



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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First Sunday of Advent November 28, 2021 Tree of Life

Advent is about the “coming days.” God’s people have always lived in great expectation, but that expectation finds specific, repeated enunciation in the texts appointed for these four weeks. The ancients anticipated a “righteous Branch to spring up for David.” The Thessalonians awaited “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints.” Jesus’ contemporaries hoped for the time “to stand before the Son of Man.” With them we eagerly await the coming days: another Christmas celebration, a second coming, and the advent of Christ in word and supper.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and 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.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP AND LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH (Paraphrase of Psalm 25:1-10)

O Lord we gather this day to lift our souls to you as we trust that you will show us your truth, lead us in your ways and teach us your paths. For you are the God of our salvation, full of compassion and everlasting love, forgiving our sins and transgressions according to your steadfast love and goodness.

As we reflect on how gracious and upright you are, we light the candle of this wreath, symbolizing the testimony of hope we have your steadfast love and faithfulness, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN: People, Look East (#248) verses 1, 4

GREETING

The hopeful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the peaceful love of God, and the joyful fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you have promised us that the day of salvation is near. Keep us faithful in love as we watch in pray, that we might stand with confidence and joy at your entrance to the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

A reading from Jeremiah.

In the Old Testament, "righteousness" often has to do with being faithful in relationship. God acts righteously both in punishing Israel for its sin and in having mercy. In today's reading, Jerusalem's future name—"The LORD is our righteousness"—proclaims that God is even now working salvation for Israel.

¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In 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. ¹⁶In 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."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

Upon Timothy's report from the congregation at Thessalonica, Paul is exuberant with gratitude for them. In this passage from his letter, Paul voices overflowing thanks, joy, and blessings for the people of this growing church.

⁹How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-36

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

God will fulfill God's purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God's people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God's promised redemption.

[Jesus said:] 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. ²⁶People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven 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, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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."

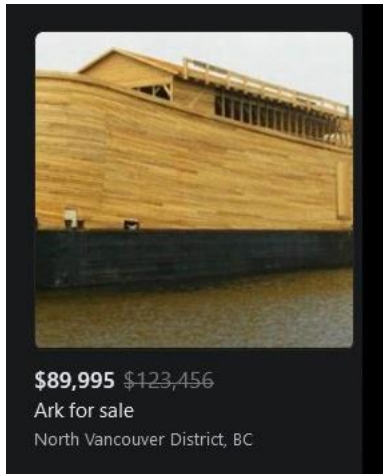
The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

God our salvation, in you there is wisdom, peace, and joy. By the power of your Spirit, lead us into your truth and teach us your ways, that we might have steadfast hope through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

So the other day I was browsing Facebook marketplace, and I came across this ad which seemed pretty appropriate for the times we're in:



I know, hilarious and obviously fake. I mean there's no way an ark like that would go for 90 grand. It's worth at least its original asking price of \$123,456. But with the rains and flooding we've had and continue to have in the last while, I guess this kind of thing isn't too farfetched now, especially when we also saw this in the news:



These are crazy times we're living in. Sure, we here in the Lower Rainland are used to this kind of weather, but the past few weeks have been unprecedented even for us. Or at very least, it is alarmingly unusual.

And so, if you're like me, you might have thought that this was it, it was the end of the world. You might have thought that God had finally had it with us horrible sinners and it was time to destroy the earth and everything in it just like the story of Noah and the real ark that wasn't bought off Facebook. You might have thought that these crazy rains and floods, paired with the ongoing pandemic and the crazy political climate we find ourselves in, were all the signs that we were warned about in the bible. This is it, the end times.

To top it all off, Jesus seems to solidify this notion in our brains today just with the timing of the gospel reading we get for this 1st Sunday of Advent. This episode is the continuation of Luke's version of that story we read just a couple weeks ago out of Mark's account when Jesus and his disciples left the temple and they expressed their awe at the building and all its marvels. But of course, Luke had to one up Mark and go into a lot more detail. Seriously, if you look up this passage in its entirety you see Jesus go all out with his explanation around this. And so Jesus warns them of the temple falling, and talks about the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the distress around the earth with the roaring waves of the seas. Which totally sounds like what we're going through now with this crazy weather.

So it's hard not to think that this is it. It's hard not to think that all these things that Jesus said will happen is now happening. It's hard not to be afraid.

Because really, this is kind of scary stuff.

I don't know about the rest of you, but I don't think I'm not ready for the world to end. I still have a lot to see, a lot to experience, there are still a lot more Marvel movies to come out for me to watch. So I tend to push away thoughts of the world ending because it makes me uncomfortable, it causes anxiety, and again, it's just kind of scary.

Well, scary when we hold onto this Western view of the world ending, at least.

What do I mean by that? Well, let's be honest. We have it pretty good on the most part over here in the west. Sure, we had our problems with the weather lately, and real estate prices keep going up, and also this cancel culture seems to be getting out of hand, but all in all, we're still very much a first world country, we enjoy freedoms and privileges that many other countries don't have, not to mention our internet infrastructure is among the most decent in the world. We have a lot to complain about, but really, we don't have a lot to complain about, although we still complain a lot.

The point is, we're comfortable in our lives. Not just because of our own hard work, but because we happen to find ourselves in part of the world that these comforts are just more easily attainable. From our Western perspective, the world is a pretty nice place.

So when we're told that such a nice place is going to be taken away from us, we get anxious about it. When we have to trade in our comfortable lives for anything but, then we feel like we're short changed and we instinctively resist. When we hear predictions and see the signs that point to the world ending, it is scary.

But what if I were to tell you that maybe the world isn't that great, at least not for a large percentage of the world? What if I were to remind you that since we're part of the 1% just for living where we do, means there is the 99% out there living in worse conditions than us? What if I were to point out that the end of the world might sound, to a vast majority of the people on this planet, like good news?

Think about that widow that Jesus and his disciples encountered in the temple. She lost her husband, her home, and all her money to the corruption of the day. Would she be so torn up if that kind of world would end? Think about the millions upon millions of refugees and oppressed that continue to live in areas of great violence and danger, the point where the only way they could be free is run away or die. Would they be afraid of all of that ending? Think about those who have been severely wronged by our broken justice systems, our out of date customs, and our very biased ways that are designed specifically to make the rich richer while the poor get poorer. Would they resist the end and hope that all of that oppression perpetuates instead? To all these, ending the world wouldn't be scary, it'd be a relief.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we need to rise up and revolt and destroy the world ourselves. I'm not saying that there is no hope in this good for nothing world. I'm not

saying that the only way to true peace is the full annihilation of all life like how Ultron wanted in episode 8 of this past season of “Marvel’s What If...?” series.

But what I’m saying is that maybe what Jesus is talking about here is not actually the literal physical end of this planet. Maybe Jesus isn’t being at all intentionally scary. Maybe there is hope in what might seem so hopeless.

Jesus says that when these things take place, stand up and raise your hands. I don’t know about you but if I see some major destruction going on around me, you better believe I’ll be running in the other direction, never mind standing with my hands up. But Jesus says when these things happen, it means that your redemption is near. It means that our salvation is drawing close. It means that we will be saved, even from this. “This” being not the actual end of the world, but “this” being the hardships of life, the unfairness and corruption of our systems, the injustice and inequality in our societies and nations.

So when Jesus said that these things will happen during that current generation, he really meant it. He wasn’t off by a few millennia like a lot of people might think, but rather he was right. That generation didn’t pass when all these things took place because these things took place in every generation since Jesus said these words and continue to take place even now.

And as these things continue to take place, so Jesus continues to tell us, promise us, give us the hope in that we will be saved from it. Perhaps not in the way that we’d think as the end of the world isn’t as we think, but there will be salvation. There will be redemption. There will be God’s love and grace ringing in and around our lives, lifting us up in love, and allowing us to see the truth of God’s welcome and forgiveness for us all.

So you see, this isn’t really scary, per se. This “end” as we might frame it as isn’t horrible. It isn’t about God being angry with us and wanting to smite us. But rather, Jesus is assuring us that we are loved even in the changing seasons. Jesus is reminding us that we are cherished even when the evils around us seem so overwhelming. Jesus is holding us up, giving us this unsurpassed hope that God holds us, forgives us, and saves us even when all hope seems lost.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of the church year. It is the first Sunday in which we look forward to the coming of Jesus as a baby in the manger, and the first Sunday in which we are reminded of the hope in that promise of salvation, the redemption in God’s grace, and the strength to learn God’s ways and truths, leading us into a world of new beginnings.

So in this season of Advent, of waiting and watching, of hope in God, let us look with confidence at the changing seasons, the changing landscape, and changing tides of society, and see the hope given to us by God that our redemption is always drawn near by the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: He Came Down (#253)

APOSTLES’ CREED (p.11)

With all of God’s people watching and waiting, 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

Led into the hope in God's truth and covenant, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "in your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord," and you all my respond with **hear our prayer**. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, to you we lift our soul and we put our trust in you, for you have promised to bring us into your salvation. Lead us into all hope that as the tumult around us seems unceasing, that we can be firm in our faith and in your love. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you show us your ways and teach us your paths, and we do what we can to trust and follow you where you lead. Increase our faith in your statutes, that our ministry and service to others be pleasing in your sight. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop and bishop elect Kathy, and national bishop Susan; as well as for our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular we pray for Peace Lutheran Church in Abbotsford and their pastor Dean Andersen; and for Emmaus Lutheran Church in Burnaby and their pastor Timo Saarinen. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, in your everlasting compassion and love you have made for us a planet upon which we can live, love, and play, and you have filled it with wonders and beauty. Strengthen our stewardship of all that you have made and fill us with hope in its restoration and endurance. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you forgive us our sins and transgressions and you remember us according to your love and goodness. This grace is difficult to understand, but may it inform us of how to handle our differences with the nations and our neighbours, that we may cohabit this planet in peace and harmony. We pray especially for those we've sponsored to come to our country: Solyana Amanuel; Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children, that their journey out of danger be swift. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you are gracious and upright and you show us the healing found in your truth. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love be apparent to us all. Especially we pray for Beulah; Paula; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Diana; Marie; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; Owen; those who have been affected by COVID 19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time.. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, in your holiness you lead and teach us, the lowly, in your ways of justice and love, and you graciously welcome us into your kingdom with all the saints. Remind us always of their lives of faith, that by the connection we have in you, we be strengthened in our own lives to follow and trust you. In your steadfast love and faithfulness, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the hope of your truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

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.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who teaches us your truth and leads us into hope, where we can see your steadfast love and graciousness welcoming us into your eternal salvation.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Saviour Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took some bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the common cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink from saying, "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."

It is in this provision of our Lord that we might have hope in the generosity of the Spirit, bringing us into salvation while declaring the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

To you, O Lord our God, be all honour and glory, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

Gathered into the hope of the Spirit, 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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see God's love for us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (#257) verses 1, 2, 6, 7, 8

Wait for the Lord (#262)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you have saved us from the worst that the world can do and promised to redeem all of creation in your time. Keep us trusting in your truth, that in hope we might live faithfully as your children in service to you and all people, through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of mercy keep you,
the Spirit of grace cheer you,
and the Christ of our salvation greet you in glory,
now and always.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: All Earth Is Hopeful (#266) verses 1, 3, 4

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live in hope.

Thanks be to God.

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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