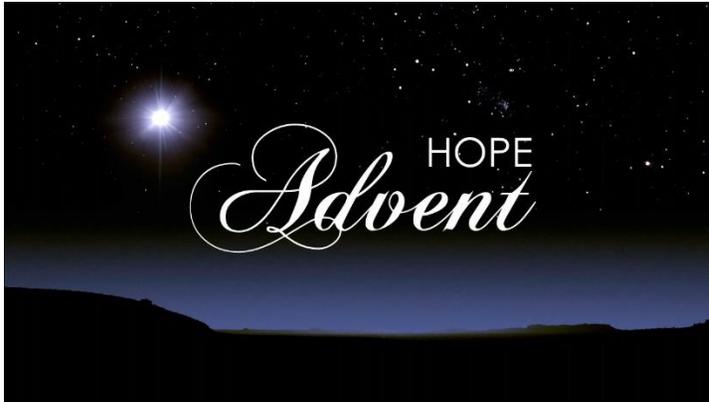


November 27, 2022
1st Sunday of Advent



STAY ALERT

ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
10207 Lincoln Trail Fairview Heights, IL

Telephone 397-6323

e-mail– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com

Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain
Organist – Sharon Banjavcic
Liturgy – Rev. Mia M. McClain

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Giver of hope!”

**All: We come today with eager expectation.
Our feet are standing within God’s gates.**

Come, let us go up to the mountain
that the Giver may teach us the way of peace.

We come today with holy expectation.

Our hands are lifted with grateful praise.

We gather at the edge of the throne of justice.

Come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

(Inspired by Psalm 122, Isaiah 2:15)

***INVOCATION:**

God of the faith that the bleak past taught us,
God of the hope that the present has brought us,
We call on you in this hour of worship.

We know that you need no invocation for you are already
and always with us—

Emmanuel, even before the child was born.

We open our hearts to receive your gifts,

For you are the Giver of hope, the Giver of peace,

The Giver of joy, the Giver love. Make your presence known
as we make ourselves available to you.

Amen.

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

We gather together in this season of Advent
anticipating hope, praying for peace, attempting to
cultivate joy and share love
amidst commotion, grief, despair and uncertainty.

Moment of silence

All:

In a world full of hopelessness,

We have sometimes forgotten that you are our hope, dear

**God. Consumed by the chaos of the world,
We lean into helplessness instead of your loving embrace.
We cling to the stony roads and the bitter rods
Felt in days when unborn hope had died;
We've forgotten that you promised us hope for a future.
So, stimulate our memory, dear God.
Remind us of that hope you assured us of.
Be with us as we cling to it in the midnight hours of
waiting.**

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Let us know that God gives us unmerited hope for a future, peace like a river, joy everlasting, and love. No misstep can separate us from the gifts of God. Amen.

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator,
and the Christ and the Spirit so near.
As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God
always here. (repeat two more times.)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 2:1-5

The LORD's mountain

2 This is what Isaiah, Amoz's son, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the days to come the mountain of the LORD's house will be the highest of the mountains. It will be lifted above the hills; peoples will stream to it.

3 Many nations will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the LORD's mountain, to the house of Jacob's God so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God's paths."

Instruction will come from Zion; the LORD's word from Jerusalem.

4 God will judge between the nations, and settle disputes of mighty nations. Then they will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war. **5** Come, house of Jacob, let's walk by the LORD's light.

EPISTLE READING: Romans 13:11-14

The day is near

11 As you do all this, you know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep. Now our salvation is nearer than when we first had faith. **12** The night is almost over, and the day is near. So let's get rid of the actions that belong to the darkness and put on the weapons of light. **13** Let's behave appropriately as people who live in the day, not in partying and getting drunk, not in sleeping around and obscene behavior, not in fighting and obsession. **14** Instead, dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't plan to indulge your selfish desires.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 24:36-44**

A lesson from the fig tree

32 "Learn this parable from the fig tree. After its branch becomes tender and it sprouts new leaves, you know that summer is near. **33** In the same way, when you see all these things, you know that the Human One^[a] is near, at the door. **34** I assure you that this generation won't pass away until all these things happen. **35** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away.

Day and hour

³⁶ “But nobody knows when that day or hour will come, not the heavenly angels and not the Son. Only the Father knows. ³⁷ As it was in the time of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Human One.^[b] ³⁸ In those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark. ³⁹ They didn’t know what was happening until the flood came and swept them all away. The coming of the Human One^[c] will be like that. ⁴⁰ At that time there will be two men in the field. One will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and the other left.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: Few passages confront us with greater difficulties than the ones we heard this morning. It is in two sections and they seem to contradict each other. The first verses (verses 32-35) seem to indicate that, just as it is possible to tell by the signs of nature when summer is on the way, so it will be possible to tell by the signs of the world when the second coming of Christ is on the way. Then it seems to go on to say that the second coming will happen within the lifetime of the generation listening to Jesus at that moment.

The second section (verses 36-41) says quite definitely that NO ONE knows the time of the second coming, not the angels, not even Jesus himself, but only God; and that it will come upon men and women with the suddenness of a rain storm out of the blue sky.

There is a very real difficulty, don’t you think. Even if we cannot completely solve it, we must nevertheless face boldly.

Let’s take as our starting point verse 34: “This is the truth I tell you – this generation shall not pass away, until these things have happened.” When we consider that saying, William Barclay suggests three possibilities that emerge.

- (a) If Jesus said it in reference to the second coming, he was mistaken, for he did not return within the lifetime of the generation listening to his words. Many accept that point of view, believing that Jesus in his humanity had limitations of knowledge and did believe that within that generation he would return. We can readily accept that in his humanity Jesus had limitations of knowledge; but it is difficult to believe that he was in error regarding so great a spiritual truth as this.
- (b) It is possible that Jesus said something like this which was changed in the transmitting. (*When the Bible was first written down, some of the scripts changed some of the passages to their ideas and thoughts.*) In Mark 9:1, Jesus is reported as saying: “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” That was gloriously and triumphantly true. Within that generation, the kingdom of God did spread mightily until there were Christians throughout the known world. Now the early Christians did look for the second comings immediately. In their situation of suffering and persecution, they looked and longed for the

release that the coming of their Lord would bring, and sometimes they took sayings which were intended to speak of the Kingdom and attached them to the second coming, which is a very different thing. Something like that may have happened here. What Jesus may have said was that his kingdom would come in power and might before that generation had passed away.

(c.) But there is a third possibility. What if the phrase until these things have happened has no reference to the second coming? What if their reference is, in fact, to the prophecy with which the chapter began, the siege and fall of Jerusalem? (*We talked about that recently.*) If we accept that, there is no difficulty. When Jesus is saying is that these grim warnings of his regarding the doom of Jerusalem will be fulfilled within that very generation – and they were, in fact, fulfilled forty years later. It seems by far the best course to take verses 32-25 as referring not to the second coming but to the doom of Jerusalem, for then all the difficulties in them are removed.

Verses 36-41 do tell us that the hour of that event is known to God and to God alone. It is therefore, clear that speculation regarding the time of the second coming is nothing less than blasphemy, for anyone who speculates is seeking to wrestle from God secrets which belong to God alone. It is no one duty to speculate; it is our duty to prepare ourselves, and to watch. (*Somebody needs to tell*

all those people who hold up signs at ball games saying that the world is coming to an end. They are unemployed now!)

Our scripture text tells us that that time will come with shattering suddenness on those who are immersed in material things. In the old story, Noah prepared himself in the calm weather for the flood which was to come, and when it came he was ready. However, the rest of humanity was lost in eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, and was completely unaware, and was therefore swept away. These verses are a warning never to become so immersed in time that we forget eternity, never to let our concern with worldly affairs completely distract us from remembering that there is a God, that the issues of life and death are in God's hands, and that whenever God's call comes, it must find us ready.

We fill our pantries with food and necessary supplies in case we get snowed in. We prepare our families what to do in case the house catches on fire. We know what to do if a tornado comes. So why can we not find a way to be prepared for God?
Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with silent personal prayer
God Most High, of great compassion, long suffering, and very merciful, you relent at human suffering. According to your great goodness you have promised repentance and forgiveness to those who have sinned against you, and in the multitude of your mercies you have appointed repentance for sinners, so that they may see what kind of a God you are.

Speed the message of salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth and ministries of healing to those who live at great distances from medical care that the healing presence

of the Christ may be known by many and great rejoicing greet the salvation and healing of those who have been far from you.

Bless this land where we live and work and play. Enlighten our leaders in government, education, business, and industry that the use of power may not be an end in itself but a means of ordering and enriching our common life and providing meaningful occupations for all of us and opportunities for continuing learning and recreation.

Bless our families gathered about us and at a distance. May those who have traveled to be together at thanksgiving time return home safely. Hear our prayers for the sick and those who are in any kind of difficulty and distress. Comfort the bereaved, heal the sick in body, mind, or spirit, grant sure hope to the dying and a peaceful rest.

We thank you, dear heavenly wisdom, for letting the twins come home and be with their brother and their whole family. Bless all those who are caring for them and we pray that they might grow in body and health.

We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who encourages us to pray together . . .

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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

As recipients of the generosity of God, let us share our generosity with each other and the community.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING**

For the wondrous ways this offering will bless this community we dedicate these gifts.

For the ways it'll help us live out God's mission we dedicate these gifts.

Let these gifts strengthen our call to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. Amen.

***BENEDICTION**

Go forth with the gift of hope

Guiding you toward the path of peace.

Go forth with the gift of joy

Guide you toward the path of love.

Go forth with anticipation,

Trusting that God will bless and keep you,

God's face will shine upon you,

And God's grace will never leave you.

Amen

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Theo Mally, Jane Riess, Sandy Fort, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Larry Wagner, Floyd Lorenz, Alister and Garrett Pickens, Julie Captain, Christopher Captain, Mary Kaye Richter.

HANGING OF THE GREENS: Please stay after worship for a bite to eat before helping to decorate the sanctuary, narthex and fellowship hall for Advent and Christmas. It shouldn't take long with many hands!

