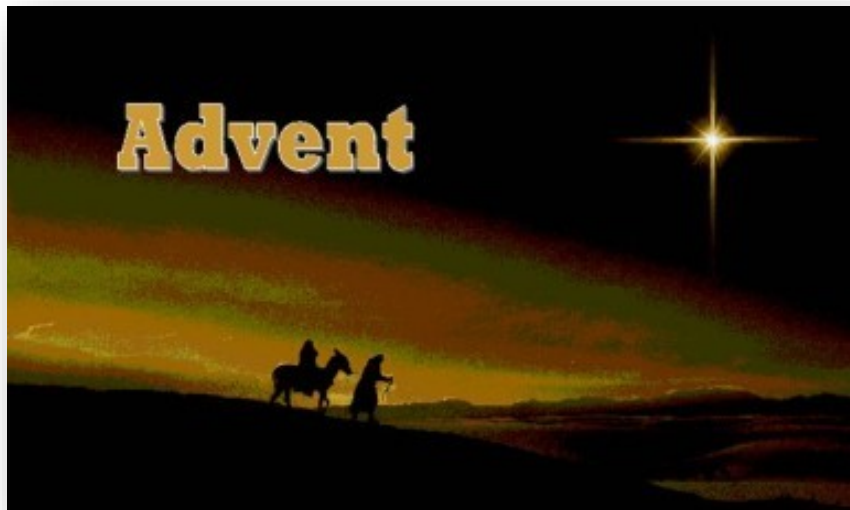


November 29, 2020



We have chosen to follow Jesus' commandment to care for our neighbor, especially our most vulnerable neighbors (Matthew 22: 37-40), during the coronavirus/COVID19 pandemic. While we are not gathering at the church building, we have chosen to see this as a time for us to try new ways to worship, learn, pray, and stay connected ...after all, *God is always doing new things (Isaiah 43:1-19)!*

In these difficult times, we are committed to continuing to find ways to be the church.

Don't hesitate to be in touch if you need something, especially help...getting groceries or medicine, figuring out how to do all this online stuff, or just needing to chat. We are here to help!

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Henry, the Elders, and Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Corona

In order to open the music, place the cursor on the title, press ctrl and click. That will take you to the appropriate YouTube location to open.

First Sunday in Advent

Gathering

[What is Advent](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Something stirs deep within us ... A longing, a hope, a thirst for joy, a hunger for peace, a yearning for blessing, in this year when everything has been made so different by a virus that affects us all. We know deep within that our hopes and fears will be met by angel songs and baby sighs. It is Advent ... season of waiting, hoping, yearning. Advent ...we worship and pray come, Lord Jesus, come.

ADVENT CAROL

[Come Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

PRAYER God of the prophets, into the wilderness you sent your messenger to prepare for the coming of your Son. In every age, your Word has called your people from death to life, and from darkness into light. In our own day, you have raised up voices who call us to turn and mend our ways. Open our hearts to your good news, help us to repent and make us ready to welcome the Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION Jesus, we are tired. Things are so different this year.....from parties to shopping, to concerts and more. We're captivated by the beauty of the season, but we are exhausted by the difference. It would be a tragedy to get to January and realize that we missed you, that we missed caring for those you care about or sharing your story with those who are lost and lonely. Help us to find balance, to stop and be still, to see you around us and to be "you" to all we meet. We love this season. Help us to keep you as the center of our focus. May you be made great in all that we do. Amen.

ASSURANCE

We know that God will continue to love us. God is a God of grace and forgiveness whose loving-kindness move us away from sin and always toward Jesus. Amen.

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 64: 1-9

¹ O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

² as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—

to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

⁴ From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

⁵ You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷ There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
⁸ Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹ Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

SERMON

During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of thousands of families were separated from loved ones. Grandparents could not see their newborn grandchildren, spouses were often separated, and when loved ones died, grieving families could not even come together to visit. Now we are in a second and more serious wave of the virus.

We are under “stay at home” orders. No restaurants. No church. We all know the angst, the pain, the silent suffering, the fear and the loss of hope. We missed our loved ones.

If only the door would open and our husband, wife, child or parents would come bursting through! Yes, we could Zoom, FaceTime, Google Meet or Teams, but we missed touching a face, hugging, laughing and crying together. We lost something and we wanted it back. We wanted a return, a restoration of relationships — for things to be like they used to be.

This is the emotional, psychological and spiritual context of the Isaiah text for today. The glory of Israel had long faded. Hundreds of years earlier, the northern kingdom had disappeared. And now, the memory of life in Judea and temple worship was a faint memory. Carried into captivity, the ancient Hebrews have been exiles in a foreign land.

Their recent history when still in their homeland had been scandalous:

- They neglected religious observance.
- They lived in open rebellion against God.
- Their rulers had set up false idols and corruption.
- Disregard for the poor and disposed was rampant.
- They refused to listen to the prophets.

So, it was a long time since they had experienced prosperity or enjoyed blessings from the hand of God. In fact, God for years now had seemed far away, as though God had abandoned them: “You have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.”

In captivity, in a strange land, the Hebrews now recalled the glory of their past. They remembered now how God had intervened on their behalf. They longed to know and experience the presence of God. And so the prophet opens today’s reading with the anguished words: “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.”

The prophet feels as though they're in some sort of quarantine. They must be infected, or something. There's some reason God is staying away. Knowing that God is a just God, he suspects that something is wrong: "You meet those who gladly do right," he says. (v. 5). He also knows that God works for those who "wait for him" (v. 4, echoing Lamentations 3:25).

Recognizing that it has been a long time since they've had a visit from their "Father" (v. 8), he complains that God has left them, committing his own people to an unwelcome quarantine.

- No visits from God.
- No meals left at the door.
- No face-to-face encounters.
- No Zoom.
- No nothing.

They have infected the relationship with their sin and idolatry. Now "you hid yourself". Now, even though they attempt "to take hold of you ... you have hidden your face from us".

They (We) hope for Reopening

Some of the Hebrews have returned, but their homeland is in turmoil. They need the Lord to visit them. The temple needs to be rebuilt. The walls need to be erected for the safety of the people. The city of Jerusalem is in ruins. Will God visit again?

*How lonely sits the city
that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal. (Lamentations 1:1)*

This is the first Sunday of Advent. We await a reopening. We must remember a lesson from Eugen Peterson (The Message) We may wish that this chaos would soon be over, Peterson says: "Wishing is something all of us do. It projects what we want or think we need into the future. Just because we wish for something good or holy, we think it qualifies as hope. It does not. Wishing extends our egos into the future; hope grows out of our faith. Hope is oriented toward what God is doing; wishing is oriented toward what we are doing."

Peterson goes on to say that we can picture wishing as though it were a line coming out from us with an arrow on the end, pointing into the future, pointing toward that thing we most want to possess. Hope is just the opposite. It's a line that comes from God out of the future, with its arrow pointing toward us.

"Hope," he continues, "means being surprised, because we don't know what is best for us or how our lives are going to be completed. To cultivate hope is to suppress wishing -- to refuse to fantasize about what we want but live in anticipation of what God is going to do next."

One of the true originals of World War II, a diamond in the rough, was Winston Churchill, who led the British people through "their finest hour" of resistance to the Nazis.

There was a time in the struggle of the British when things looked dark indeed. London was being bombed daily. The courage of the citizenry seemed to be wearing thin. Only 21 miles of water separated them from the fearsome invasion force that -- rumor had it -- Hitler was assembling on the French coast.

Just as the situation seemed most desperate, Churchill called a meeting of his most trusted advisers. He laid out for them the facts: that the nation stood alone, and that they were doing so with few resources other than spirit and courage.

The room fell silent before the Prime Minister's gloomy appraisal. It became clear, as the leaders of government glanced around at each other's ashen faces, that at least some of them were ready to suggest giving in. Then Churchill said quietly to the hushed gathering, "Gentlemen, I find it rather inspiring."

One of Churchill's greatest attributes, as a leader, was his capacity to transmit hope to others.

We are a people in a strange time in this land — exiles as it were. We long for Immanuel! God with us.

We must remember

- God is with us throughout shelter-in-place and stay-at-home orders.
- God is with us throughout quarantine.
- God is with us throughout social distancing — God is going to come close.

Some of us walk into advent

Tethered to our unresolved yesterdays

The pain still stabbing

The hurt still throbbing

It's not that we don't know better

It's just that we can't stand up any more by ourselves.

On the way to Bethlehem

Will you give us a hand? (Yesterday's Pain by Ann Weems)

May Advent be a time in which we experience the fullness of God's presence every day. God is the potter, we are the clay.

[Have Thine Own Way Lord](#)

(Thanks to Carlos Wilton and Timothy Merrill for their reflections and material shared in the sermon)

AFFIRMATION

In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.

God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Joys & Concerns

Marilyn's best friend, Diane and our friend, Barb, and their friend, Charley, were in a horrible accident. They were T-boned by a car that ran a red light at 50 miles and hour and are in the Desert Regional Hospital in Palm Springs. Obviously the car has been totaled. Di has a fractured sternum, 4 fractured ribs, fractured shoulder and knee, and many cuts and bruises. Barb is just as badly injured. Their friend, Charley has head injuries and is in very serious condition. Di has been told that hers will be a 10-month recovery. Please pray that God will watch over all of them and restore them to health

Continuing Prayers

Continued prayers for Rochelle. Prayers for our country and elected ones. All people, law enforcement & civilians, affected by current violence in this country. Lynn Rodisch - healing. Pete - healing. Kofi - prayer. Loren Nelson - continued prayer.

Please Pray During Week of November 29, 2020 for the families of:

- ◇ Lynda Rodisch
- ◇ Mike Say



if you have a prayer request or joy to share, contact any session member, Pastor Henry, the prayer chain at mom4tc@sbcglobal.net, or judy@fpc-corona.org.

During this time of being apart,
remember that your Deacons are
available if you are in need of help.

PRAYER

During this holy season of waiting, O God, grace us with the presence of mind to be attuned to what this season is all about, and just what it is we are celebrating. Let us walk slowly into Advent and wait as Mary did, and ponder this wondrous birth. Instead of racing to the store and becoming engulfed in mall madness, let us walk slowly into Advent, and watch for the holy happenings that come to us as we journey to Bethlehem. In the midst of December darkness, open our eyes to the gift of light in our lives. Let us walk slowly into Advent that we might take note "whenever and wherever God comes ... even to a godforsaken place like a stable." Let us watch where we are going as we walk slowly into Advent so that we might kneel and greet the babe with ready and restful hearts. We offer our prayers in the name of the one for whom we wait, who walks with us even in our darkest times, Jesus the Christ who taught us to say when 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.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

ADVENT HYMN

[For You, O Lord, My Soul in Stillness Waits](#)

BENEDICTION

Live this week not seeking a sign from God but being a sign of God to your family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, classmates and everyone you encounter along your way. For the sake of the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.

RESPONSE

[God Be with You till We Meet Again](#)

