

December 20, 2020 – At Home Worship

Welcome to worship for our Fourth Sunday of Advent. By now, your Advent candles at home should be well burnt and this Sunday we light the fourth candle: love. On this Advent Sunday, we re-visit the Psalms from the first three weeks of Advent, along with today's lectionary Psalm, exploring the theme of restoration especially in the context of COVID and the coming of Christmas.

Our church building, remains physically closed for services through at least January 4th, 2021. If our municipality remains in Stage Red beyond January 4th, we will remain physically closed too.

Until we work out our technology limitations, we are experimenting on Heide's Zoom service for live online worship. This allows us to gather together for worship from our respective homes. We want to ensure this is the best package for our use before the church invests in our own Zoom subscription, so a big thank you to Heide for sharing the service she pays for, and for helping us in the work of sacred experimentation and discovery. **You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to any of the Zoom services; you can also just call in on one of these numbers (long distance charges may apply):**

1 587 328 1099 or
1 647 374 4685 or
1 647 558 0588 or
1 778 907 2071 or
1 204 272 7920 or
1 438 809 7799

Use your telephone keypad to enter the meeting ID and Passcode when asked.

This is the information for our Zoom worship connection this **Sunday, Advent 4, December 20th**.
Dec. 20, 2020 9:40 AM (note earlier time in case you need the quick Zoom tutorial ☺)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84235826923?pwd=UmhTKzRKOUJ2cXJFaEV0dHU2aHJkUT09>

Meeting ID: 842 3582 6923 and
Passcode: 285279

In the course of this coming week, we also have these worship services happening:

On December 21st, the longest night of the year, I will co-lead a 7:00pm worship service with Reverends Anne Anderson and Joanna Miller on Zoom. This is an offering from our seminary, and this is the link to

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87073002509?pwd=TzJUeDNhN1F1aUJ3aUg4dEFYSFVmUT09>

Meeting ID: 870 7300 2509 and
Passcode: 786197

On Christmas Eve service will be made available in three formats: a paper mail out, an online offering with YouTube links that you can access at your convenience, and a live online video Zoom service at 7:00pm. The different formats may include different content as technology allows.

Christmas Eve Worship Service

Dec 24, 2020 06:30 PM Zoom opens, service begins at 7:00pm.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81940328156?pwd=OVcreGpNbWJYRWQxSjlTWm5vakVHZz09>

Meeting ID: 819 4032 8156 and
Passcode: 538456

Christmas Day service: Based on early responses, we will have a 10:00 am Zoom Christmas Day service, which will be jointly lead by myself and Ven. Reverend Rosalyn Elm.

Christmas Day Service

Dec 25, 2020 09:30 AM Zoom opens, service begins at 10:00 am.

Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/94892614909>

Meeting ID: 948 9261 4909

As always, if you need a phone call or distanced visit, please do reach out by email or phone: pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org or 519-653-4721 ... The church office is closed, but walking visits or coffee shop visits, video phone visits or regular phone visits remain available ☺ Have a blessing filled week, and please do be in touch if I may be of help or support in these times!

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

We give thanks to God, for granting our existence on this safe, bountiful, land,
and we recognize that we thrive and enjoy life here,
on the traditional territories of
the Anishnabe, Neutral and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart, centre yourself for worship.

Gathering Music – Sussex Mummer's Carol featuring Carmen Moggach-Laivaara, viola; Bradley Moggach, piano

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BdaVTbgHTU&feature=youtu.be>

Notated by Lucy E. Broadwood; Arrangement by Percy Grainger

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Greeting:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day: God of the beginning, the middle and the end ... in you rests all time, and the capacity for restoration and complete, eternal fulfillment. Throughout the ages, you have demonstrated your faithfulness to your people: always restoring, always returning to gather us up, to reside in our midst. Keep us in the light of this knowledge: of your faithfulness, of our constant communion with you, proven and assured in, with and through Jesus. Amen.

The First Lesson: Psalm 80: 3, 14-19.

Restore us, O God;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Turn again, O God of hosts;

look down from heaven, and see;

have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted.

They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;

may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.

But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,

the one whom you made strong for yourself.

Then we will never turn back from you;

give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be saved. [NRSV]

Word of God, Word of Life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

The Second Lesson: Psalm 85:6-13.

Will you not revive us again,
 so that your people may rejoice in you?
 Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
 and grant us your salvation.
 Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
 for he will speak peace to his people,
 to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.^[a]
 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
 that his glory may dwell in our land.
 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
 righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
 and righteousness will look down from the sky.
 The Lord will give what is good,
 and our land will yield its increase.
 Righteousness will go before him,
 and will make a path for his steps. [NRSV]

Word of God, Word of Life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

The Third Lesson - Psalm 89: 1-6.

Your love, God, is my song, and I'll sing it!
 I'm forever telling everyone how faithful you are.
 I'll never quit telling the story of your love - how you built the cosmos
 and guaranteed everything in it.
 Your love has always been our lives' foundation,
 your fidelity has been the roof over our world.
 You once said, "I joined forces with my chosen leader,
 I pledged my word to my servant, David, saying,
 'Everyone descending from you is guaranteed life;
 I'll make your rule as solid and lasting as rock.'"
 God! Let the cosmos praise your wonderful ways,
 the choir of holy angels sing anthems to your faithful ways!
 Search high and low, scan skies and land,
 you'll find nothing and no one quite like God. [The Message Translation]

Word of God, Word of Life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Acclamation of the Word: **Be Still for the Presence of the Lord; Helga Morrison, soprano; Stephanie Burgoyne, piano**

Click Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gQ47tRJe1s>

By David Evans

The Holy Scripture according to Psalm 126.

It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,
 when God returned Zion's exiles.
 We laughed, we sang,
 we couldn't believe our good fortune.
 We were the talk of the nations—
 "God was wonderful to them!"
 God was wonderful to us;
 we are one happy people.

And now, God, do it again—
 bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
 So those who planted their crops in despair

will shout hurrahs at the harvest,
 So those who went off with heavy hearts
 will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing. [The Message Translation]
 Word of God, Word of Life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon (Imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here):

It is inevitable at this point that we are looking to a very different version of Christmas celebrations than what we have been used to in previous years, and maybe took for granted in some ways. In conversation with more than one person over the past few weeks since we moved to Stage Red, I have heard descriptions of feeling numb and being on auto-pilot, or swings of emotions ... phrases like:

"I get through the day but it is like I am watching someone else in motion"

"I pull myself together but I feel numb on the inside"

"Sometimes I seem to cry or be angry for no good reason"

And this one is really common "I just don't feel like talking to anybody anymore."

These kinds of sentiments I am hearing from many folks, and invariably there is a sadness that Christmas cannot be what we are used to. Myself, I have been feeling so acutely the sadness of not having our beautiful sanctuary to worship together at Christmas. I miss so much from before COVID. I miss hugs and contact and touch.

When we made the decision to stop in-person worship in the sanctuary, I was both relieved for safety's sake and deeply depressed and saddened. The thought of being isolated from all of you again felt like the time of drought in the desert again. And in that first week when we moved from in-person gathering at church to zoom and mail only, I was on what I have come to think of as the COVID rollercoaster: highs and lows of emotions and personal energy.

In our own lifetimes, perhaps, we have not encountered anything like this before:

- so much change that came all at once, with not a one of us having any say in allowing it to be so.
- So much uncertainty that came all at once, and though a vaccine is now being given, we still don't know what that inoculation will mean.
- So much loss of power and control over simple things we took for granted like the freedom to hug people, and pop in to visit, the freedom to see smiles and laugh lines and nose crinkles. The freedom to plan.

I felt myself sinking into a dark and numb place ... and this is where my dog Parker becomes a therapy dog. Walking him has become my daily prayer time, my daily bread of encouragement, my time of intimate and close encounter with God. When I feel that numb sinking feeling, the cold outdoor air slaps me awake. Feeling Parker tugging on the leash reminds me that I am still anchored to the reality of this living, breathing, pulsating world with all its relationships and connectedness.

As I turned more to walking, I got him one of these extend-a-leashes, the kind that are on some sort of spinny wheel and give him about 6 meters of run, and I can pull that leash back in at will, to draw him closer to me, to restore our closeness when needed – maybe when another dog comes along, or a squirrel pops up, or another walker who might not appreciate the hearty doses of beagle love that Parkie likes to give. He's figured out really quickly too that he can run back to me, and that extend-a-leash is his line back.

Whether danger or simply the unknown element, that extend-a-leash has changed our walks because now I can keep my own pace much more, and he can keep his, and we draw back together when we need to – it is like a well choreographed dance.

The Psalms track a similar choreography between the people of God, and their experience of God. Throughout Advent, the Psalms in the lectionary speak of brokenness, separation, suffering and then

restoration ... At various times in the history of the Jewish people, they are removed from the lands given to them by God, they become exiles, living in captivity. They pray and plead for God to not forget them:

Psalms 80 “give us life, and we will call on your name.
 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved.”

They call on the God they know, who has been faithful in saving them always:

Psalms 85 “Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
 that his glory may dwell in our land.
 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
 righteousness and peace will kiss each other.”

They recognize the foundational love of God, even whilst in dire straits:

Psalms 89 “Your love has always been our lives’ foundation,
 your fidelity has been the roof over our world.”

These Psalms of praise and restoration not only capture the reality of being far away from the things they are used to, the things they once enjoyed, the confidence they once had ... but like a divine extend-a-leash, the Psalms pull the people back in close proximity to God even when they feel far away, They do not have to fear becoming completely disconnected, untethered ... they know that God not only restores, but brings them to a place of inner and outer landscape that is ultimately better than the one that was snatched away with neither their permission nor their consent.

Many if not all of us have had to keep trucking during these COVID times. If we are caregivers, we had to keep providing that care. If we have day (or night jobs) we have had to keep working. Parents haven’t gotten a COVID pass from parenting. Grandparents haven’t got a COVID pass from grandparenting. And the school-goers, whether teachers, or students of whatever level of school – nobody has gotten a pass. We keep going, we keep seeing to our responsibilities as best we can ... and these are acts of faith.

We are also deeply grieving ... whether we recognize it or not, that bone-weary feeling of exhaustion is the bodily expression of our grief. In a complex knot with that grief is maybe some regret that we had not realized how rich we were when we could just hug, when we could just visit, when we could just go to church on Sunday, or pop into the grocery store at will for whatever we needed, or meet at the local coffee shop to catch up in person. Even when dead broke, before COVID, we were rich in many things which we are now poor in. For those losses, there is very real grief.

In order to keep trucking in the midst of this grief, psychologically, we put away the pain to function. That sometimes is the cause of our feeling of numbness. It is also why sometimes, like a pimple ripening up and bursting, sorrow or anger or frustration seem to flare out of nowhere.

We might feel like these are all unique experiences that only COVID could bring ... but think of the experiences of people exiled from all they were familiar with: their religious practices and places, their farm lands, their homesteads ... those are the people about whom these Psalms are written ... and it is to remind them (and those who read today: us), it is to remind them and us that these words of restoration are repeated so often in the Psalms ... Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, God will restore all, and in the process something very magical happens ... our relationship with God deepens if and as we lean more into our faith and our relationship with God.

Sometimes these days I find I have to go outside to walk with Parker, because those walks have become the most rich place of my encounter with God. For you, that place might be doing a puzzle, it might be knitting, it might be baking or cooking, it might be in listening to music or hymns, or reading – whether God’s Word or something else that gives you that connectedness.

When I come in from that walk, that time spent with God, I can feel again ... and I feel hopeful again, and I feel one of those mini-restorations which has not banished mask wearing and distancing requirements but restores my soul with the reminder of God's presence, God's steadfastness, God's faithfulness ... and God's capacity to comfort me in my sorrow, and reassure me of a bigger, ultimate and eternal restoration.

Feel the density and richness of hopefulness in this Psalm:

And now, God, do it again—
 bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
 So those who planted their crops in despair
 will shout hurrahs at the harvest,
 So those who went off with heavy hearts
 will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.

God is even now doing God's work of restoration in, with and through us.

In this time, we are on extend-a-leash with our God ... and we can always reel ourselves back close to God's mother hen wings, seeking that solace, that protection and that restoration. And it is in THIS hopefulness that we await the coming of the light which is not overcome by darkness.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day: Each Winter as the Year Grows Older ELW 252, Bradley Moggach, Piano and Vocal
Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAVcP4ybRAw>

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The main wording of the prayer below came from a Thanksgiving message sent out by the Interim Executive Director of the Cambridge Shelter Corporation, Anne Tinker, in an email to staff and volunteers. Anne's message was not worded as a prayer – but her words sounded prayerful and appropriate to me. It captured so well the many things we have to be thankful for, that, with some additional intercessions, edits and Anne's permission I share some of her words in our prayers today.

A Thanksgiving Prayer:

All-powerful God: You bless us in countless ways,
 Thereby showing your authority, your grace, your mercy and your boundless love.
 We are thankful for the many blessings you give us:
 We are thankful that we can turn on a tap and have clean water to drink, shower, or wash clothes, when so many in the world do not.
 We are thankful for food in our cupboards and in our refrigerators when so many go hungry.
 We are thankful that with a flick of a switch we have light or heat when so many have neither.
 We are thankful for roofs over our heads, warm beds to sleep in, and a place to call home when numbers of those experiencing homelessness are climbing everywhere.
 We are thankful to be part of an organization that works to serve others and to make our little corner of the world a better place.

Holy God:

Help us to remember to respond to your generosity mindful that we are created in your image and likeness.
 Help us to make love our pandemic of choice: make us vectors of infectious love.
 Where these times sow fear and insecurity, help us to sow faith, hope and joy.
 Make us your instruments of justice, grace and mercy.
 Rid us of judgmental attitudes and replenish our reservoirs of compassion.
 Help us to live safely; reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.
 We pray that you would also keep us in good spirits, as we feel the colder weather coming,
 And as we contend with the reality of rising infection rates ... please keep us in your care.
 We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Let us share the peace of Christ:

The Peace of Christ be with you always, in your home and in mine, and throughout God's creation.

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

Music to Accompany you from worship & during the week: Abide Synthesizer & Bells, Bradley Moggach; Improvisation, Bradley Moggach

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGHnsAHeKHs&feature=youtu.be>

Notes from Brad: I improvised this soundscape to accompany a prayer within a service. I recorded the synth then played it thru a Bluetooth speaker and then I recorded/improvised the bells on top of it. I took the last 4 notes of the hymn "Abide with Me" and it appears as a mantra 6 times with ambient bells throughout. The intent was for prayers of intercession be read with this music in the background. The motif, Abide with Me, appears as a subliminal echo running inside the prayer.

Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.
May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.
May God look upon us with favor
and give us ✝ peace.
Amen.

Dismissal: Go in Peace, Go in Hope. ***Thanks be to God.***

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