

Service Transcript

Sunday 6th December

Notices

Hello and welcome to our December Communion Service, this second Sunday in Advent, the 6th December. This is our monthly Communion service, so this may be a good time to pause the video and get some bread and wine or juice, and while you're at it, you'll need to get your candle, or candles for marking the second week of Advent.

Advent is about the coming King, the One who came, the one who will come again, and the one who comes to us when we call out to Him. Psalm 40 celebrates this. Let's say it together. I will do the LEADER verses and we say the ALL ones together.

LEADER

I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.

2

He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.

3

He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
and put their trust in him.

ALL

***Blessed is the one
who trusts in the Lord,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.***

5

***Many, Lord my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.***

LEADER

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire –
but my ears you have opened; –
burnt offerings and sin offerings[d] you did not require.

7

Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come –
it is written about me in the scroll.

8

I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart.'

ALL

***I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, Lord,
as you know.***

10

***I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.
I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.***

LEADER

Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.

12

For troubles without number surround me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.
They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails within me.

13

Be pleased to save me, Lord;
come quickly, Lord, to help me.

He is the One who was and is and is to come. The Saviour who came, who comes to us when we call to Him and will come in glory. In Advent, we look forward to His coming in all three aspects. Let's give Him glory in our first song today.

There is an endless song

Prayer

Father we give you glory for Jesus. At this time, when we look forward to celebrate His coming as a baby to Bethlehem, we thank you that by your Holy Spirit, He comes to us when we call on Him and we thank you that we can meet Him here at His table as we celebrate Communion with Him today. Thank you this is a looking forward as it is something we do "until He comes." What we see in part now, we will see in fullness when He comes in glory, and we praise You for that too.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Advent Candle

It's time to light our candles: Candle Week 2 video

Responsive words on pictures



The theme of the second Sunday in Advent is love and this morning in Communion we are going to remember that in Communion. Emmanuel came because God loved us and in His death on the cross, paid a massive price to redeem us from sin and open a way through which we have peace with Him through faith. The next song is a traditional hymn that remembers that, and points to the final end that Jesus will return and He will finish His new creation.

Love divine, all loves excelling

Before Andrew shares God's word with us, Rhiannon is going to read from John's Gospel.

John 6:41-59

41 At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

43 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' [d] Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

53 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

I am the Bread of Life

The Raising Agent

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. John 6:54

A few years ago, I went on a cookery course. One of the things I learnt was about raising agents. It was actually quite scientific. If you want your cakes to rise, you can use either physics, chemistry or biology. There are three basic ways to get air into your food, so that what you bake is light and not stodgy.

Physics. Meringues - you beat the air in with a whisk, and then cook them before they can collapse.

Chemistry. Scones - you add baking powder, which contains two chemicals (a bicarbonate and an acid) that react when they meet water. Carbon dioxide is released as a by-product and you get fluffy scones.

Biology. Bread - you add yeast, a living organism. Living organisms thrive on warmth, food and moisture. Yeast meets sugar, and gives off carbon dioxide as it grows (just like us!)

Jesus once said that "the kingdom of heaven is like yeast" (Matthew 13:33)

What has any of this got to do with Advent? Advent is not just a countdown to Christmas - it's about Jesus' coming back, at the end of time. For Christians, this is something to rejoice about, because Jesus promises, in this passage, to raise us up from the dead.

Jesus first coming (as a baby in Bethlehem) and his second coming have always been linked in Christian thought. True in our reading today - Jesus says (six times in this chapter) that he "came down from heaven". As in the well known carol ('Once in Royal David's City')

He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all

Mrs Alexander is rightly criticised for some of the dubious theology in the carol, but she got it right in this verse. It's very Biblical.

The doctrine of the Incarnation - that Jesus was God in human form - wasn't invented after Jesus had gone. He taught it.

He also taught that he would return, and raise us up - if we share his life in a special way. What we call 'communion', the sharing of bread and wine, is about how we take this 'Jesus life', this raising agent, into ourselves.

Interestingly, John's Gospel, though it describes the Last Supper in more detail than the other Gospels, does not actually include the institution of what we call the Lord's Supper. John actually explores the theology of it in Chapter 6 (the longest chapter in the NT) as part of the debate that followed the feeding of the 5,000. This seems to have started after Jesus had crossed the lake, where the waiting crowds want to compare him with Moses (who

gave the Israelites manna in the wilderness), and continues in the synagogue at Capernaum. John deliberately links his teaching with the sacrament of bread and wine. He even uses the Greek word 'eucharist' in his description of Jesus giving thanks for the bread (vv 11, 23).

Jesus' message is quite clear - what he stresses is not that he was able to miraculously feed them with real bread. He was not trying to be another Moses. His miracle, and the manna in the wilderness, were only about providing for our temporary physical needs. These were important (Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread) but "man does not live by bread alone". The real Bread of Heaven was something else. "I am the Bread of Life" he proclaims. One of the seven "I am" statements in John. Three of them include the word life. Because ultimately, the biggest enemy we face is death. Even if Covid-19 is eradicated, we will all die of something else. I've lost two close relatives recently, to cancer and dementia. People who say they are not religious are just burying their heads in the sand. I'm prepared to follow someone who has demonstrated that death is defeated. Jesus, the Bread of Life.

The key word is not bread, but life. Earlier (v. 33) he had said "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world". Life is one of the key themes in John's Gospel (others include light and love - also in 1 John). Here are some of the references:

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (1:4)

Whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life (3:16)

A spring of water welling up to eternal life (4:14)

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (5:24)

The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life (6:63)

"To whom shall we go?" asks Peter. "You have the words of eternal life." (6:68)

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (10:10)

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. (10:27-28)

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (11:25-26)

I am the way, the truth and the life. (14:6)

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (20:31)

The reason John wrote his gospel, he says, is so that we might have life.

He starts by telling us that the Word became flesh (1:14). He was God, but he became flesh and blood, to identify with us. We need to identify with him, by receiving his flesh and

blood. This is the message of John 6. We need to partake of the Divine Life, the life Jesus had with the Father:

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (6:57)

Because he is the resurrection and the life, we will be raised to life (as he was). Because our destiny is to become like him.

When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

This is not automatic ("whoever does not believe stands condemned already" John 3:18). We have to believe. Taking bread and wine is a symbol of that belief. The Jews were confused about how Jesus could give us his flesh to eat (v.52), but his message is surely that we need to take into ourselves the 'Jesus life', the real life (more permanent than ordinary bread) that he brought into the world. The true raising agent. The eternal life that came from the Father. The life that was there in the Son, even though he was flesh and blood. The Risen Lord was even more real. He had permanent life. That life he shares with us, as we receive the benefits of his broken body and shed blood. And one day we too will be raised.

*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.
Romans 8:11*

Paul is saying the same thing as John. They have both grasped what Jesus taught about eternal life - how we can have it, because he brought it into the world. The life of God made flesh, mortal but overcoming mortality. Not just about partaking of bread and wine, but receiving the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus, into our lives - which is something John emphasises in his account of the Last Supper, and here in John 6 - "the Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing". (John 6:63)

That is the real meaning of Communion - receiving the life of the Incarnate Son of God.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

It's all about receiving. But in receiving we proclaim. We proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. It's also the real meaning of Advent. When he comes again he will raise us up. And we will be like him.

CONFESSION

As we come to the table this morning, we come recognising the glory that is before us because we have trusted and followed Jesus, and as we reflect on that, we are only too aware of our own sin and shortcomings; we don't reflect his glory in our lives. So before we break bread, let's bring our confessions before Him, recognising that Jesus' shed blood was sufficient to take away all our sin, and ask God to purify our lives so that we may reflect the people we should be in Christ. In the silence let's do that now.

Short silence.

Love Divine (Purify) Ben Cantelon

Communion

Father, we worship you this morning as we come to celebrate communion. We thank you that you have loved us and shown compassion to us even though we never deserved it. Lord Jesus, thank you for taking the punishment we deserved and suffered in our place. Holy Spirit enlighten us and empower us as we eat bread and drink wine this morning to be the people we should be in Christ. We ask this in His name, Amen.

The Bread and Wine

Here is how Paul presents to us the invitation of Christ:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, **"This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."**

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So as we break this bread, we remember the body of Christ broken for us.

As we drink from the cup, we remember the blood of Christ shed for us.

Immanuel, O Immanuel

Post-Communion Prayer

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were afar off, you met us in your Son and brought us home.

Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.

***May we who share Christ's body live his risen life
We who drink his cup, bring life to others,
We whom the Spirit lights, give light to the world.***

Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so that we and all your children might be free, and the whole Earth live to praise your name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fellowship Prayers

We take time this morning to pray for our fellowship Let's pray .

Our Father

We pray for those in our fellowship or known to us who have lost loved ones recently, that they will know your peace and presence. We pray too for those who have lost loved ones in the last year or two who will also particularly miss them this year with Covid measures in place. Lord, comfort them in such a difficult time and turn their sadness into joy.

We bring to you our forthcoming Christmas services, that although we are not going to be doing them in the familiar way, that through the new way of doing things, there will be those who are drawn to the Good News that your Son has entered into this world and that forgiveness, life and hope is offered as a gift to them. Bring your peace into their lives this Christmas time we pray.

Let's take a few moments in the quiet to bring individuals and situations before God.

Silence

Lord Jesus, you are the God of Advent. When we call out to you, by your Spirit, you enter into our situations and bring your mercy, peace and love. May this be so in the lives and situations we have prayed about this morning. Thank you Lord Jesus that we have the promise that one day you will return and we cry, even so, come Lord Jesus!

Great is the darkness

Blessing

As we close, we say this blessing together.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

That's it for another week. May you know God's blessing. Goodbye and stay safe!