



Advent Sunday 29th November 2020

WELCOME

OPENING SENTENCES

We make the sign of the cross

**In my head,
in my heart,
and all around me,
Jesus is here**

WELCOME – WAITING – WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH

We wait for the coming of Christ,
the light of the world
Come Lord Jesus

We sing

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.

The first candle is lit and this response is used

The true light, which enlightens everyone is coming into the world.
Come Lord Jesus

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.
Christ, shine in your church today

COLLECT

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

BIBLE READING: Mark 13:24-37

'But in those days, after that suffering, 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.

Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. 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.

'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth 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 tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; 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 slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

TALK: Revd Petra Shakeshaft – A Reflection on Hope

*Hope that is seen is not hope.
For who hopes for what is seen?
But if we hope for what we do not see,
we wait for it with patience. Romans 8. 24*

When I was about nine my mother inherited a book of Victorian prints from her grandmother. She invited me to choose one for my bedroom. This image hung above my bed for the next eleven years.

My mother couldn't understand this choice. But I found, even then, something profoundly, painfully beautiful about it I couldn't explain. It moved something deep inside me; something more than simply a response to visual beauty.

Hope is personified as a young woman, seated precariously on a globe, her eyes bandaged, clinging to a battered lyre. Her head bent down, she listens intently for the possibility of the music she might extract from a single remaining string. This intense isolation; this desolation, the precariousness of her position, speaks of the fragility of Hope.



There is an audacity to this Hope; what does this wretched creature see or hear or know that gives rise to Hope? Is there a glimmer of light shining in the darkness that cannot be overcome? Is it that same glimmer that keeps us going in the midst of despair, that kept Moses and the people of Israel going through the wilderness, or when they were exiled in Babylon, or Job on his pile of ashes?

At the top of the painting there is a tiny pinprick of light; a tiny vestige of Hope. It's easy to miss. In life it's easy to miss too; easy to look in the wrong places, to try to conjure it up in music of our own making. Here, it's almost as though the darkness has swallowed it up, consumed it, has begun to overcome it ... And yet there it is, coming from somewhere beyond, shining on the misery and tragedy of the world. If we dare to look up, to tear ourselves away from the music we are trying to make with our own battered instruments, pull away our blindfolds, we can see Hope, and hear the soaring note ringing through the universe on the string plucked by God's hand.

Threshold

R S Thomas

I emerge from the mind's
cave into the worse darkness
outside, where things pass and
the Lord is in none of them.

I have heard the still, small voice
and it was that of the bacteria
demolishing my cosmos. I
have lingered too long on

this threshold, but where can I go?
To look back is to lose the soul
I was leading upwards towards
the light. To look forward? Ah,

what balance is needed at
the edges of such an abyss.
I am alone on the surface
of a turning planet. What

to do but, like Michelangelo's
Adam, put my hand
out into unknown space,
hoping for the reciprocating touch?



This image was made just as we prepared to go back into another lockdown for November.

How long, O God, how long?

It's the question on so many lips.

We wait for a day in some distant future when a vaccine might set us free again. Two thousand years ago in Palestine, the people waited in the darkness of occupation and corruption – a world that, in many ways has not changed. Human nature, it seems, does not. People still hunger. People still thirst for justice. There are wars and rumours of wars.

Again, Autumn leaves in various stages of decay provide a backdrop of shadows of themselves and a focus on the physical world. The Covid virus floats above, part of the corruption and darkness we find ourselves in as we approach this period of Advent. Where is the Hope?

We live in the world. We cannot avoid the darkness and corruption – it is all around, but we don't have to be defined by it. By going into the darkest places with compassion, with service, with love, we find ourselves in the very same places Jesus went, and there we find him still, bringing Hope to our Advent waiting. It's there in the many small acts of kindness and selflessness: waiting with the sick and dying, washing small hands or full grown, frail bodies. It's there driving up and down the country bringing vital goods and medicines. It's in the phone call, in the hand that waves – that wants so much to touch and hold. It's in the hands that dare to plunge into life's messiness and draw out the golden thread of Hope and hold on.

In the print, if you look carefully, you will see the golden thread. It links a dead leaf to a single seed. As the print is moved light is reflected up and down the thread. And maybe, like the last remaining string on Hope's lyre, we can hear *its* note ringing out through the universe, plucked by God's hand; the Advent of Hope.

SONG – This Little Light of Mine

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.
We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

PRAYERS

Patient God, you ask us to be awake and ready to receive you,
but we are sleepy and bound by our habits.
We prefer to do what we've always done.
But we long for you.
We are thirsty for the light of your goodness.

Forgive our unwillingness to welcome you.
 Forgive our fear of seeing the dullness of our lives in the light of your holiness
 and our readiness to blame others for the ways of the world
 and for our own shortcomings.
 Wake us – gently or urgently,
 according to our need, according to your will
 and turn our hearts and minds to see your face,
 to rise and serve you as did the babe born in Bethlehem.
 In his name. Amen

PEACE

God will speak peace to his people,
 to those who turn to him in their hearts.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you

OFFERTORY HYMN

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
 and ransom captive Israel
 that mourns in lonely exile here
 until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
 shall come to you, O Israel.*

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
 who ordered all things mightily;
 to us the path of knowledge show
 and teach us in her ways to go. *Refrain*

O come, O Branch of Jesse's tree,
 free them from Satan's tyranny!
 that trust your mighty pow'r to save
 and give them victory o'er the grave. *Refrain*

O come, O Key of David, come
 and open wide our heavenly home.
 Make safe the way that leads on high
 and close the path to misery. *Refrain*

O come, desire of nations, bind
 in one the hearts of all mankind.
 O bid all our sad divisions cease
 and be yourself our King of Peace. *Refrain*

COMMUNION - THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Be with us Lord Jesus in the breaking of this bread
and the pouring of the wine.

The Lord is here
His Spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give thanks and praise.

Lord of all life,
you created the universe,
where all living things reflect your glory.

You give us this great and beautiful earth,
to discover and to cherish.
You give us your love,
even when things go wrong.
Jesus knew hurt and pain.
Through him you wipe away our tears,
and fill us with your peace.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We thank you, loving Father,
because, when we turned away,
you sent Jesus, your Son.

He gave his life for us on the cross
and shows us the way to live.
Send your Holy Spirit
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us Christ's body and his blood.
On the night before he died, when darkness had fallen,
Jesus took bread.
He gave thanks, broke it, and shared it with his disciples, saying:
'This is my body, given for you. Do this to remember me.'

After they had eaten, he took the cup of wine,
gave thanks, and shared it with his disciples, saying:
'This is my blood, poured out for you and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins.'

So Father, with this bread and this cup
we celebrate his love, his death, his risen life.
As you feed us with these gifts, send your Holy Spirit,
and change us more and more to be like Jesus our Saviour.

Help us, Father, to love one another,
as we look forward to that day
when suffering is ended,
and all creation is gathered in your loving arms.
And now with all your saints
we give you glory, through Jesus Christ,
in the strength of the Spirit, today and for ever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

As our saviour Jesus Christ has taught us, so we pray.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ
**Though we are many, we are one body
because we all share in one bread.**

**Jesus, Lamb of God have mercy on us.
Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us
Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us peace**

THE GIVING OF COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Generous God, you have fed us at your heavenly table. Set us on fire with your Spirit that when Christ comes again we may shine like lights before his face, who with you and the Spirit lives for ever. Amen

BLESSING/DISMISSAL

Go out into the world peacefully. Shine the light of Christ in every dark corner; on broken hearts, on loneliness and sorrow on overwhelming and disappointment, on hunger, and thirst for justice and truth. May your words be gentle and your thoughts kind, may your heart be full and generous. May you bring God's joy, hope, love and peace into every encounter and conversation this Advent and beyond. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit, be with you all, be with those you love and those who challenge you to love them, now and evermore.

Go in peace and light to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ, Amen.