

An Order of Worship
First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell, MT
November 29, 2020

Words of Welcome

Centering Time

To stand watch –
 over a sick child or a rising loaf,
 at the gate of a factory,
 upon the ramparts of a walled city
 or in the craggy top of a mountain –
calls for alert senses and sensitivities.

Standing watch demands an awareness of surroundings,
 for even when it seems as though there is nothing out there to watch for,
 you must be ready for anything.
Standing watch builds anticipation.

In this season we seek to watch with eagerness
 for the promised but always surprising arrival of Christ.
God comes to be with us, ready or not.
May our worship this morning and in days ahead
 be times of looking forward with perceptive and receptive watchfulness

Music *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*

Introduction to Our Advent Theme

Advent Reflection

We use the word hope frequently, perhaps even flippantly. We hope not to get stuck in traffic or to get tickets to the game. The word hope gets thrown around and employed for wishes or desires. But the hope of Advent, the hope of our faith, goes much deeper than our likes and wants. The hope of Christianity entails nothing less than the redemption of the world – and this hope, while often difficult to maintain in the face of evil, is nonetheless certain. Paul instructs Timothy, his young apprentice in the faith, to train in godliness and focus on that which is true and worthy of full acceptance. He reminds Timothy, “For to this end we toil and strive because we have set our hope on the living God who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe.” Our hope encompasses all of creation. Imagine that scale of expectation.

Our hope in this world of pandemic and war, poverty and disease, is set on the living God, the Savior of all people, who soon will become incarnate and dwell among us, who promises to return and set all things right. As we begin this liturgical year and look to the end of the calendar year, we do not take hope lightly. The year 2020 does not afford us the luxury of cheap hope. Too much has been lost, altered or upended for us to hope for anything less than redemption, salvation and God for and with us. If we have learned nothing else this year, we have learned the limits of our own power. We cannot save ourselves. Our finitude cannot be denied. Our need for divine strength and intervention feels obvious this Advent. This is year when we sing “Come, Lord, Jesus” from behind masks while we are physically distant from one

another, I suspect we will do so with palpable longing, with a yearning hope to know without question that God is indeed with us.

As we eagerly anticipate the inbreaking of God's kingdom this Advent, hearing Paul's words to Timothy – that young disciple attempting to shepherd a nascent flock living in the middle of a threatening context – could guide and encourage us, too. Focus on godliness. Remember the teachings of Jesus, the commandments of God. Emulate those people of faith who are admirable, wise and stalwart. Think about the good doctrine learned from the Word of God and faithful people. Ignore irreverent and silly myths. Hope in no one less than Jesus Christ and nothing short of the salvation of all people.

Music *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

Advent Prayer & Lighting the First Candle of Advent

Let us pray. Lord of all that is seen and unseen, we set our hope on you, our living God who comes to save, not condemn, the world. This is year we feel battered and weary, ready for your inbreaking, longing for a sure awareness of your presence. We know you are true and worthy of full acceptance even on days we doubt your providence and wonder when you will set all things right. Help us to set our hope on you and live as people of hope who point to your light and enact your love in a world too often awash in hopelessness. Amen.

Silent Reflection

Confession of Sin

How can we stand in the presence of God?

Let us confess those places where we need to grow to prepare for Christ to come to our live.

God of the loving heart,
we confess before you those places in our hearts where we have refused you entrance:
~ people we have refused to love;
~ habits we never get around to changing;
~ good thing we have left undone;
~ and ways in which we hurt you, ourselves and others.
Come to us in the light of your Christ.
Shine on those places we have hidden from you.
Show us new ways to live.
Sweep clean the rooms of our hearts, that Christ may find a home among us.
Be known among us now and forever! Amen.

Music *Star Child*

Assurance of Pardon

This is the good news in Jesus Christ.

We can stand before God,

not through our own goodness, but through God's great kindness to us.

Rejoice and be glad, for God comes to us in the baby Jesus to offer forgiveness and new life.

Thanks be to God. Amen!

Music *Mary Did You Know*

Prayer of Illumination

As we read our lectionary scriptures for this day,
let us come to God's sacred word in prayer:
God of power unexpected, we want you to tear open the heavens and comedown;
to make mountains quake, water boil and stars to fall
until all nations tremble at your presence!
But you,
you will not perform according to our wants and whims.
Instead you come like the sound of sheer silence: Thin. Quiet.
Instead you are born among us as an infant.
Instead you show us how love is made perfect in weakness.
So we will stay alert,
or at least we will try,
because we are your people and there is no other God besides you. Amen.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 80

- ¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
- ² before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might and come to save us!
- ³ Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
- ⁴ O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
- ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.
- ⁶ You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.
- ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
- ⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.
- ⁹ You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land.
- ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches;
- ¹¹ it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River.
- ¹² Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
- ¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.
- ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine,
- ¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted.
- ¹⁶ They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
- ¹⁷ But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
- ¹⁸ Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.
- ¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

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

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

Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Reading

Mark 13:24-37

The Coming of the Son of Man

²⁴ “But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then 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.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

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. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It 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. ³⁵ Therefore, 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, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Meditation

Music *Prepare the Way of the Lord*

Prayers of the People & The Lord’s Prayer

Let us pray. All praise to you, Emmanuel, God-promised, and God with us; all praise to you in the silence and the singing of this sacred season of Advent. Because of you, stars shine in our lives and our poor manager places become holy straw. May the good tidings of peace on earth and good will to the people of the earth be on our lips, as with the shepherds and the angels.

We give you thanks, Emmanuel, for becoming human – weak and poor and cold and lonely. We become more human for knowing you – more able to lift our burdens and open our doors to strangers.

We give you thanks, Emmanuel, for choosing the low and the rejected and the broken; so we find mercy in our struggles and courage in the rough places and crooked paths, even in the shadow of death.

All praise to you, Emmanuel, God-promised and God-with-us, for your advent candle burns brightly in our lives. We pray this in the name of the Jesus Christ, who is born in a manger and taught us to pray saying:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Music *Born in the Night, Mary's Child*

Invitation to Give

Advent Reading

“Standing on Tiptoe” by Macrina Wiederkehr

Standing on tiptoe is not a children's game of balance. Rather it is the beautiful prayer of balancing God's promise with my joyful expectation. It is the Season of Hope! You are God's Story of Hope.

The Christian heart has a built-in urgency to expect good things. And why not? We have been promised so much:

- eternal life
- a dwelling place in the heavens
- living water
- answered prayers
- healing and forgiveness
- resurrection
- freedom that comes from knowing the truth
- sacramental life for our journey homeward
- the Spirit
- a new heart.

It is no wonder, then, that in spite of all the brokenness of our lives, we are still standing on tiptoe waiting for the glorious freedom promised us as children of God. This confident waiting is called hope, and our lives are empty without it. It is a small seed that grows wildly when it is nurtured. We cannot teach someone hope. We give hope by eagerly awaiting the blessings that have been promised to us.

This Advent Season, may your life reflect the hope we find in Jesus Christ. May you find hope in:

- birth
- Christmas and Jesus
- eager expectation
- epiphanies
- affirmation
- mornings
- twinkling stars
- divine presence
- invitations into relationship.

In the midst of this Advent Season, may you be encouraged and challenged to stand tiptoe. Your joyful expectation might be just the healing ointment needed to minister to someone's tired hope.

Music *What Child is This*

Charge and Blessing

Beware.

Keep alert.

Keep awake.

God is doing awesome things we do not expect.

And Christ is coming near with great power and glory,
and with great tenderness.

May God strengthen us to the end;

Christ draw near to our very gates;

and the Holy Spirit awaken our spirits;

until, with eager longing, we greet the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Depart in peace. Amen.

Music *Adore*