

Immanuel United Church  
The First Advent Sunday, Nov 29th, 2020

Welcome

Description of Hope (Jennifer Antymis)

Advent Candle-lighting:

Today, we light the candle named Hope.

**May its light help us find our way.**

Hymn: VU 7 *Hope is the Star* (V. 1)

**Hope is a star that shines in the night,  
leading us on till the morning is bright.**

**When God is a child there's joy in our song.**

**The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.**

Call to Worship: (Pat Schulz)

Today we start our Advent journey just like every other year.

**But this is a year unlike any we have known.**

Things are different –

we talk about social distancing and wearing masks and flattening the curve.

**We are not physically in our sanctuary on Golspie Street.**

Things are different, but they are also the same.

**We will light the Advent candles each week.**

**We will hear the familiar hymns.**

We will prepare to hear again the stories of Jesus' coming to our world  
to bring hope for a weary people.

**We will remember that we are Immanuel – God with us.**

So as we prepare for the coming of the child of hope,

**we will go forward together with hope.**

**Let us worship together.**

Prayer: (Ted Dodd)

**In these days of the daytime waning and the nighttime lengthening  
of the winter moon and stars ablaze,**

**we are shaken by the pandemic and the polarities,  
the violence and destruction.**

**We pray that suffering and sorrow will end and  
that power in heaven will prevail.**

**Gather your people, O God,**

from the four winds,  
from the ends of the earth,  
from the heights of heaven.  
We need to learn your sacred lessons,  
to see your divine presence,  
to embody your holy wisdom.  
Keep us alert.  
Keep us awake.

5 Murals and Gospel reading: Walk the Journey through the Advent to Christmas  
(Artists: Eileen Metcalfe, Luba Olesky, Jennifer Antymis; the reader: Lynne Strome)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Hymn: ***O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1glfuYQxdo> - A Capella

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKu0orOt8Uw> -Traditional

<https://youtu.be/gvWqaehjFWw> - Shining Waters Regional Council, United Church of Canada

Scripture: Mark 13: 24-37 (Reader: Martha Sawchuck)

“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 ‘God’s Child coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.

Then this child will send out the angels,

and gather the 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 God’s Child 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 God’s Child, but only God.

Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

It is like someone going on a journey, who upon leaving home and puts servants in charge, each with a particular task, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the Sovereign will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or lest the Sovereign may come suddenly and find you asleep.

And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Anthem: *Hearth and Fire* (Immanuel United Church Choir)

Message: Rooted in the tradition of hope (Advent 1: Exodus)

This week, my son and I were lying on the bed, after reading a short story. I explained to him, “Jah-bi, I think I am going to be very busy this week. The season of Advent is coming, and this Sunday is the first Advent Sunday. I’ll turn off the light right now so that we sleep right away. I need to write a sermon early tomorrow morning..” Jah-bi, 9 years old, turned his head over to me and said, “Mom, is Advent the thing when we take out one thing each day from a pocket or a box until Christmas?” “Yes, we count the days until Christmas, the birthday of baby Jesus. Advent means someone, something, is ‘arriving’ and their arriving is impending, which means, really soon. We are waiting...”

In the popular imagination, Advent is like a long musical prelude that would start taking liturgical crescendo each week and each Sunday leading up to Christmas day. Each day, children open or mark the advent calendar -- some of which actually present waiting children with something sweet and delightful. (Those were special pokemon cards for my son last year.) My family’s Advent tradition is pretty humble compared to some other families’ much richer ways to celebrate and prepare for the big day. We assemble the plastic Christmas tree we bought at Walmart several years ago, and add lights and adorable or memorable ornaments of our own purchase or gifts from church families in the past. When our kids were younger, we didn’t even carry a tree until they insisted the reason why they did not get presents from Santa was because we did not have a Christmas tree at our home. (In Korea, most Korean families would see Christmas trees only at church or at department stores in the season. Not all have a Christmas tree at home.)

But in preparing for Advent we would miss something crucial if we overlook the truth in our tradition that at the heart of Advent is a deep wound: God’s suffering. God’s groaning, as we, humanity, and as our whole cosmic neighbourhood, the creation, groan and still wait for

their healer to appear in glory and bring into reality the words of God proclaimed and promised.

These days, increasingly more people in Christian circles begin to talk about Advent as a time when we wait for the apocalypse. Christmas as Apocalypse. Indeed, apocalyptic Christmas, while rediscovering or discovering for the first time in our life (at least I do) Advent as a time when we wait for the 'end time'. People are telling that 2020 feels apocalyptic enough, realizing and learning more truthfully than ever that we are the bodily beings and we suffer as our bodies struggle deeply each and every day being confined in rooms, apartments, houses, and in our small social bubbles. The pain of confinement has penetrated so many spheres and aspects in our lives and relationships. Physical separation, as well as, very restricted social support available in our lives as the result, have become the oppression and bondage we all want to end.

We are not supposed to bear this burden alone. Our hope is that this becomes the truth to all bodies and people who live in our time: No one bears this burden alone. Exodus 3:7. The God of the Exodus knows our sufferings too and says, "I know their sufferings." when we mourn, when we struggle, when our heart aches and our bodies suffer, and when we wipe tears welled up in our eyes for compassion.. God says, I know your sufferings.

In today's reading, Jesus calls his people to the memories of Israel in the past: the memory of the suffering and the memory of the great escape from it. Jesus says, "But in those days, after that suffering." Jesus draws the wisdom from the memory of exodus -- the great escape from the enslavement in Pharaoh's Egypt -- and also from the memory of exile -- the great return from the expulsion to the empires in those times, Babylon and Persia, back to the homeland. Jesus recalls the traditions of hope evoked by the prophets and their truth-telling about the world they lived in, especially against the totalism of power and wealth which cause and perpetuate the oppression of the poor and the most vulnerable populations: "widows, orphans and immigrants."

Jesus follows the tradition of hope and truth-telling of the prophets who spoke to their generations about the destruction of the world, the destruction of the status quo of the world, 'the passing of the old heaven and the earth as we have known them.' That's what it means to be an 'end time'. An apocalypse. "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." At the same time, just like the prophets gone before Jesus did, he also energizes the hearers, the children of God, with the Words of God of love and justice: "Then, they will see 'God's child coming in clouds' with great power and glory." Jesus stands in the tradition of hope that enable us to safely navigate the end times of our generation in faith, courage and persistence in believing: "Then this child will send out the angels, and gather the elect from the four winds, from the

ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” Jesus declares the Advent of New Heaven and New Earth. And this arrival does not complete its process just with him being born in the land of Palestine 2000 years ago. He clearly says, we need to “keep awake” for the advent of the reign of God, for we do not know “when the time will come.”

“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.” (V. 28) Hope, as if it is the “letter from the future” (Chung, Hyun Kyung), comes from God’s future. God’s future is unprescribable, and yet hope is visible in the sign of summer. We can feel it coming. Our heart becomes joyful.

Until this year, Advent for me was a Western tradition, which I adopted later in my life, and began to enjoy as a very special time to reflect on hope, peace, joy and love. But like me, more people are learning from Covid-19 that we can walk the journey of Advent in which we sincerely hope and wait for the end of oppression, the end of bodily and spiritual bondage, and the end of communal sufferings. These waiting enactments consummate in such spiritual status as hope, peace, joy and love. In the time of a deep wound of our humanity and creation, we look for the sign of summer, the sign of healing, in the eyes of a baby born to a young woman. Mary laid him in the manger people used as the basket to put hay for domestic animals, reminding us of Moses being laid in the basket by the hands of his own mother and sister to be saved from the Pharaoh’s command to kill the Hebrew male babies. When Moses was put in the basket and flew in the river alone, the daughter of Pharaoh found it later and adopted him. The basket became the safe container for Moses’ life, but at the same time, it was the rejection and abandonment from the world. Hope is tenacious.

In this Advent, let us hold high the tenacious hope. Lately, I appreciate the words of an Elder who said, when we hold high the hope for peace, the spirit moves us. Then, the hearts of people will dance with joy, and love will come. No more alienation. No more separation. We suffer now, but God’s steadfast love for the entire humanity and creation, as the unconditional promise, never leaves us to bear our burdens alone. God of Exodus knows our suffering. Transformation of the heavens and the earth is possible with this baby. Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (V. 31)

Over the next three Advent Sundays, I hope to continue to share with you the visions of “hope” we can find in the tradition of prophets in the Bible, and discover and rediscover Advent as a time when we wait for the end time as good news: the destruction or passing away of the status quo as it is so sorely needed, that images of the sun being darkened and heaven and earth passing away can be moments to look forward to with anticipation. Advent is a very powerful tradition to discover again and again in new and familiar lights.

And let us continue to walk humbly with God-with-Us, Emmanuel, through this journey towards Christmas. In these days of the daytime waning and the nighttime lengthening, in

these uncertain liminal winter days, anxiously navigating our in-between times together - between the time of we-are-almost-there and the time of not-yet, we are called to live, in eager anticipation, God's future inbreaking here and now. God is in our midst. Exploring together as an Advent community, as Immanuel United Church, the four powerful and familiar themes in the Bible - Exodus, Return from Exile, Apocalyptic Christmas, and Incarnation, let us truly celebrate that we are children of God. Immanuel - God-With-Us. All the time. In our midst. Amen.

Hymn: ***Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus***

<https://youtu.be/8UPIGKvYw3Y>

In 1744, Charles Wesley considered Haggai 2:7 while looking at the plight of orphans in his community, as well as the growing class divide throughout Great Britain. Through this train of thought, Wesley wrote *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*.

Prayers of the People (Marg Smith)

Hymn: ***A Candle is Burning*** (the same lyrics to VU 6)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RvEBk\\_ONXQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RvEBk_ONXQ)

Benediction: Sung Refrain from ***Hearth and Fire***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baD9MRrwPOo>

**Hearth and fire be yours tonight and all the dark outside;  
Fair the night and kind on you wherever you may bide.  
And God be the sun upon your head, the wind about your face;  
God's love upon the path you tread,  
and upon your wand'rings, peace.**