

Third Sunday of Advent 13th December 2020

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

**HYMN HAIL TO THE LORD'S ANOINTED**

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
great David's greater Son!  
Hail, in the time appointed,  
his reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
to set the captive free,  
to take away transgression,  
and rule in equity.

2 He comes, with succour speedy,  
to those who suffer wrong;  
to help the poor and needy,  
and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing,  
their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned and dying,  
were precious in his sight.

3 He shall come down like showers  
upon the fruitful earth;  
that love, joy, hope, like flowers,  
spring in his path to birth;  
before him, on the mountains,  
shall peace the herald go;  
and righteousness, in fountains,  
from hill to valley flow.

4 Kings shall bow down before him,  
and gold and incense bring;  
all nations shall adore him,  
his praise all people sing;  
to him shall prayer unceasing  
and daily vows ascend,  
his kingdom still increasing,  
a kingdom without end.

5 O'er every foe victorious,  
he on his throne shall rest;  
from age to age more glorious,  
all-blessing and all-blest.  
The tide of time shall never  
his covenant remove;  
his name shall stand for ever,  
his changeless name of Love.

*James Montgomery (1771-1854)*

**GATHERING BEFORE GOD**

Sing songs of hope into the waiting air  
And begin the dance of joy,  
For the life of faith is before us.  
Look into the distance and see the rising dawn  
With shining rays like acts of love  
And warming brightness from the heart of God

**Let us sing praises to God  
And watch for the Christ,  
For in the longing of Advent  
Lies the promise of a good which is yet to come.**

*From, 'Liturgies for High Days', by Dorothy McRae-McMahon*

**PSALM 126**

**R** *The Lord has done great things for us.*

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.

<sup>2</sup> Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy. R

Then said they among the nations,  
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

<sup>3</sup> The Lord has indeed done great things for us,  
and therefore we rejoiced. R

<sup>4</sup> Restore again our fortunes, O Lord,  
as the river beds of the desert.

Those who sow in tears  
shall reap with songs of joy.

<sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed,,  
will come back with shouts of joy,  
bearing their sheaves with them R

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets  
to preach repentance and prepare the way of our salvation:  
give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins,  
that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer;  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit  
now and forever. **Amen.**

*Episcopal Church, USA*

**CONFESSION**

When the Lord comes, he will bring to light the things now hidden in  
darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Therefore, in the  
light of Christ, let us confess our sins.

Father eternal, giver of light and grace,

We have sinned against you and against our neighbour,  
In what we have thought,  
In what we have said and done,  
through ignorance, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault.

We have wounded your love,  
and marred your image in us.

We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,  
Forgive us all that is past; and lead us out from darkness  
to walk as children of light. Amen

**ABSOLUTION**

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and  
assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**REFLECTION**

Ask God to speak to you through the passage that you are about to read.

**BIBLE READINGS** ISAIAH 61: 1-4, 8-11

*A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah*

The servant of the Lord said:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;

<sup>3</sup> to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,

the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

<sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

<sup>8</sup>For I the LORD love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

<sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the nations,  
and their offspring among the peoples;  
all who see them shall acknowledge  
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots,  
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,  
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise  
to spring up before all the nations.

#### HYMN: HILLS OF THE NORTH REJOICE

1 Hills of the North, rejoice,  
echoing songs arise,  
hail with united voice  
him who made earth and skies;  
he comes in righteousness and love,  
he brings salvation from above.

2 Isles of the Southern seas,  
sing to the listening earth,  
carry on every breeze  
hope of a world's new birth:  
in Christ shall all be made anew,  
his word is sure, his promise true.

3 Lands of the East, arise,  
he is your brightest morn,  
greet him with joyous eyes,  
praise shall his path adorn:  
the God whom you have longed to know  
in Christ draws near, and calls you now.

4 Shores of the utmost West,  
lands of the setting sun,  
welcome the heavenly guest  
in whom the dawn has come:  
he brings a never-ending light  
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.

5 Shout, as you journey on,  
songs be in every mouth,  
lo, from the North they come,  
from East and West and South:  
in Jesus all shall find their rest,  
in him the sons of earth be blest.

*Editors of English Praise (1975) based on Charles E Oakley (1832-1865)  
© Oxford University Press*

**THE GOSPEL JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28**

*HEAR THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO JOHN*

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

*This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you O Christ.*

#### **BIBLE READING: 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

#### **SOME THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:**

The third Sunday of Advent is sometimes known as Gaudete Sunday. The name comes from Latin word *Gaudete* which means 'rejoice'. This is the first word of the reading from 1 Thessalonians 5 (and also another reading for the third Sunday of Advent in other liturgical cycles: Philippians 4.4-6). It is a chance for knowing liturgists to light the 'pink' candle on the Advent

wreath. Some save this candle for the fourth Sunday of Advent believing the colour to represent The Blessed Virgin Mary who is celebrated on the fourth Sunday. In fact, the liturgical colour for Advent, a season of penitence, is purple. There is some reprise from the purple and the penitence/abstinence of Advent on the third Sunday when, even as we await the coming of Christ, we are told to rejoice.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul tells us:

#### 1. Rejoice always

Because this sounds so simple and so difficult, it is easy to miss the point...or purposefully forget the point. However, Christ is born, Christ has died, Christ has Risen, Christ will come again. Therefore we are to rejoice. Don't get stressed over all the Christmas presents you have to buy, don't feel sad because you wish your family were larger and you really want more presents to buy, don't worry about Covid: Christ died for you, he rose for you, and he will come for you. I admit these things are hard to say, and more difficult to do!

#### 2. Pray without ceasing

When it comes to asking for things that are simple to say and how to do, Paul is on a roll. He has asked us to do something that seems difficult enough when he said rejoice always, now he is asking us to pray without ceasing. We are a little busy for all that – praying for 10 minutes a day might seem a more realistic (but still difficult) target. When Paul asks us to pray without ceasing he invites us to consider just *what* prayer is. As well as this, Paul anticipates the life of heaven: conversation with God, seeing things from God's perspective: living a life of prayer.

#### 3. Give thanks in all circumstances.

Paul rolls on, unperturbed, with another simple thing that is hard to do. It is worth recalling that Paul, perhaps more than anyone, knew how hard it was to give thanks in all circumstance. He may not have gone through

Covid and had to endure the terrible frustration of church buildings closed for public worship, or the government requiring facemasks, but Paul had been beaten a number of times as an act of punishment, been shipwrecked, ridiculed, and imprisoned. He had once fled in fear of his life. Paul, however, never backed off: he never gave up. Paul lived in light of the future promise that Christ would come again – so what was the worst that could happen? He could be killed, but how can you kill someone who knows that Christ has taken the sting from death? There is always hope: in the midst of your darkest prison – picture it now – the thing you most struggle with, the thing that you think has you locked up and there is no escape from - and in that place give thanks.

4. Do not quench the work of the Spirit, do not despise prophecy.

God is always doing new things. These new things sometimes seem scary, or bizarre. However, growing things experience new life, and these growing, new things are also changing things. We should desire the Holy Spirit to be at work in our lives and in our Church.

5. Hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

Sometimes good things slip through our fingers, but we should seek to hold fast on to them; and at the same time, back off from all forms of evil. Again, it all sounds simple enough to say, but the fact that they are hard to do means we should nurture some spiritual disciplines...which is what Advent is, in part, about.

May God gives us peace as we try, with the help of the Spirit through whom our weaknesses become God's opportunities, to live as the children of God. For that is what we are. **Amen.**

*Harry Steele*

**SILENCE** During this time of quiet invite Jesus in to your hearts.

MARANATHA! Come Lord,  
**Dwell in our hearts, full of grace and truth**

MARANATHA! Come Lord,  
**That we might live prophetic lives**  
MARANATHA! Come Lord,  
**Make us one, as You and the Father are one**  
MARANATHA! Come Lord,  
**The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"**

**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.*

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  
Longing for hope, many despair.  
Your word alone has pow'r to save us.  
Make us your living voice.  
*Chorus*

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.  
Longing for water, many still thirst.  
Make us your bread, broken for others,  
shared until all are fed.  
*Chorus*

4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  
Longing for warmth, many are cold.  
Make us your building, sheltering others,  
walls made of living stones.  
*Chorus*

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

*Chorus*

*Bernadette Farrell (born 1957)*

**OUR PRAYERS** (USING PRAYERS BY NICK FAWCETT DURING THE SERVICE)

Loving God, we dare not sing you a glad song this day  
without bringing before you those here and in other places  
for whom singing a song of joy  
is a costly and hard-won moment of hope.  
Even our own songs of faith  
sometimes arise from small moments of delight  
in the midst of struggling life.

*Silent reflection.*

We come to you now with our prayers for ourselves and others:

Hear our prayers, O God of hope:  
take the ashes of burnt-out life  
and the fragments of frail futures  
and cover them with flowers  
of your creative possibilities.  
Take the tears of the world  
and transform our weeping with the oil  
which burns with warmth and light for a new day.  
Lift our hearts with your encouragement and strength  
so that we enter this week  
filled with your inspiration for a different future.

**For you are the source of our hope,  
you are the wonder at the end of the waiting  
and you are the God of all eternity. Amen.**

*From, 'Liturgies for High Days', by Dorothy McRae-McMahon*

**A PRAYER CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS**

God of compassion,  
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.  
in their loneliness, be their consolation;  
in their anxiety, be their hope;  
in their darkness, be their light;  
through him who suffered alone on the cross,  
but reigns with you in glory,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**MUSIC: LISTEN TO 'THIS IS THE TRUTH SENT FROM ABOVE'**  
*sung by St Martin's Voices*

- 1 This is the truth sent from above,  
the truth of God, the God of love;  
therefore don't turn me from your door,  
but hearken all both rich and poor.
- 2 The first thing which I do relate  
is that God did man create;  
the next thing which to you I'll tell:  
woman was made with man to dwell.
- 3 Thus we were heirs to endless woes,  
till God the Lord did interpose;  
and so a promise soon did run  
that he would redeem us by his Son.
- 4 And at that season of the year  
our blest Redeemer did appear;  
he here did live, and here did preach,  
and many thousands he did teach.

5 Thus he in love to us behaved,  
to show us how we must be saved;  
and if you want to know the way,  
be pleased to hear what he did say.

#### AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

My Jesus,  
I believe that You  
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.  
I love You above all things,  
and I desire to receive You into my soul.  
Since I cannot at this moment  
receive You sacramentally,  
come at least spiritually into my heart.  
I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.  
Never permit me to be separated from You.  
Amen.

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

#### THE BLESSING

#### HYMN: THOU WHOSE ALMIGHTY WORD

Thou whose almighty word  
chaos and darkness heard  
and took their flight,

hear us, we humbly pray,  
and where the gospel day  
sheds not its glorious ray  
Let There Be Light!

2. Saviour who came to bring  
on thy redeeming wing  
healing and sight,  
health to the sick in mind,  
sight to the inly blind,  
now to all humankind  
Let There Be Light!

3. Spirit of truth and love,  
lifegiving, holy Dove,  
speed forth thy flight;  
move o'er the waters' face,  
bearing the lamp of grace,  
and in earth's darkest place  
Let There Be Light!

4. Blessed and holy Three,  
glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, Love, Might,  
boundless as ocean's tide  
rolling in fullest pride,  
through the world, far and wide,  
Let There Be Light!