



The Methodist Church
Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist
Circuit
Worship at Home – 11 December
2022

The Third Sunday of Advent.

Hymn 183

Praise to the God who clears the way
Preparing room and space;
For power and pride will lose their sway
As peace comes in their place.

Praise to the God who comes to judge
The truth of word and deed,
Who calls our minds and wills to change,
Rebuking wealth and greed.

Praise to the God who waits with us
For hope and joy to reign,
Who shares our suffering and loss,
Embodied in our pain.

Praise to the God who comes to bring
Comfort to all who mourn.
The whole creation, 'Glory' sings
As Christ the light is born.

Prayer of praise

God our Father, we offer thanks and praise for all
You have done, all You are doing,
And all You will do for us, for the Church and for
the world.
You have brought us into being. You are moulding
us into Your likeness,
And You lead us forward into the light of Your
presence.
As we prepare to celebrate, once again, the birth
of Jesus,

1.

A baby born 2,000 years ago, who changes lives
today.
We praise You God, for the gift of Your Son Jesus
Christ;
For the Word, who existed before the world was
created;
For the promise of His coming again in glory.

During this time of Advent,
Fill us with joy, so that we may be ready to
worship You;
Fill us with hope, so that we may be ready to find
You;
Fill us with love, so that we may be ready to serve
You.
By the power of the Holy Spirit, living and
working in us,
Lead us to reflect Your glory in the world,
For the sake of Christ, Your Son and Saviour.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Great and good God, we are feeble witnesses to
You.
Our lives are fearful; we are prisoners of our own
limitations,
Avoiding the paths You want us to walk in.
We are touchy and grudge-bearing; but You come
to set prisoners free.
Open our eyes to You, open our ears to Your
message,
Our hearts to forgive and be forgiven;
And strengthen us to speak of You with joy.
Forgive us, Lord, when we try to put limits on
You.
Forgive us and bless us and come soon. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer.

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.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
Yours,
Now and for ever, Amen.

Reading Matthew 11v2-10.

² John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about
all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent
his disciples to ask Jesus, ³ "Are you the Messiah
we've been expecting,^[a] or should we keep
looking for someone else?"

⁴ Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen— ⁵ the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." ⁶ And he added, "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me."^[b]

⁷ As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. "What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see?"

⁹ Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,

'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.'^[c]

Sermon 1.

2.

John, Jesus' cousin spent his whole life in the desert getting ready for his mission, to prepare the way for God's Messiah.

Then he came to the river Jordan demanding repentance and baptism from the people, a spiritual cleansing, a preparation for God's messiah who would follow. There hadn't been a prophet in Israel for 400 years! Now the second Elijah had come as had been prophesied. The expectations of the people must have been at boiling point.

Then Jesus began His ministry, He's here the Promised one has come!

What did John expect Jesus would be like?

John had said that the axe of God's judgment was already laid to the root of the tree; the divine fire of God's cleansing judgment had begun to burn.

John wanted action. But Jesus was not showing savage wrath, He was showing God's love.

John in his preaching, denounced Herod, the ruler of Galilee, for getting rid of his wife and marrying his brother's wife. So, Herod threw John into prison.

And in the lonely darkness of that prison, John had doubts.

Had he really got it right, done what God wanted, was Jesus really the right one. He needed reassurance.. John was the chosen forerunner, What if--?

Perhaps John had heard about his disciples worrying that Jesus was too lax, the friend of sinners, not hard and judgemental enough? We all need reassurance, don't we? Have I made a mess, was that a loving thing I did or said, was

that what Jesus wanted me to do?

So we do what John did, we go to Jesus and we ask Him.

And if we are in that terrible place that mental dungeon which stops us even from praying to Jesus, we still do what John did, he sent his friends; so we ask our friends, our Christian family, to pray for us in trust that we too will be answered.

And how did Jesus reply to John, not with argument, but a demand that John's friends tell him what Jesus is doing. And Jesus still says that to us today, "Look what I can do for you, see what I have done for others. See what I am doing in the world"

You see John demanded repentance and cleansing, ready for judgement. In Jesus God is launching a new thing, which comes as sinners turn back to Him in penitence and faith, following that repentance and are forgiven. That is why Jesus comes with Good News and celebration. He is announcing the coming of the Kingdom where God is in charge, and demonstrating in His life what it looks like.

Jesus does bring fire He brings the Spirit and fire of God's love.

He brings mercy and forgiveness, the healing which comes after a time of sorrow.

But like those disciples of John, we must accept Jesus as He is, not how we would like Him to be; we must learn to grow with and closer to Him.

To see the forgiveness and mercy, the healing love at the heart of Jesus' mission, which remains, and must remain at the heart of the Churches' work today.

This is where and how God is at work, and those who recognise it and are not offended because they are expecting something else, will know God's blessing.

Hymn 244

Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God:
The secret of the Lord is theirs;
Their soul is Christ's abode.

3.

The Lord who left the heavens
Our life and peace to bring,
To dwell on earth in lowliness
Our pattern and our king.

Still to the lowly soul
He does himself impart,
And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooses the pure in heart.

Lord, we your presence seek,
A vision of your face:
Give us a pure and lowly heart,
A temple of your grace.

Reading James 5vv7-10

⁷ Dear brothers and sisters,^[c] be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. ⁸ You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

⁹ Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We give great honour to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.

Sermon2.

This is the third Sunday of Advent, the time for thinking about and getting ready to welcome, not just the baby in the manger who is man and God made human,

but to meet Jesus crucified and risen from the dead who now sits at the right hand of God, when He will return in Glory.

The Kingdom of God began when Jesus came, and will come in all of its fullness at Jesus' return, but we have to wait. God's time is not our time.

We, like the recipients of James' letter are in the now but not yet time. We are like farmers who have sown the seed, but must wait for the harvest. The harvest is God's and will happen in His time not ours.

And we do not wait, twiddling our thumbs, but we learn and grow closer to our Saviour Jesus, ready to greet Him in Glory.

James advises us to be patient and to stand firm. Not passive patience, trodden down like a door-

mat; but patience in the Spirit which confronts doubt and sorrow and disaster and comes out with faith stronger on the other side, because the source of that strength is our Saviour, Jesus. So, we like those early Christians, are in the waiting time. Learning to live as Kingdom people in a materialist world.

So how well were they doing, and can we learn from James advice to them.

As Kingdom people, with the Spirit's help, we keep our focus on Jesus our Lord and Rescuer. If we are in an unjust situation, don't focus on the situation and become angry, be patient.

We must not focus on ourselves or we become filled with self-pity.

We must not focus on someone to blame or we complain and become bitter.

Finally we live today and the Spirit is our ever present help though prayer but our true hope and focus is our home with Jesus in glory, either when we die or when he returns.

4.

James also advises us to look at the example of those who have gone before, to encourage us. I am inspired by the lives of the Northumbrian Saints who went out to bring Christ to the Heathen people of the North, especially Aidan. He and his followers lived as they taught and gave away to the poor anything that kings or wealthy people gave them. Aidan walked the land, stopping to speak to anyone he met. If they were heathen he encouraged them to be baptised, and if they were Christian, he strengthened their faith and inspired them by word and deed to live a good life and be generous to the poor.

One last thought, if we did know the date of the second Coming, would it really make that much difference? I mean every year we celebrate Christ's birthday on 25th December. And who can ever say that they have been all ready and organised? Not me.

So, I can just see it now, Jesus returns in glory, it's Judgement Day. And He says:-

'Time has ended, the New Heaven and the New Earth have come. Jan, I'm back, are you ready?' I reply, Oh Jesus! I haven't decorated these morals, I haven't baked this last good deed, and I haven't wrapped the commandments in shiny, pretty paper. Just a bit longer, Jesus, please! And Jesus would say, 'Jan, it's been over 2,000 years. Why aren't you ready?'

Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Lord, thank You for all the good things that You give,
The beauty of the world around us, the riches we find in the companionship of others,
For music, food and laughter, giving and
Trusting that Your great hand will cradle us through. **Amen.**

Prayer of intercession

This day we pray for all who journey: Christmas journeys, like that lady.
children at the beginning of life's journey, adults with family and social responsibilities,
men and women whose decisions affect the lives of others.
Jesus, our guide through life, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those whose journeying is intolerably difficult,
those denied the warmth and security of love and home,
those who struggle with internal and external pressures beyond their capacity,
those who are intimidated by the complexity of life.
Jesus, our willing guide, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those for whom this approaching Christmas is a nightmare,
those who have no resources to share,
those who, like the Christ, have no place to call their own, those who struggle with faith.
Jesus, our loving guide, **hear our prayer.**

Into your care and keeping we commit those near and dear to us
in sickness or in health, in wealth or in poverty, in love or alone.

5.

Come close, O Spirit of God, and journey with them.

receiving, creativity and variety,
For Your love, for Your joy and Your peace.

And when we endure times, when we have none of those things,
Help us to love You for who You are,

We ask this in Jesus' name.
Hands who healed the blind man, heal our aching souls;
Hands who cured the lame, mend our disjointed lives;
Hands who embraced all life, enfold us in your peace.
Lord, merely touch and heal, cure and forgive
Amen.

Hymn 169

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free,
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us for ever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Blessing

Christ's peace surround you, Christ's light shine upon you.
Christ's joy fill you, Christ's blessing always go with you. Amen.