

**SERVICE TRANSCRIPT FOR SUNDAY NOVEMBER 29<sup>th</sup> 2020  
(ADVENT SUNDAY)**

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Welcome – to everyone watching or listening. It is good to be together again in this way, even though we cannot be together in person. I hope that this last week has been kind to you, and that you have been able to keep well and safe. Some of you have had a birthday recently, and I wish you a Happy Birthday and send a virtual sweet!

I hope you all have a candle and a way of lighting it ready for our Advent candle lighting in a little while. If not, now is a good time to pause the video and go and find one, if you are able.

***Call to worship***

As we near the end of what has been a very strange year, one we could not have imagined at this time last year, and with no idea what the New Year will bring,

We meet today on this, the first Sunday in Advent.

Advent is a time of waiting, a time of expectation; a time to remember the birth of Jesus, but it is also a time to remember his life, his death, his resurrection and his ascending into heaven – a time to remember that GOD is ever present and that He has a master plan for each one of us and for His world - and a time to look to the future, when Christ will come again.

And so, we light the first Advent candle  
to remind us of our Advent hope – Jesus is coming again!

We say these words together:

LEADER:

The first candle in our crown is lit for the first time Jesus came to earth.

A shining example of how we should live, Light of the World from his humble birth.

***ALL:           Jesus, help us live more like you,  
                  O come, O come Emmanuel.  
                  Spirit-filled and shining bright,  
                  O come, O come Emmanuel.***

IN Luke's gospel we read –

*In the 6<sup>th</sup> month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary.*

*The angel said to Mary "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end". .....*

But God had yet to reveal the full extent and wonder of His plan and the part Mary would continue to play. She was waiting, not just for the birth of her child, but also for her whole life's purpose to unfold as she became part of the fulfilment of God's eternal plan. Little could she have dreamed of God's love story involving all who call that baby, Lord.

She was prepared to wait, and wait patiently, for what was to come.

We too wait for the unveiling of God's plan for us – in certain hope of eternal life with Him –and we long for the day when He will come, and all will be made clear.

In Romans 8 Paul writes:

*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.*

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons, for the redemption of our bodies.*

*For in this hope we were saved.*

*But hope that is seen is no hope at all.*

*Who hopes for what he already has?*

*But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”*

That waiting and hoping for what is unseen is like a deep yearning, an ache of longing that sometimes envelops us – to see loved ones we’ve not seen for a long time, to go back to the place we loved as a child, to feel what we in Wales call “hiraeth” – a heart felt longing for home.

But our longing for God, a CERTAIN hope of a relationship with Him, a hope for all He has prepared for us – all that is so much more.

Our greatest hope is for the unseen that God has promised us, our eternal life with the one who loves us more than we can ever imagine. For that, as Paul says, we must wait patiently!

The Old Testament foretells the coming of Jesus in many passages, including this from Micah Chapter 5:

*But you, Bethlehem Ephratha,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from old,  
from ancient times.*

*He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord,  
In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.*

*And they will live securely, for then His greatness*

*Will reach to the ends of the earth,*

*And He will be their peace.*

God’s saints of old told of the one who was to come.

Like the prophets of old, like God’s people through the centuries, we long for Jesus to come again – and call to Him – Come Emmanuel.

We pray this responsive prayer together – I will read the passages in normal text – you those in italics AND YOU BEGIN.

*(Congregation)*

*O come Emmanuel, be known among us.*

(leader)

Come Lord, touch our eyes, and we shall behold your glory.

*O come, Emmanuel, be known among us.*

Come Lord, touch our ears, and they shall hear your call.

*O come, Emmanuel, be known among us.*

Come Lord, touch our lips, and they shall sing your praises.

*O come, Emmanuel, be known among us.*

Come Lord, touch our hearts, and they shall fill with your love.

*O come, Emmanuel, be known among us.*

Come Lord, touch our lives, and we shall live and work for you.

*O come, Emmanuel, be known among us.*

*AMEN*

(Testimony about hope Leprosy Mission)

A recent communication from Leprosy Mission to all its supporters brought this message –and it is a message of hope for the future –

Peter Waddup, national director of Leprosy Mission writes

*I wanted to share a couple of examples of how God has blessed your generosity and brought hope for the future to people in India and Sri Lanka*

*There were tears of relief and joy when the Karuna mobile clinic arrived in Mumbai. While leprosy has always been part of life in the slums, COVID-19 meant that care was even more vital. Your compassion allowed our medical teams to give out ulcer care kits to people affected by leprosy in these slums so that they could care for their feet and prevent disability.*

*Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, you helped us to deliver emergency food parcels to leprosy-affected families. They were also trained in farming techniques. People like Visvalingam and his wife Thangama can now grow sustainable crops and fruit trees to feed themselves during continued lockdown restrictions.*

*Visvalingam and his family received the gift of a well. Now they have clean water for drinking and washing. Better personal hygiene will protect his family against COVID-19.*

*Visvalingam said: "We now garden as a family for our food and we can earn some income from it too. I share my crops with my neighbours and encourage them to use our water well. Thank you so much for the care you have given me and my family during this difficult time".*

Let us pray

Heavenly Father - We join with the staff and supporters of Leprosy Mission as we thank You for Your faithfulness to people affected by leprosy during this unimaginable year. And we pray for Your continued blessings on the work of Leprosy Mission and all other places where your people are bringing hope and comfort throughout the world. AMEN

### ***Prayers of intercession***

Prayers related to Coronavirus (see weekly sheet) and silent prayer for other needs.

## **Reading and Sermon**

*Romans 13: 11 And do this, understanding the present time: the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

### **THE TWILIGHT ZONE**

There is a sense of foreboding as the music takes us into the drama unfolding. We feel the tension rise as we wait for the unexpected.

But not today.

If you are a lover of horror films, or thrillers, you'll know that tension is a powerful force, moving the story forward, making us want to keep watching, keeping us on the edge of our seats. It works with well-authored books too. It keeps us wanting to read on, to view on. We are held in suspense – waiting for the outcome.

Tension is also powerful in creating physical movement - think about a bow and arrow. It is no use having a loose, relaxed bow string; you need the tension to make the arrow fly. Or think about the strings of a guitar – how do I make the sounds? By putting an enormous amount of tension on the strings and then striking them.

The problem is, often tensions are uncomfortable. I haven't played for a few years and it's like playing an egg slicer. Ouch!

If we know two people are having an argument with differing points of view, we will say that we can feel the tension in the room – it's how soap operas work most of the time! Tension asks us to hold in balance two things which seem to be, or are, opposing each other, and that can be a challenge. And that can take us from stories into the real-life relationships we have amongst our families and friends and in situations we face that make us feel tense.

This is often true too when we try and wrestle with some of the big questions of the Christian faith. Is God our friend, or is he our judge? Is God close to us, or holy and set apart from us? Is God in charge, or do we have free will?

When questions like this get too much for us we often give up don't we and collapse the tension, rather than try to wrestle with the apparent contradictions and creative power in the midst of them. And often to find that by dealing with them, we find answers.

### *First and second coming*

Today we begin the season of Advent, and we said last week that Advent means "coming". The "coming" of Jesus refers to his first coming as a baby 2000 years ago. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus kicked-off the Kingdom of God on earth. This was the beginning of the kingly rule and reign of God, which had been long promised by the prophets. It might have looked very different to what people had expected, but it made a transforming difference in the lives of everyone who responded and who still respond to it.

At the same time, the fullness of Jesus' Kingdom won't be complete until he comes again. As well as the first coming of Jesus as a human baby, there is also a second Advent, a "second coming" of Jesus. This is a clear expectation which the New Testament church had: that Jesus would come again. Jesus himself speaks of:

*“the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.” (Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27)*

Or take for example this passage from Hebrews:

*“Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” (Hebrews 9:28)*

After Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension back to his Father’s side, the angels said this to the disciples:

*“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)*

This belief in the return of Jesus shapes the whole of the New Testament understanding of what it means to be a Christian, and how we are to live in the world as we anticipate it. It’s something that should shape our lives and witness as God’s people. Jesus is coming again and we need to have a sense of urgency as it could be at any time, and we need to think how it impacts on our lives as Christians.

### *Knowing What Time It Is*

Our Bible reading today encourage us to be aware of the “time” we live in. Paul writes to the Romans:

*“And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.” (Romans 13:11-12)*

Imagine that you wake up early the day of a great party - it could be your birthday, a wedding, or Christmas day. The night before is almost over, the sun is just beginning to come up. You’re full of excitement - and yet the party itself has not yet started. In this situation, you begin to live with both the anticipation of the day being almost here and frustration that it has not yet fully begun. You would begin to put on your party clothes and do all you could to make final preparations. But you would hold that in tension with knowing that the party in all its fullness was still a few hours away. This is the “time” we live in as Christians. The night is almost gone and the day of Jesus’ Kingdom has started to dawn. And yet, that Kingdom “day” has not yet arrived in all its fullness. We live with the suspense that the full party has not yet started. Paul tells us to be aware that we are living in this “time”, this in-between daybreak stage.

This is a huge tension in the Christian life, sometimes called the “now and not yet” of the Kingdom:

“Now” Jesus is King, and at the same time his Kingdom is “not yet” here in its fullness.

“Now” Satan is defeated, and at the same time we are waiting for all evil to be finally overcome and so our lives are “not yet” free from temptation.

“Now” Jesus has healed the sick and has given us authority to do the same in his name, and at the same time we live in an era where sick people are “not yet” healed.

“Now” Jesus is resurrected from the dead and we are seated with him in the heavenly places, and at the same time we live in the “not yet” where all creation groans to be healed and resurrected.

This “now” and “not yet” calls us to be radical in how we live. It asks us to be both hope-filled and also realistic. Life is not all roses and sunshine this side of Jesus’ second coming. We all struggle with pain, temptation, disappointment and loss. The earth continues to groan, the oppressed continue to cry “How long?” And yet in the middle of these challenging realities we have seen the sun beginning to rise and we are called to live in its light. And that hope should make us see the positives in life, in God’s purposes, in the future life with God in glory.

### *How Then Do We Live?*

Paul continues the passage we just read with this warning and encouragement:

*“So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not*

*in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Romans 13:12-14)*

When we know a party is coming, we need to put on our party clothes and prepare all we can for the coming celebration. Similarly, when we know Jesus is coming we need to put on our Jesus clothes - for example the Armour of God (Eph 6) and attitudes like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Col 3:12). Jesus reminds his disciples that nobody knows the time of his return, and that we should:

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:34-36)

Honouring the coming King Jesus isn't just an imperative for us personally. It's imperative that people see Jesus in our lives, hear Good News in our words and find eternal hope for themselves before it's too late for them. Following Jesus is not a lifestyle choice, but an imperative for each man and woman. Without Jesus, people will perish, facing hell, without hope, facing God's righteous judgement and facing a lost eternity. And we have words of life. There is an urgency about this. What are we doing about it? What can we do? Let's never forget that for us, we became part of the coming kingdom the day we trusted and followed Jesus. We have the Holy Spirit in us, changing us and empowering us for God's purposes. We are going to explore a little more of that next week.

That's a challenge isn't it. What are we doing about it? Let's pray that God will give us the opportunity, strength and words to tell them of Jesus. In this coming week, let's reflect about whether we are living a life which anticipates God's eternity and celebrates what is best for us, for the people around us, and the world which God has made. Let's pray.

PRAYER - extempore

This is all thought thought-provoking stuff. Have you been challenged? Got questions? This week we'll be looking at this stuff more deeply in our Advent Course. Do come. Details of how to log on are on our website.

### ***Benediction***

***Blessed are you, Lord God, King of the universe,  
Prince of peace, to you be praise and glory forever.  
Your coming gives new hope to our lives.  
Your coming lightens our darkness,  
Strengthens us in our weakness,  
Brings peace in our troubles,  
And comfort in our distress.  
Lord, fill our lives,  
With your love,  
With your light,  
With your life,  
That we may live to praise and glorify you.  
Now and for ever.  
AMEN***

And so - Farewell till next time. Have a good week, and keep safe.

## **For Reflection & Discussion**

1. When is tension useful? When is it uncomfortable?

Read Romans 13:11-14 and also Mark 13:24-27 and Luke 21:32-36

2. How is Jesus' second coming important for His followers?
3. How can we prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming?
4. What would it look like for you to "clothe yourself with Christ?"

These are the questions for tomorrow's Walton Churches' Advent Couse. The service today was based largely on the subject matter. Why don't you log on and join the discussion? Details are elsewhere in News and Info.