to be executed?

See, the world has ended already, when we killed the Son of God. The world ended already, when it seemed like all hope was lost. The world ended already, when the skies got dark, the angels mourned, and evil won.

But.

The world didn't stay ended. The world didn't stay dead. The world didn't stay dark. Nor has it ever throughout history, with every generation having their world end in some way. And nor will it, this time around.

Why not? Because our faith isn't in death, but in resurrection. Our faith isn't in the darkness, but in the light. Our faith isn't in hopelessness, but in the hope of a newborn babe come to us on Christmas Day.

A few weeks ago, renowned physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson posted a video that blew my mind. He simply said that he doesn't know why people look forward to summer citing that's when the "days get longer" because that simply isn't true. And how people alternatively don't look forward to the winter because that's when the "days get shorter", as that isn't true either. Rather, if the first day of summer is the longest day of the year, and the first day of winter is the shortest, then that means the days actually get shorter throughout summer until we reach the winter solstice, and then throughout the winter season the days slowly get longer.

Right? *Mind blown*

Yeah it takes months, but it gets there. It isn't overnight, it feels really slow, and the whole Daylight Savings thing doesn't really help like it's supposed to, but it gets there. Now as we approach the darkest of days, we can look forward to the light that comes after it.

And that is the reason for Advent being when it is. That is why we remember the birth of Christ on the arbitrary date of December 25th, mere days after the winter solstice. That is why we start every church year with this kind of apocalyptic text, because things just get brighter as we progress in our learning about God with us in Jesus through the power of the Spirit. Things get better as we see God more in the world. Things get better when we recognise Christ working in and through us, guiding us by the Spirit, pointing us to the truth of God's grace and salvation, and filling us with the hope that surpasses understanding.

So as dark as the days can be, as dark as the world can seem, as dark as this looming pandemic can cast a shadow, we can cling onto the hope that God has never left us, that we are still connected to each other through the Spirit, and that Christ remains the shining light in our lives that the darkness cannot overcome.

Jesus meant it when he said we won't know the day or hour, because we won't. But we can be aware that it isn't just one day or one hour, but many. Constant. Perpetual, even. That Christ enters into our lives again and again, when we hit rock bottom, when we are at the ends of our ropes, when we are engulfed in darkness. Christ appears full of grace, salvation, and light, freeing us from oppression and whatever might be holding us down. He just asks us to be alert enough to recognise him.

So in this season of Advent and this new church year, may we constantly be aware of God's presence in our lives, that we might lean on the strength, love, and hope of Christ, fuelling our faith and community for the sake of the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: My Lord, What a Morning (#438)

APOSTLES' CREED (p. 11)

With the whole church living in hope, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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

Living in faith and hope, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, “by your grace, O God,” and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Shepherd of Israel, you are powerful and mighty, and you lead us as your flock, promising us your strength and help. May our hope rest in these promises, that we might live and love, even in difficult times, with confidence in your name. By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you restore us, your face shines on us, and we are saved. May our proclamation of all that you have done be inspiring to others, moving all people to know of your love. We pray for the ministries of our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Peace Lutheran Church in Abbotsford and their interim pastor Cliff Reinhardt; and for Emmaus Lutheran Church in Burnaby and their pastor Timo Saarinen. Strengthen us all for your service. By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord God of hosts, you look upon us with favour, and your majesty is seen throughout all of creation. Restore our relationships to it and each other, that our care for this planet might be pleasing to you. By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O God of hosts, your face shines on us and we are saved by your justice and mercy. May the nations of the world learn from your wisdom, that all might learn to live in peace. We offer a special prayer for Solyana Amanuel, that she might be able to enter our country quickly and safely. By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you place your hands upon us and strengthen us in spite of difficulty and hardship, and we are restored by your love. Be especially with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who are lonely, that we all might lean on you and your promises in faith and hope. In particular, we pray for Bev and family; Beulah; Paula; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord God of hosts, you restore us and give us life, that even in death we are eternally connected to you and all the saints forever. May the lives of all the saints inspire and motivate us to continue living in hope, that we might hold to the faith in your love and promises. By your grace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your eternal presence shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

OFFERING HYMN: Come, Let Us Bring (p. 13)

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, you have enriched us and blessed us with every good gift. May this food before us serve as a tangible witness to your love and providence, as we continue to lean on your strength with the hope in your promises, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

DIALOGUE (p. 14)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy,
that we should at all times and places
give thanks and praise to you,
Holy God, through your Son Jesus Christ,
who resides with us and in us,
strengthening us to bear all things and
to join with all the choirs of angels,
the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth,
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, enthroned upon the cherubim, you shine forth and lead us with your strength and help. You restore us, you shine your face on us, and you save us with your grace and mercy. And in the fullness of time, you send to us Jesus, your Son, your strength, the one that sits at your right hand, to be with us always, reminding us of your unending forgiveness and redemption.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, took some bread, and with thanksgiving he broke and shared it and said, "take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the cup, and with the same thanksgiving he shared that and said, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Thus we together proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

With this food before us, we remember your presence among us, full of grace and truth. We remember your promise to be with us, guiding and leading us, showing us the ways of your justice. We remember how you restore us, forgive us, and save us through your Word Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, as one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

As we gathered together in hope and faith, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

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.
Save us from the time of trial
 and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
 and the glory are yours,
 now and forever. Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 17)

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see God's goodness and hope present in our lives.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

POST-COMMUNION HYMN: By Your Hand You Feed Your People (p. 18)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Faithful God, we give you thanks for Jesus revealed in every time and place, among us and within us, and with this food you've blessed us with. Strengthen us in our witness of your love, that our hope might bring joy to all whom we encounter, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God strengthen us and restore us,
God's face shine on us and draw us near,
God look upon us with favour, and save us from our sin,
now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Soon and Very Soon (#439)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be alert for the presence of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

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