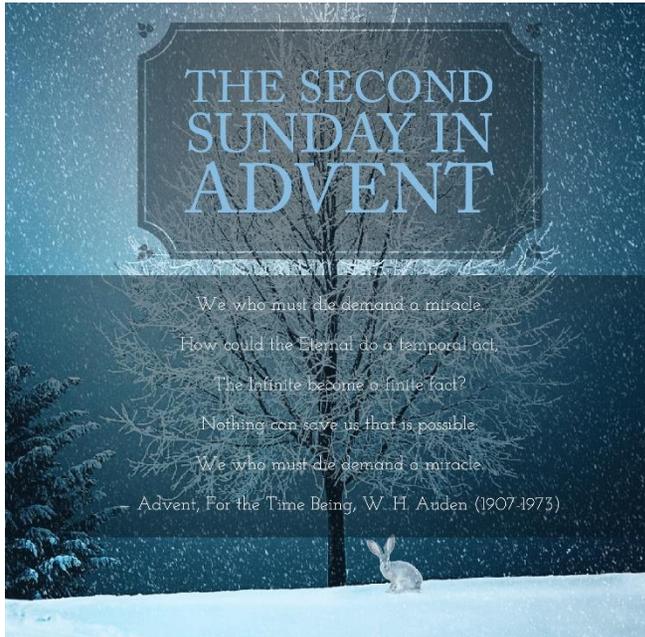


December 6, 2020

Second Sunday of Advent



St. John United Church of Christ

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Susan Blain

Week Two: *The readings this week continue the theme of great change coming to a people struggling with faithfulness. God’s continuing challenge is clear, but so is God’s tenderness and care for a weary people, offering “Comfort, comfort...” Isaiah gives voice to the emotional ups and downs of a community under stress—surely this people is only “grass”—yet that same people is called out to the hard, future oriented work of preparing the way for the Holy One. 2 Peter acknowledges the mystery of God’s time—Kairos—where one day may be a thousand years by human reckoning, and the community is called to live attentively in this very moment, listening for the call of God. The beginning of Mark’s Gospel is one such moment: the appearance of an unkempt and unruly prophet, calling people to change their lives in the expectation that God is doing something radically new. One is coming into their midst with the power of the Holy Spirit.*

LIGHT THE FIRST AND SECOND CANDLES:

O Holy One, we light this second candle,
A candle offering comfort to weary spirits
After a year of pain and loss.
Let its glow remind us of your tender care
And warm our lives in the Light of Peace.
Let it guide us to your presence in our midst,
Leading us to your Justice and Joy in the service of
Love. **God be with us in this
Light of Peace.**



Scriptures for this Sunday

Isaiah 40:1-11 Psalm 85:1-2, 81-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a Mark 1:1-8

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Let us hear what God will speak,
Tender words for a burdened people:

Comfort, comfort, my people!

The days of sorrow are ending!

Let us hear what God will speak,
Encouraging words for an anxious people:

Prepare a way for the Holy One,

Through deserts of despair

build a highway for our God!

Let us hear what God will speak,
words of vision for a weary people:

**Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss!**

Come, let us worship!

INVOCATION:

O Holy One, you are tender shepherd,
architect of the Way, beguiling hope of all who go
looking for you deep in their lives.

Surprise us here with Sweetness, challenge, vision—
Whatever we may need. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: From the Common English Bible

Isaiah 40:1-11 “Comfort, comfort my people! says
your God. ²Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has
ended, that her penalty has been paid that she has

received from the LORD’s hand double for all her
sins!

³A voice is crying out: “Clear the LORD’s way in the
desert! Make a level highway in the wilderness for
our God! ⁴Every valley will be raised up, and every
mountain and hill will be flattened. Uneven ground
will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain.

⁵The LORD’s glory will appear, and all humanity will
see it together; the LORD’s mouth has commanded
it.”

⁶A voice was saying: “Call out!” And another said,
“What should I call out?” All flesh is grass; all its
loyalty is like the flowers of the field.

⁷The grass dries up and the flower withers when
the LORD’s breath blows on it. Surely the people are
grass. ⁸The grass dries up; the flower withers, but
our God’s word will exist forever.

⁹Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion!
Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem!
Raise it; don’t be afraid; say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”

¹⁰Here is the LORD God, coming with strength, with a
triumphant arm, bringing his reward with him and
his payment before him.

¹¹Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; he will
gather lambs in his arms and lift them onto his lap.
He will gently guide the nursing ewes.

2 Peter 3:8-15a ⁸ Don't let it escape your notice, dear friends, that with the Lord a single day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a single day. ⁹ The Lord isn't slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a dreadful noise, the elements will be consumed by fire, and the earth and all the works done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be? You must live holy and godly lives, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming day of God. Because of that day, the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴ Therefore, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found by him in peace—pure and faultless. ¹⁵ Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our dear friend and brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him,

Mark 1:1-8 The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, ² happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

*"Look, I am sending my messenger before you.
He will prepare your way,*

³ a voice shouting in the wilderness:

*"Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight."*

⁴ John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. ⁵ Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. ⁶ John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

SERMON: **"Waiting"**

Because Rev. Blain included the three readings in her introduction, I included them here. Before Covid, we used to read all three during our in-person worship services.

In these readings there is a shift in the mood from lament and longing (last week's message) to the good news of God coming soon. Both Isaiah 40 and 2 Peter 3 remind us of conditions in the world that persuade some that salvation is nowhere near. But those same texts boldly make their announcements

of comfort and redemption to waiting believers. Mark uses Isaiah 40 to say that the promise is being fulfilled in the appearance of John the Baptist to prepare the way.

Waiting . . . What do we do while we wait?

Waiting for something new or for rescue is hard. We get impatient. We get bored. We want to give up. I was thinking of a pregnant woman who has to wait 9 months to hold her baby. I'm sure she gets impatient but she can't give up. What can she do while she waits? She can follow her doctor's advice: eat healthy, take her vitamins, go for walks. See her doctor regularly. She can do these things to assure her baby will be healthy.

What about us? What can we do while we wait? The 2 Peter text gives us suggestions. ¹⁴Therefore, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found by him in peace—pure and faultless. ¹⁵Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our dear friend and brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him.”

“Found by God in peace – pure and faultless.” And in verse 9b, “God is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives.” Does that sound familiar? What was John saying at the banks of the Jordan River? Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

God keeps God's promises if we are present to receive them. If we turn away and give up, God might have trouble finding you when God calls.

Isaiah 40:3-5 reads, ³A voice is crying out: “Clear the LORD's way in the desert! Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God! ⁴Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened. Uneven ground will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain.

⁵The LORD's glory will appear, and all humanity will see it together; the LORD's mouth has commanded it.”

Does that sound like something worth waiting for? Is it really that hard to stay in touch with God during this time of Advent? “Hey God, I'm still here waiting but I am grateful for the chance to wait because I know the best is yet to come.” Amen.

PRAYERS: I know this prayer is a week late, but I think it's worth hearing. From the thoughts of Maren Tirabassi.

Words for the Week of Hope in the United States

Sometimes we light a candle,
(it can be blue or purple, red,
this year simply an electric tea light)
and, after a service or a meal,
extinguish it –
due diligence, Sunday of Hope.

But hope is a whole week –
a new administration is being formed
and we put our hope in it.
US / Iranian relations are strained,
but we put our hope in them.

World HIV/AIDS Day is tomorrow,
and we put our hope
in people not forgetting it.

Ninety thousand are in the hospital with Covid,
and our hope is ... no, not the vaccine –
that's for us – our hope for them is beds, medical
staff, ventilators, new healing protocols.

My newsfeed tells me forty critically endangered
sea turtles were rescued from cold-stunning,
and we put our hope in everything long-lived, turtles
and elder friends, the ones they call compromised,
(which sounds like they are less worthy of saving),
the traditions, history, and contemporary traumas
of indigenous people – which, after brief and guilty
mentions the second week of October
and last Thursday, are conveniently tucked away.

And there is the old story we begin to tell now –
with its angels, manger, and fleeing,
we put in that story, too –
a daily baa for the straw of hope
and the deep camel-weariness
that the gifts we carry
will journey from hope to peace. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR OFFREINGS:
In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.
We bring forth our offerings – our tithes, our
treasures, our least coins –
to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

DEDICATION OF OUR OFFERINGS: O Faithful One,
accept these gifts of our hearts and hands. May they
be multiplied and magnified as the living presence of
Christ in the world. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Go forth into the world energized to
seek signs of God's future everywhere: especially in
the unruly, unkempt, and persistent voices of
Prophets in our midst: calling us to prepare the way
in our lives and our world for the Holy One who is
coming! **Amen.**

PRAYER LIST: Rich Schmitt, Nelson Libell, Dave
Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Donna Isselhard,
Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol
Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess,
Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, Amy Annis, Janice
Petroff.

