

Parish of St. Thomas, Apostle & Martyr, Ipswich

Second Sunday of Advent: 6th December 2020

Collect:

Almighty God, purify our hearts and minds, that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge and Saviour we may be ready to receive him, who is our Lord and our God. **Amen.**

Psalm 85.8-end

8 Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,



and righteousness will look down from the sky.

12 The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

A reading from the prophet 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 forever. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to 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."

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, o Christ.

Reflection:

I wonder what you have lost this year. 2020 will probably go down in the history books as a year that didn't happen, when everything was cancelled, postponed, or found new form through Zoom. And we have lost a lot. Whether it was a party, school prom, graduation, a family gathering, a holiday, time with friends, the ability to go out and about, your confidence, your health, or even a loved one, it has been a year of loss. Lost things and would-have-beens. So I suspect that for most of us, the idea of wilderness will seem closer this year. That image of being alone in a desert, wandering and separate from society. So as the season of Advent once again invites us to inhabit this space of wild lost-ness, we explore what it means to be in the wilderness with God.

Firstly, the wilderness can be a place of lament. Lament is something we don't do much of, in public anyway, but the Bible is full of it. Prophets, psalm writers, kings and ordinary people, they all cried out to God from their darkness and asked God to bring change. For lament isn't about laying blame, but is that process of bringing God our loss and our pain, presenting our suffering to God, and being full of faith (being faith-ful) that God's presence would be known.

I suspect we sometimes feel that Christianity should be all about joy, about praise and thankfulness, and perhaps we think that lamenting to God or each other shows a weakness, or even a lack of faith. But this is not so. Indeed, it is the opposite. It shows that even when we are walking through the shadows, we believe that God is there, that God is powerful, and that God wants good things for us. We lament in order to call upon God to change a situation, to draw upon God's mercy and love.

John Swinton, who has written an amazing book about where God is among suffering, says "Lament provides us with a language of outrage that speaks against the way that things are, but always in the hope that the way things are just now is not the way they will always be. Lament is thus profoundly hopeful." So lament is like a prayer in the wilderness, acknowledging the brokenness of the world, and asking God to bring change.

But, secondly, the wilderness of Advent brings with it a small light. Like a single candle in a dark room, the hope of what we wait for shines brightly, because the voice crying out in the wilderness is saying 'prepare the way of the Lord!'. The hope of advent is the promise that God is coming, that he will dwell among us, change the world, and bring us life. Our wilderness is a place of the not-yet and the coming-soon, but we know what it is we are waiting for. We wait for the coming of the one who IS the light, the creator and carrier of light. Many of us have put our decorations up early this year, because in the midst of our year's hardness we simply want that symbol of hope and joy, and perhaps the twinkling lights can remind us that God always walks with us alongside our troubles.

So here we are in the wilderness, acknowledging where we are, perhaps lamenting our loss, but holding tight to our light of hope as we prepare for the coming of the Lord. This is the Advent season. It's a bit like reading a story that you have read many times before. You know how it ends, and you know where you are on the journey, but you still take the time to travel through all the pages, looking forward all the time to the delight of the ending. So we take this time to live in hope, holding on to that promise of the light coming into the world.

I also learned something about Advent this year that for some reason I never picked up on before: the fact that Advent is also a time to think about Jesus' *second* coming. Not only do we look forward to Jesus' birth, but as Christians, we look forward to being with Jesus, with God, after we die. We look forward to heaven, and to seeing God's glory in all its fullness. In this way, our whole lives are like the season of Advent, as we are always looking forward to what will come next.

So this is our story for Advent. This is our story for the year that didn't happen. That through our lament and our loss, there is a light in the darkness, growing brighter with every passing day. As we tell the Advent story, we keep the rumour of God alive, the whisper of hope that is perhaps even louder in the shadows. We point back to the birth of a child who was light, and we point forward to the hope of being with Christ forever.

Listen! Hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness—prepare the way of the Lord!

- Rev Cat

God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

This week's hymn:

Longing for light, we wait in darkness
Longing for truth, we turn to You.
Make us Your own, Your holy people
Light for the world to see.

*Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in Your church gathered today.*

Longing for peace, our world is troubled
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light!...

Longing for food, many are hungry
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others
Shared until all are fed.

Christ, be our light!...

Longing for shelter, many are homeless
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us Your building, sheltering others
Walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light!...

Many the gifts, many the people
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another
Making Your kingdom come.

Christ, be our light!...

For Our Prayers:

The Bishops are calling on every parish to join them using this prayer at home and at every act of worship for our church, that we grow in trust in God's providence and deepen our own generosity giving of ourselves and of our gifts.

**Loving God,
you are always with us,
and give us all we need to be your church
in Suffolk.**

**Help us, we pray, to give as we have received:
abundantly, generously, and joyfully,
that our worship and our service
may bear witness to your Kingdom of
unfailing love.**

**In the name of your Son
who gave himself for us,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Please pray for:

Those with chronic or long-term illness: Eric Dickerson, Rosemary, Jenny, Andrew Barfield, Kathy Steele, Frank D., Andrew, Peggy, Natacha, Christine, Stephen, Samantha, Rex & Jill, Margaret Christian

Those undergoing treatment or currently ill: Emily, Gloria Elmer, Helen Harlow, Jean Dominy, Leslie Bloomfield, Katie (cancer), Alice (Joan's grandson's wife), Vincent Lightbody, Trish, Roger Dickerson, Vicky & Matt, Maureen Dobson, Dagmar (Andrea's mum)

All who are affected by the Coronavirus in the UK and around the world: *For all who have lost their jobs due to Covid19; all who are despairing. For all who have lost their lives & livelihoods, the injured, the bereaved. For hospital and health care workers*

For our government & MPs', and local councillors: for honesty in politics, for wisdom and justice for all. For refuges across the world & diplomats and peace makers, working to end conflicts

Those who have recently died, and their families mourning their loss: Eric Gilson, Diane Bloomfield, Peter Wardley, Leslie Symonds. RIP.

Call this number —> for free.

It's a lovely way to worship from home!



Notices:

Hymn & Carol-athon: Sunday 6th Dec, 11am. Simon will perform a **2 hour** marathon of hymns and carols, which will be livestreamed on our facebook page. Please sponsor him, and ***spread the word*** to get your friends and family to sponsor Simon on the Just Giving page!

Christmas Hamper Raffle: we are raffling off 8 hampers of Christmas goodies. At £2 per ticket, please buy them online, or in person during church open hours. The draw will be on Saturday 12th. Invite your friends to buy a ticket or two - £2 for a hamper is a bargain!

Advent & Christmas: We are planning various special services (to be booked into as we do for Sundays), including:

- Carol service - 13th Dec 6pm
- Zoom Carols - 20th 6pm
- Christingle Service - 24th 4pm
- Midnight Mass - 24th 11.30pm
- Christmas Day - 25th 10am

Alpha: We are starting a Zoom Alpha course on 7th January! It will run on Thursday evenings 7-9pm. We know from experience the best way to get people to come is for us to invite them personally, so please, *invite your friends, family, and neighbours*, and why not give it a go yourself!

Christmas Cards: rather than sending individual cards to each other this year, some folk are making a donation to church. Would you consider doing the same?

Prayer! We want our church to grow, to share God's love wider. Here is a prayer for us all to pray:
"God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your Church, send your Holy Spirit to give vision to our planning, wisdom to our actions and power to our witness. Help your Church here in Ipswich to grow younger, to grow in numbers and to grow leaders; in spiritual commitment to you and in service to our local community. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

To book by phone for Sunday services, call **01473 742973** in the week before the service, leaving your name, how many you are booking for, and your phone number.

This Week:

Sunday, 6th December

10am Eucharist: in-person worship with Zoom and livestream available

6pm Youth Group: our last meeting for the year—Christmas themed!

Tuesday 8th December

6 pm Meditation Group livestream on Facebook/StThomasPilgrimCommunity

Wednesday 9th December

10am Eucharist, also livestreamed on **Facebook/StThomasIpswich**

Church website:

<http://stthomasipswich.org.uk/>

Sunday Worship & other Worship resources on the Church Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasipswich/>

Pray for members of the St Thomas Congregation

Simon & Zuzana; Christine Perfect; David Pitt; Helen, Neil, James, Sophie & Adam; Rick, Julie & Amber; Linda Savage & family; Jackie Rathbone & family



Birthdays this week:

7th: Gareth Andrews **12th:** Rebecca Lowe

Contacts:

Priest in charge: Revd Canon Jutta Brueck m:07958 360564

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Jutta's days off are: Fridays & Saturdays

Assistant Curate: Revd Cat Connolly m: 07530 412988

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Lay Evangelist: Malcolm Gibbs m:07906 665530

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If you would like to chat, you could also ring:

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