



AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 3rd December 2023

1st Sunday in Advent

compiled by Angela Banfield - Lay Assistant

Advent candles tell their story as we watch and pray,
longing for the Day of Glory, 'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.
Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness,
changed for gladness on that day.

Mark Earey

Welcome to our worship as we begin a new church year. We will be reading through the gospel of St. Mark as we prepare for our celebration of Christmas 2023 and of the coming 2024. How quickly the time passes and such anniversaries, as Christmas, give us more than a hint of the treats in store as we explore this gospel over the next few months.

Whenever we read Mark's Gospel, we are struck by the excitement and haste that his writing conveys. Our reading for today, the first Sunday in Advent, illustrates this feeling perfectly, although, instead of the immediately and straight aways that we often find Mark using, we hear Beware, Keep Alert, Keep Awake!

Hymn: 171 STF

1] Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes, the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne and every heart a song.

2] He comes the prisoner to release, in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

3] He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace to enrich the humble poor.

4] Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace, your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring with your beloved name.

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

Prayer

Almighty God, we come to you asking for your blessing as we worship you today. Through your Holy Spirit help us to be one. One people; each seeking to please and serve you as we love and care for mankind and for your world.

Forgive us when we don't do this and we act selfishly, without thought of Jesus' commandment to love one another as he has loved us. Forgive us if we spoil and hurt things you have created. Forgive us when we rely on our own strength and do not trust you.

St. Mark calls us to be ready for Christ to come again in glory. We want to be ready and waiting for his return, so we ask you to forgive us and renew us to your service. Help us to serve you in your kingdom. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Psalm 80: 1 - 7 & 17-19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.

Stir up your might and come to save us!

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

You make us the scorn of our neighbours; our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

In this beautiful Psalm we hear echoes of the blessing that God gave Moses to give to Aaron, for him to bless the people. Have a look at Numbers 6 verses 24 and 26. Today these words are often used to bless the congregation at the end of a service.

Hymn: 177 STF

1] Lo, he comes with clouds descending,
once for favoured sinners slain;
thousand thousand saints attending –
swell the chorus of his train:
Allelujah! Allelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.

2] Every eye shall now behold him
robed in glorious majesty;
we who set at nought and sold him –
pierced and nailed him to a tree,
deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.

3] Those dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears;
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshippers:
with what rapture, with what rapture, gaze
we on those glorious scars.

4] Sing, amen, let all adore thee,
high on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory,
claim the kingdom for thine own:
come Lord Jesus! Come Lord Jesus!
Everlasting God, come down!

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Mark 13: 24 - 37

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then 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 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. **No One Knows That Day or Hour** “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the

doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning - lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

Reflection

The following story may be well known to you, but it is a charming and powerful reminder to be ready to welcome Jesus. Our gospel speaks of Jesus coming with great power and glory, but we must remember that the glory of God is found in a stable birth, a life of sacrifice, and a criminal's death and his resurrection appearances were to his humble and distraught disciples. I'm reminded of the verse from Hebrews 13: 2 'Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realising it.'

The Cobbler and His Guest

There once lived in the city of Marseilles an old shoemaker, loved and honoured by his neighbours, who affectionately called him Father Martin. One Christmas Eve as he sat alone in his little shop reading of the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus, and of the gifts they brought, he said to himself, "If tomorrow were the first Christmas, and if this Jesus were to be born in Marseilles this night, I know what I would give him!" He rose from his stool and took from a shelf overhead two tiny shoes of softest snow-white leather with bright silver buckles. "I would give him these, my finest work." Then he paused and reflected. "But I am a foolish old man," he continued..."The Master has no need of my poor gifts." Replacing the shoes, he blew out the candle and retired to rest. Hardly had he closed his eyes it seemed, when he heard a voice call his name... "Martin! Martin!" Intuitively he felt a presence, then the voice spoke again... "Martin, you have wished to see me. Tomorrow I shall pass by your window. If you see me, and bid me enter, I shall be your guest at your table." Father Martin did not sleep that night for joy and, before it was yet dawn, he rose and swept and tidied up his little shop. He spread fresh sand upon the floor, and wreathed green boughs of fir along the rafters. On the spotless linen-covered table he placed a loaf of white bread, a jar of honey, and a pitcher of milk. When all was in readiness, he took up his patient vigil at the window. Presently he saw an old street-sweeper pass by, blowing upon his thin, gnarled hands to warm them. "Poor fellow, he must be half frozen." thought Martin. Opening the door, he called out to him, "Come in, my friend and warm yourself, and drink something hot" and the man gratefully accepted the invitation. An hour passed, and Martin saw a young, miserably clothed woman, carrying a baby. She paused wearily to rest in the shelter of his doorway. The heart of the old cobbler was touched. Quickly he flung open the door. "Come in and warm while you rest," he said to her. "You do not look well, he remarked. "I am going to the hospital. I hope they will take me in, and my baby boy," she explained. "My husband is at sea, and I am ill, without a soul." "Poor child," cried Father Martin. "You must eat something while you are getting warm. No? Then let me give a cup of milk to the little one. Ah! What a bright, pretty little fellow he is! Why, you have put no shoes on him!" "I have no shoes for him," sighed the mother."Then he shall have this lovely pair I finished yesterday." And Father Martin took down from the shelf the soft little snow-white shoes he had admired the evening before. He slipped them on the child's feet...they fitted perfectly. And shortly the poor young mother went on her way, two shoes in her hand and tearful with gratitude. Father Martin resumed his post at the window. Hour after hour went by, and although many people passed his window, and although many people shared the hospitality of the old cobbler, the expected guest did not appear. "It was only a dream," he sighed, with a heavy heart. "I did hope and believe, but He has not come." Suddenly, so it seemed to his weary eyes, the room was flooded with a strange light and to the cobbler's astonished vision, there appeared before him, one by one, the poor street sweeper, the sick mother and her child, and all the people whom he had aided during the day. Each smiled at him and said: "Have you not seen me? Did I not sit at your table?" Then they

vanished from his view. At last, out of the silence, Father Martin heard again the gentle voice repeating the old familiar words: "Whosoever shall receive one such in my name, receiveth me...for I was hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in...Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.

(The Cobbler and His Guest (also known as Martin, The Cobbler) was written by Russian author Leo Tolstoy and one English translation was done by Nathan Haskeel Dole which was published in the United States in 1885. Mr. Dole translated the Russian story title as "Where Love is, God is Also" but it became better known by its character Marin.)

Prayers of Intercession

Dear Lord, at this special and Holy time of preparation, we ask for your help in seeing the need around us in your world. We ask for your help in our caring, so that we are kind and sensitive to those we meet. We ask for your spirit of generosity so that we are able to share from the abundant blessings you have showered upon us.

We pray dear Lord for peace throughout the world. And we especially pray for the horrific turmoil in Israel and Palestine. May we respond to such suffering in whatever ways we can. We also pray that the ongoing war in Ukraine will end. We pray for those displaced and suffering there, and for those throughout our world, mourning loved ones lost to war.

We pray Dear Lord for all who are sad or desperate at this time. We ask that we can join with your Holy Spirit of love and truth, to bring peace and joy into people's lives. We offer our lives again to you so that our hands and feet and hearts will spread and bring Good News to your world.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Hymn: 185 STF

1] Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
glory to Jesus the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King.

*Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
this is our song who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King*

2] All shall be well in his kingdom of peace,
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and peace from his sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King.

Come let us sing.....

3] Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin
doubt shall not darken his witness within;
hell has no terrors and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King:

Come let us sing.....

4] Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished when Jesus is King.

Come let us sing.....

Charles Hutchinson Gabriel (1856- 1932)

Blessing

May the Lord bless you and keep you:

the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the Lord turn his face towards you and give you his peace. Amen.