

## Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit.

Worship at Home  
29<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### First Sunday in Advent

#### Prayer of Approach

We come to you, our God,  
sometimes aware, and sometimes not aware.  
Sometimes aware of our need,  
sometimes ignoring others' needs.  
You wait for us, O God, and as you wait,  
you call us to wait for you, too.  
As we gather to read your Word,  
may we remember how you have helped us –  
in the kindness of a stranger,  
in the comfort of a friend,  
in the call for justice,  
in the shout for mercy.  
And make us, who wait for you,  
approach you and each other  
with new vigilance, and with new hope. **Amen.**

#### Hymn (StF) 338

1 There is a Redeemer,  
Jesus, God's own Son,  
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father,  
for giving us your Son,  
and leaving your Spirit  
till the work on earth is done.*

2 Jesus my Redeemer,  
name above all names,  
precious Lamb of God, Messiah,  
O for sinners slain.

3 When I stand in glory  
I will see his face,  
and there I'll serve my King for ever  
in that holy place.

*vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946)  
v. 3 Keith Green (1953-1982)*

*If you have a candle, please light it now,  
then recite aloud:*

Gathered here today, I light a candle of hope,  
knowing that in dark times there is always a  
light that can be lit.  
Let me move from the dusk and the dawn,  
to light the light of vigilance,  
knowing that God is always calling me  
to justice, mercy and humility –

at this time of year,  
and all times of the year. Amen.

#### Prayer of Adoration

God, your name is Love,  
and in your great love  
you have called us into  
community with each other.  
With you and in you and because of you,  
we are nurtured in love.  
Yours is the name that lasts for ever.  
Your love reaches into all corners,  
confirming those who wait for you –  
that they wait in the name of Great Love.

#### Prayer of Confession

We have turned our face from you, O God,  
whose face is always turned towards us.  
We have forsaken what we know is just.  
We have ignored what we understand is true.  
We have refused to believe  
what should be believed.  
We have deceived ourselves  
in word and deed.  
For this, we humbly repent,  
and we turn our face towards you –  
who waits for us, and makes us ever new.  
Make us ever new now, O restoring God.

God of goodness,  
you know what is most important:  
love, justice and honesty.  
Help us to know what is  
most important in our lives  
and to work for that, and to wait for that,  
and to keep remembering.  
Because you know what is most important:  
love, justice and honesty. Amen.

#### Lord's Prayer

#### Bible Reading

Mark13: 24-37

<sup>24</sup> "But in those days, following that distress,  
"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will  
not give its light;

<sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky, and the  
heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

<sup>26</sup> "At that time people will see the Son of

Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

<sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

<sup>28</sup> “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

<sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.

<sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

<sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

<sup>32</sup> “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

<sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

<sup>34</sup> It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

<sup>35</sup> “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.

<sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.

<sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

## Reflection

Advent, for many, means a 25 day calendar filled with chocolates. It's a time of busyness as we rush around preparing for Christmas; shopping for food and gifts, for decorations and tinsel, and huge family gatherings. This year will be different. Gatherings will be smaller, or even, not taking place this Christmas.

But perhaps that won't be a bad thing. Instead of been caught up in the frenetic, hectic streets of Bethlehem, perhaps this year, we can truly enter the quiet and calm of a dark stable, to sit with a young couple and their baby.

Can we reflect more deeply on the true meaning of that first Christmas?

And in the same way, can Advent be more meaningful this year, as we reflect quietly at home?

Advent is a time for looking ahead, to watch for signs of Christ's return. But the Gospel reading today, puts us in a dark place as our starting point. That actually seems quite appropriate this year. We have been living in dark times, you may have even considered “Is this the End Times we are living through?”

But Jesus reminds, by the imagery of the fig tree, that in the midst of the darkness of winter, we should look for signs of the brightness of summer. They do still appear, unexpectedly, bringing hope for the future. I don't have figs in my garden, but there are blackcurrant bushes. The branches now have no leaves, but on each tip is a bud – the sign of a bumper harvest of fruit for next summer – and delicious jam and pies.

That involves waiting. And sometimes we have to be patient and wait to see the signs of hope. When we are feeling low and vulnerable, as many are at the moment, when we want to hear that things are getting back to normal, the glimmers of hope can pass us by. We hear the good news that vaccines are being developed, but it still may be some time before we receive them, and we still must comply with the restrictions to get through this dark winter, which is probably going to feel rather long.

Darkness is still surrounding us, but Jesus urges us not to give up hope; be alert and watchful, and to look for the signs of his presence in our lives today.

Consider...

When did you get an unexpected call from a friend to cheer you up?

When did something you were dreading, turn out to be better than expected?

How many of your prayers been answered?

When we are alert and watchful, we do see the glimmers of light in the darkness, and

can even feel that touch of love reaching out to us.

God's love is all around us, we only have to open our eyes and see.

As Jesus said "What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Amen.

### StF 306

1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
*Love is come again,  
like wheat that springs up green.*

2 In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,  
thinking that he never would awake again,  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:

3 Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,  
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,  
quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:

4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
then your touch can call us back to life again,  
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:

*John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872-1958) (alt.)*

### Intercession Prayer

*Today, I am leaving spaces for you to offer your personal prayers to God*

Lord God, I bring before you  
Our world;  
people living in the darkness of a global pandemic,  
creatures whose habitat is being destroyed,  
farming practices that damage the environment,  
climate change.  
I pray especially for ...  
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord God, I bring before you  
Our nation;  
our government striving to find the best way

forward for our health and financial well-being,  
our local authorities delivering social care and education under extreme circumstances,  
volunteers seeking to be a good neighbour,  
delivering shopping, prescriptions and a cheery greeting.  
I pray especially for ...  
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord God, I bring before you  
Our church;  
for new ways to bring the gospel message,  
sending light and hope into the darkness,  
offering pastoral care,  
and practical support.  
I pray especially for ...  
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord God, I bring before you  
All those who are waiting;  
for hospital or doctor appointments,  
for friends or family to visit,  
for social activities to be resumed.  
I pray especially for ...  
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord God, I bring before you  
All those for whom hope seems dim,  
refugees in camps,  
nations caught up in civil unrest,  
the vulnerable and abused.  
I pray especially for ...  
Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord God, I bring before you  
Myself.  
Help me to be strong,  
to be a small light shining  
whether at dusk or dawn.  
May I find comfort,  
if the darkness seems overwhelming,  
and keep awake, and watching  
for the signs of your presence  
around me, and within me.  
Lord, hear my prayer. Amen.

### Hymn StF 645

1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,  
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?  
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,

will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul  
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;  
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

- 2 Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,  
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?  
While the surges rave, and the wild winds  
blow,  
shall the angry waves then your barque  
o'erflow?
- 3 Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,  
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?  
On the rising tide you can never fail,  
while your anchor holds within the veil:
- 4 Will your eyes behold through the morning  
light  
the city of gold and the harbour bright?  
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,  
when life's storms are past for evermore?  
*Priscilla Jane Owens (1829-1907)*

*As you look upon your lit candle (or imagine  
one, we pray..*

We have been called in, to be renewed  
in the name of the one who is love.  
Even in the darkest night,  
even when there is only one small candle lit,  
your power and love restore us.  
Let your light shine on us  
as we go from here,  
so that we may be warmed  
and strengthened  
to light your light all around.  
**Amen.**

And may the blessing of the Father, Son and  
Holy Spirit be with now and always. Amen

Kathy Lowrie