**Video Service Advent Sunday 2020**

Hello and welcome to this time of worship together, thank you for joining me today. Sunday 29th November marks the beginning of Advent, a time of preparation, of reflection and a time of hope. As the nations battle COVID-19 and all its consequences, it is timely to remind ourselves that we have a hope that is sure and unchanging, a hope brought to us and lived out in the birth and life of Jesus Christ.

Let’s pause a moment and settle ourselves into the presence of God.

*Opening Prayer (adapted from Psalm 126)*

We are a people who dream, who long for joy.

We are thankful for the gracious gifts of God.

We know that God does great things in our midst.

We are thankful for the gracious gifts of God.

God has given us neighbours, near and far, to love.

We are thankful for the gracious gifts of God.

As we gather and grow, give and receive.

We give thanks for God’s unfailing love.

**Carol “On Jordan’s Bank”**

**An Advent Prayer of Confession and Healing**

Even as we have lived with isolation and fear this year,

**we have also made space for hope in our lives.**

With broken hearts, faltering steps, and a desire for healing with those who have been silenced,

diminished, and objectified,

**we seek peace with each and all, and commit to justice with our lives.**

As we greet strangers, neighbours and friends,

**we make a place for joy in the chaos of our concern.**

Awaiting a future announced and promised by the Living God,

**we make room for love in our habits, hearts, and homes.**

Holy One, you make the crooked ways straight and mend the broken soul.

You assure the lost and lonely of your love; you bring joy to the suffering.

On this day, as we offer simple gifts in the face of profound need,

remind us how your grace grows in our giving and receiving.

Inspire the rebirth of love―in our world and in our lives―

as we dedicate ourselves to your justice and mercy. **Amen.**

**Gospel Reading Mark 13.24-end**

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.
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.

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. 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.

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. 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.’

**Homily**

I mentioned at the beginning that this is a time of hope. Yet you might be puzzled as to why I said that once you heard the Gospel reading today, there doesn’t seem to be much if any joy or hope in it. And yet there is always hope.

Advent is a time of getting ready, of looking forward, but be careful if our only preoccupation is getting ready for Christmas Day, of buying presents and food, looking forward to seeing the limited numbers that may gather together this Christmas. Be wary of being so busy getting ready that there is no time to stop and reflect; to prepare in a different way, to remaining alert and ready. The gospel reading paints a dark picture, with Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the return of “The Son of Man”, there are signs of impending crisis. You might be feeling that way too at the moment with the destruction of our old way of life and impending financial crisis.

Now is the perfect time to stop our busyness, our worrying, our anxious thoughts. Over the past weeks the Gospel readings have all been about those who were prepared and those caught by surprise. They led us to today, as Jesus teaches that his disciples must be constantly on the alert for the return of ‘The Son of Man’ or they will be caught unprepared. ‘Keep awake’ or ‘keep alert’, be watchful, be alert, be watching for the return of Jesus, for we do not know when that time will come. In one sense, it is always Advent, we are always watching and waiting for the return of Jesus in all his glory.

You may know there are many stories in the sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers and there is one quoted in Joan Chittister’s book ‘The Rule of Benedict’ ( *The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages, Crossroad, 1992)*. A monk comes to his abbot seeking enlightenment. He questions the abbot eagerly and impatiently, firing questions at him. But the abbot says, ‘Just look’. The monk is very disappointed, ‘I’m always looking’ he says sulkily. ‘No, you’re not’, says the abbot. ‘In order to look at what is here, you have to be here, and you are mostly somewhere else.’

Jesus’ practical advice is much like that of the abbot to the impatient monk. ‘Look, keep awake, be prepared.’ Jesus calls us to look at the world and see the signs and wonders of God at work, where he is present. Don’t be so busy complaining that God is absent, looking everywhere else for God that we fail to see him right beside us. Advent is like a time of total lockdown, where we have no choice but to sit still and look, see the world as it actually is, full of signs of God. Full of signs of hope.

**Prayers**

**Collect Advent Sunday**

Almighty God,

give us grace to cast away the works of darkness

and to put on the armour of light,

now in the time of this mortal life,

in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;

that on the last day,

when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead,

we may rise to the life immortal;

through him who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen

God of Hope, you hear our silent prayers and urgent cries.

Hear us now as we pray for your world and its people.

**God of Hope, hear our prayer.**

God of Peace, on this day we pray

for the people of Bethlehem, of Israel and Palestine;

for (other places suffering conflict);

for refugees who have nowhere to lay their heads;

and for those who feel alone, lost, tired and frightened.

We pray for those who suffer at the hands of systemic racism, bigotry and misogyny.

Restore us in right relationship, we who are created in your image, which is plural and good.

We pray for those who live your peace with justice and who, by example and at risk to

themselves, shine a light on the chasms that divide us.

Grant your people strength and patience as, together, we seek your promise of life renewed.

God of the morning star, guide us in the ways of mercy and justice.

**God of Peace, hear our prayer.**

God of Joy, on this day we pray

for those who will spend this day alone;

for those whose tables will have an empty place this year;

for those in care home and hospital;

and for our loved ones who live now in your eternal joy.

We pray also for those working in hospitals and research facilities

who, daily, work to keep us safe in the midst of the COVID pandemic.

Grant your people courage and wisdom, as we seek your promise of wholeness.

God of heaven and earth, of anticipation and promise, be with us and heal us.

**God of Joy, hear our prayer**.

God of Love, open our hearts, that we might receive you and hear your voice.

Open us to the possibility of true change, in us and in others.

Remind us of your promise, made again to every generation, of your enduring love.

May things on earth be as they are in heaven.

**God of Love, hear our prayer.**

We pause for our own prayers

We pray these things in the name of the One who comes, Jesus Christ, who taught us when we

pray to say,

Our Father in heaven

hallowed be your name

your kingdom come

your will be done on earth as in heaven

give us this day our daily bread

forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

**Blessing**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,

scatter the darkness from before your path,

and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory;

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always. Amen.

**Notices.**

Next week we are very happy to present our Nativity Play and the following week our Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. Both will be online only and will allow many more people to join in than is currently allowed in the church building.

 Our Christmas Market is available online as well, please hurry to place your orders as the closing date is mid-December with collection and /or deliveries from the 13th December

 Also online is our Mosaic gathering with the mid-week virtual meeting to discuss the sermon. All details of the video and Zoom meeting from churchoffice@christchurchlille.fr

 The church building will reopen for in person worship on Sunday 20th December for the 10:30 service only.

**Carol “A great and mighty wonder”**

*Parts of this service are taken from* *© 2020 The United Church of Canada/L’Église Unie du Canada. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit ttp://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca. Any copy must include this notice.*