

Circuit Service 6th December 2020

Call to worship

Loving God, teach us to be still when we are disturbed, distressed or troubled.

Lord teach us to be still in anger, disappointments, pain and sorrow. Help us to seek your presence for comfort, strength, protection and reassurance.

As we enter into your presence may we hear your voice and respond to your call. Lord, be present with us now.

Stf 25 God is here! As we his people, H&P 653

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbkNXq71iis>

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| <p>1 God is here ! As we his people meet to offer praise and prayer, may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share. Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts wait the coming of the Spirit into open minds and hearts.</p> <p>2 Here are symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace ; here are table, font, and pulpit ; here the cross has central place. Here in honesty of preaching, here in silence, as in speech, here, in newness and renewal, God the Spirit comes to each.</p> | <p>3 Here our children find a welcome in the Shepherd's flock and fold, here as bread and wine are taken, Christ sustains us, as of old. Here the servants of the Servant seek in worship to explore what it means in daily living to believe and to adore.</p> <p>4 Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom, in an age of change and doubt, keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out. Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive : we, who cannot live without you, we adore you ! We believe !</p> |
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Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

Prayer of Adoration and Thanksgiving:

We come into your presence with adoration, thanksgiving and praise, acknowledging how you have sustained us through these difficult times. As we pray in our individual homes – around the nations and around the world – we are united as one family to offer you glory and exaltation. Thank You for the gift of Jesus, our Immanuel, the Word made flesh.

Thank you for your Spirit holding our nations, institutions and our families together in these challenging times. Your love gives us hope, peace and joy even in our darkest moments. Help us to become responsible with creation and nature. Thank you that we can experience deep in our hearts the incredible nature of your grace. As we contemplate the great price you paid for our sins, Lord, forgive us of our sins. Come and draw us together, to embrace and forgive one another.

Release your Holy spirit on us and rise above this worship and make it acceptable in your sight. AMEN

Our Lord's Prayer

All age talk

The Christmas gift for Tom

Tom was a hard-working schoolboy. He had a lot of friends as well. He was always patient and understood well that his parents were not as rich and could not afford everything he wanted.

One such thing was a bicycle, he wanted a bicycle that he could ride to school. He told his mother and the answer was, Tom, if we are able to save enough money then we would get you a bicycle.

Christmas came and the few boxes were put under the tree. Tom's parents could not afford the bicycle that year so he got football boots instead. He was very grateful. The following year he asked his mum again, do you think you may be able to save enough money to get me a bicycle? The answer was the same, if we are able to put the money together then we will try. Christmas came and the few boxes were arranged under the tree. Tom in the night came and checked each box and went back to his bed knowing that the parents could not afford the bicycle but continued to pray to God to help his parent so that one day they would be able to give him a bicycle.

The next day as they sat down to eat, Tom opened his present and it was an Xbox computer game. He was happy with it and said thank you to his parents. Then the father coughed and said to the mother, has he been to the garage today? Tom got up and opened the garage door and there it was, a red BMX bicycle. WOW! he put on his helmet and started riding - going round and round in the family garden. In excitement he came to say thank you to his parents but they rather thanked him for his patients and willingness to wait and his understanding.

As we look forward to Jesus coming again to take us home, we need to wait in patience and trust that our Jesus never fails. He has promised us heaven and a life without sickness or death and in Advent we look forward with hope that one day our Lord will come and take us to his kingdom.

Stf 175 Light of the World, H&P alternative 85 O Come, O Come, Immanuel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MmRGSEG2LM>

1 Light of the world,
you stepped down into darkness,
opened my eyes, let me see
beauty that made this heart adore you,
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,
here I am to bow down,
here I am to say that you're my God,
and you're altogether lovely,
altogether worthy,
altogether wonderful to me.*

2 King of all days
oh so highly exalted,
glorious in heaven above.
Humbly you came
to the earth you created,
all for love's sake became poor.

So here I am to worship ...

And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
to see my sin upon that cross.

So here I am to worship ...

Tim Hughes

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

- 1 You have been gracious to your land, O LORD, *
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.
- 2 You have forgiven the iniquity of your people *
and blotted out all their sins.
- 8 I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, *
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.
- 9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, *
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
- 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
- 12 The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, *
and our land will yield its increase.
- 13 Righteousness shall go before him, *
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Matthew 25:1-13

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹²“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’”

¹³“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Stf 157 God has spoken – by his prophets, H&P 64

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nyCY-hBw_g

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| <p>1 God has spoken — by his prophets,
spoken his unchanging word ;
each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil
one firm anchor holding fast :
God eternal reigns forever,
God the first, and God the last.</p> | <p>3 God is speaking — by the Spirit,
speaking to our hearts again,
in the age-long word expounding
God's own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
one sure faith is standing fast ;
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,
God the first, and God the last.</p> |
| <p>2 God has spoken — by Christ Jesus,
Christ, the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory,
with the Father ever one ;
spoken by the Word incarnate,
God from God, ere time was born ;
Light from Light, to earth descending,
Christ, revealing God to all.</p> | <p>George Wallace Briggs (1875–1959)</p> |

Sermon: Waiting in Anxious Times

In a time of lockdowns, mask wearing, social distancing, and hand sanitizing and our circles becoming smaller, it can be anxious, lonely and stressful. We become concerned about here and now and we sometimes could forget that we are waiting for the return of our Lord and our master. We need to remember that it is God who is coming to us once again. **it’s a story of hope and humanity is in desperate need of hope.** And the darker the night gets, the brighter the star that would shine.”

Paul in his letter to the Romans, introduced himself as a bond servant of Christ called to preach the gospel of God proclaimed through prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Paul was a man who was learned and knew the scriptures. His introductory statement does not appear to have anything to do with Advent but he captures the fact that the Old Testament is the “Gospel of God” and is filled with prophecies of hope foretelling that the Messiah was coming in flesh and Christ is the fulfilment of all the prophecies about hope.

From the day of fall of Adam and Eve, when God atoned for them but said to the serpent the seed of the woman will crush your head and you shall bruise his heels. From that time, prophecy after prophecy have come to enlarge the promise that the Messiah would come and defeat Satan, atone for the sins of many and humanity must look forward to his coming.

Unfortunately, Prophecies offer hope but hope involves waiting. When prophets are given the message of hope they are not given the timeframe and that meant those who heard the message had to live in anticipation.

Is a fact of life, that when you make people wait too long, they may give up waiting. God is eternal but we are mortals with short life span. Imagine Moses assuring his people that God will raise someone like me from among you and you should listen to him. Then Moses dies and the people live in expectation for a long time.

God then, sends another prophet to wake the people up and renew the message and raise the expectation and the hope again. The people become excited and live in expectation, then again no Messiah appeared.

If the same message is repeated by Joel, Micah, David, Jeremiah and Isaiah etc. and the hope is not realised it becomes a myth and so many of the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures became consigned to the archives as people went about their day to day lives. Peter addresses this issue and reveals an important nature of God and that we should never never ignore God's message.

2 Peter 3:8-15a Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief ..

Several centuries later, a young man woke everybody up, shouting *metanoia, metanoia*, repent – he is here, he is standing among us, he is here. All of a sudden, the prophecies that were gathering dust in the archives became alive. The promises of God don't fail. They stand sure.

With Advent, when we look back, we also have to look ahead. We live in the time of Moses and in the time of Elijah, that God is immutable, his Divine initiatives do not fail even though the wheels of prophecy turn slowly, they never die.

The fact that prophecies have no timeframe have been the underlying theme for the past 3 weeks sermons. We were reminded last week, that nobody knows when the master would return and that we must be alert, and we should live in expectation. Couple of weeks ago, we were told that when he comes he would separate people – some to his left and some to his right. Advent messages can be tough!

Today, the message is in 2 folds:

1. Divine Assurance: Comfort my people; this was the divine assurance given to the prophet Isaiah when the people of Israel were living under difficult and challenging times. It was as if their God had forgotten about them. God sent the message of assurance through Isaiah that they should be comforted and there was hope for them. Speak to God's people tenderly; tell them to prepare the way for the Lord and make the highway straight for the Lord. That message could apply to us today!
2. Divine hope: Whereas, Last week the message was "Be on guard! Be alert!" Today the message is don't nod off, and fill your lamp with the spiritual oil, so that when the bridegroom comes late you will be awake and your lamp will be burning bright to

meet your Lord. “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

We also live in anticipation, we also hold prophecies in our hand such as mansions to accommodate us eternally in his home, his Father’s house, eternal life awaiting us, A life of glory – all these promises of Christ will come true. But when the bridegroom returns, Will you be dozing away? Will your oil be enough to see you through the time of waiting or will you be behind the door reading the message “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you”

Let us “fix our eyes, on the baby in the manger, the author and perfecter of our faith”. As we begin the Advent season his perfect love will cast out our fear and fill us with hope, peace, joy, love, and ultimately Himself. Amen.

Stf 185 Sing we the King who is coming to reign, H&P 244

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlqcBEcWpQw>

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| <p>1 Sing we the King who is coming to reign ;
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain !
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King :</p> <p><i>Come let us sing : praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King :
this is our song, who to Jesus belong :
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.</i></p> <p>2 All shall be well in his kingdom of peace ;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase ;
justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring ;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King :</p> | <p>3 Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin ;
doubt shall not darken his witness within ;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting ;
love is victorious when Jesus is King :</p> <p>4 Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray ;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing ;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King :</p> <p>Charles Silvester Horne (1865–1914)</p> |
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Prayer of intercession

‘For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ (Romans 8:38-39)

Sovereign God, we come into your presence to glorify your name and we thank you for sheltering us during these difficult time.

Now Lord, we want to offer our prayers for our nation and the nations around the world who are trying to recover from the human and economic toll of this pandemic. We know that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will restore calmness into our world and assist humanity in our fight against this pandemic.

We particularly focus our prayer on the institutions that are working to find both treatment and vaccines against this virus. Sovereign Lord guide them into the path of knowledge and insight to unlock the key and to find treatment against this dreadful virus.

We pray for insight for world leaders and politicians who are trying to balance economic recovery. Lord guide them with knowledge and vision

We lift before you people who are anxious about their jobs, and their businesses, people who are lonely, people who are mourning love ones and people who are recovering from illnesses. Lord, we pray for healing for them.

We pray for the health workers tending the seriously ill

For those who are unwell and concerned for loved ones

for those vulnerable because of underlying conditions

for those who have no choice but to go out to work

for those who are afraid to be at home

for those who are more lonely than they've ever been

for those who are bereaved and grieving.

God be their healer, comfort and protect them.

be their strength, shield and provision

be their security, safety and close companion

Lord, we thank you for ourselves, your church and your ministers. Lord continuously renew our strength and bless each one in our homes in Christ Jesus name. Amen

Offering: Lord bless our offering in different forms that it takes and use us for your work in this world. Amen

Blessing: (2 Corinth 13:11)

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all - Amen