

## Second Sunday in Advent 2020 December 6, 2020

I want to encourage you again, as I did last week, to gather the candles for the first part of the service. Don't worry about the color of the candle. These can be any four candles, even if they are not the "correct" colors tradition offers. Gather them as we gather our thoughts and our hearts to focus on that feeling of waiting. This week we will light two candles, creating more light as that feeling of expectation of all that is coming into the world grows. This week, we will light two candles as the source of the light in our hearts draws closer.

Let us pray.

May the Lord's peace be with us all.  
*The Lord is our faith and our life.*

May God's love shine in our hearts.  
*Our hope is in the coming of the Lord.*

Light the first and second candles.

Let us pray.

*God in Heaven, the day draws near where the birth of your Son will make radiant the light of the waiting world. May the quiet coming fill us with true inner peace.*

*Amen.*

We now proceed with our regular service.

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
*And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.*

Let's pray this together.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord be with you.  
*And also with you.*

Let us now pray together the collect of the day.

*Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*

*Amen.*

***First Lesson***

**Isaiah 40:1-11**

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.”

A voice says, “Cry out!”  
And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand for ever.  
Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!”

See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep

### *The Response*

#### **Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13**

#### *Benedixisti, Domine*

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.

## *The Epistle*

### **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, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Mark.  
*Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

## **The Gospel**

### **Mark 1:1-8**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

*Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

## **A Reflection**

May the words written and the prayer of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

The din of Christmas is in the air! It's usually a joyful noise, but something this year feels a little different. Perhaps a little more urgent. We have been for many in so much darkness. Will this din of Christmas ads, and to-do lists, and expectations make it all come any faster or shine any brighter?

I'm sorry, but probably not. We can try our best to make a joyful noise to hurry the coming of the light, but this does not work on our schedule. We need to proceed together through the darkness and create what light we can. We cannot speed this up, no matter how much shopping we do or how many Christmas specials we may watch. As we hear in Second Peter, "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."

God is patient with us, so let's trust in God, in turn. The light always returns, but to remind people of that can make one feel very much like "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness," as we hear in Isaiah. If we choose to slow down, be quiet, and spend more time reflecting on the miracle of what is and has unfolded, we are going full scale in the opposite direction of society. Society right now is wanting more noise, more shopping, more celebrating, more joyful noise!

Don't misunderstand me; I am as much a fan of joyful noise as anyone – I also like the time to appreciate the quiet. The time to spend a little longer in anticipation, time not worrying about the to-do list, just the time to enjoy the moment.

In this quiet anticipation, we together "prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight." I have for a long time been hard-pressed to believe we can do this while shopping!

I've referred before to living and being "right-sized" – part of living that way recognizes the time for humility. We do not prepare the way for that which is to be born with a loud, boisterous celebration – that comes later. In the Gospel, John says, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals." John knows his own gifts - he will baptize with water. But the one who comes "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

I once heard a preacher describe her favorite carol, "O Holy Night." She said it offers a wonderful frame of reference for this time when it says, "Fall on your knees, hear the angel's voices." Not our voices, the angels – something we can hear in the quiet. Quiet, and on our knees in recognition of that which is coming. Humble, because this is bigger than we are. Thankful for all that has been and all that will be.

Take the brief moment of silence. Take the brief moment of humility – of being right-sized. When you do, you may find you can hear the silence and hear the angels' voices.

It has been dark. Let us light the candles together in prayerful celebration of the light to come.

Have no doubt that we will make a joyful noise together, but this is all in God's time, not ours. Remember, "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day." Live into the mystery of this time.

Oscar Wilde once wrote, "Don't be afraid. There are exquisite things in store for you. This is merely the beginning."

We will get there together.

*Amen.*

Let us now confess our sins against God and our neighbor, praying together.

*Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Pray this as you will, out loud or to yourself – just know that God hears you.

*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,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

We will continue with the prayer of Spiritual Communion. This prayer was written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori. This prayer is now often used when the church is in a place of fasting

from Communion, and I have heard this used in many of the on-line services being offered. We will be using this prayer in place of Communion as we work on regathering, too.

*Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.*

Thomas Merton once wrote, "If we are called by God to the holiness of life, and if holiness is beyond our natural power to achieve (which it certainly is) then it follows that God must give us the light, the strength, and the courage to fulfill the task."

In God's time, not ours.

Yours in Christ,  
Dave+

I'm happy to share that due to a lot of work by Rachel Poli, you can now contact me directly at DPrentice@TrinityofWoburn.com by just responding to this email. Feel free to contact me with your thoughts and feelings as we lead up to Christmas.