

December 6, 2020 – At Home Worship

Welcome to worship for our second Sunday of Advent, the season of readying ourselves for the coming of the light of the world into our midst. Hopefully, by this week, you have set up your Advent candles at home, and I offer you the encouragement to pause here, light your two Advent candles, and welcome the hope and peace of Christ into your home.

Our church building, per council decision, remains physically closed for services through at least January 4th, 2021, or until we return to a lower risk municipal stage than Red. Please do follow the updates in the news as we head towards the new year, as well as notes in our weekly worship updates, to know when we can return to gathering at church.

In the meantime, we have had a few of our volunteer disciples who trained for safe entry and exit protocols for in person worship step down from the roles due to various factors. While we are closed, we will be seeking to re-organize that roster of volunteers and confirm who is willing to continue when we re-open, as well as set a “short notice re-opening team”, so that when we receive the green (or orange) light, we can resume in-person worship. Donna Graham has graciously agreed to lead the rostering process, so you might well be hearing from her ☺

We are also honing our at-home offering, and are now able to invite you to join congregational worship via Zoom. It is not a perfect system yet, but it allows us to gather together for worship from home. You don't have to have a computer or internet to connect to the Zoom service, you can also just call in on one of the numbers included here, and just use your telephone keypad to enter the meeting ID and Passcode when asked. This is the information for our Zoom worship connection this week:

Heide Emrich is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting for Sunday worship: Dec 6, 2020 09:50 AM

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86272085556?pwd=NW5ZNHhzc0V3bUR2dzlNakRRZU5oZz09>

Meeting ID: 862 7208 5556

Passcode: 526583

Canadian 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

You can feel comfortable to share the link and invitation with others, and we hope to see or hear you this Sunday.

Although in-person Bible Study had to be cancelled, the following Adult Study opportunities are also continuing beyond their originally scheduled dates:

- Our online writing group began on Google Meet on Mondays through to Christmas week at 7:00pm. Please email Avery, arobin17@mail.uoguelph.ca to join us.
- Our Bible study of the Gospel of Thomas on ZOOM will meet on Wednesday this week, 7:00pm. Please email Heide emrichheide@gmail.com to join this study.

In the upcoming weeks before Christmas, I will make the effort to do some doorway visits, with communion kits (which will include sacramental elements, prayers & instructions) that you can use at home with your families. Please contact the church office if you would like a kit delivered to your door by me ☺

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 ... It is not my intention to neglect pastoral visitation ministry during this time, sometimes my shins just need a swift kick. 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.

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

Prelude: Land acknowledgement with Brad's creative composition ☺

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

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: In the midst of all that feels messy and uncertain, open the eyes of our hearts and minds to see how to prepare the way for the life-giving light of Jesus. Remind us of the hope and peace available in, with and through us by the power of your work in us through Jesus. Amen.

The Lesson: Isaiah 40:1-11.

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her

that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;

the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings,

lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,

and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. [NRSV]

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

Gospel Acclamation: Wait For the Lord

Click Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvyhXkQCu-Q&t>

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The Holy Gospel according to Mark 1:1-8.

C: Glory to you O Christ.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
 “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
 who will prepare your way;
 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
 ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight,’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” [NRSV]

This is the Gospel of Jesus: **Thanks be to Christ.**

Sermon (by Pastor Janaki):

(youtube link will be available after Sunday's Zoom service)

I want to preface today's reflection with these two statements:

- Embrace your personal brand of weirdness (take an example from John the Baptist).
- In your own life, prepare the way to shine forth the divine that comes from you, and trust in the way laid out before you.

I am really, really blessed to have been your pastor for long enough that I have had the opportunity to build relationships of some depth with everyone here. Sometimes, even in the space of one visit, the things I learn about you: your lives, your journey to this point, the things you have accomplished, your approaches to challenging things and your faith ... the things I have learnt about your individual faith bowl me over. There is a common misconception afoot, that a pastor teaches a congregation about faith ... I say a common misconception because I have learnt from each one of you way more than I could ever teach, about faith and gifts of Spirit: patience, gentleness, compassion ... and also, I've learnt we are, all of us, a bit strange, a bit weird ... there is no norm! And that is just fine! To this diverse variety of ways, I bring a story to share today!

When I was in my very early 20's I moved to Canada for the first time. I came on a scholarship to study engineering, and it was a good and also hard time in my life. My first experience with winter, and failing courses was especially hard. In the transition to Canada I also had my first break up with my high school and undergrad university sweetheart, so, picture if you can: young heartbreak, failing courses (when I was used to acing everything), homesickness and then the snow and cold.

I turned to the counseling department of the University of Waterloo for help. They had a special counsellor deployed for engineering students, and her name was Christine. I wasn't a Christian at the time, and in some ways, Christine became the person to whom I confessed my weirdness at that time in my life. One of the things I confessed of was compulsive cleaning.

Because I found myself washing the floors and cracks and corners of my apartment, wiping down counters, wiping down the dining table and my desk – always with water, and it seemed washing and water were part of this new weirdness I had developed. I had the sneaking suspicion that I was going crazy, and I thought I better tell someone. When I made this confession to Christine, she smiled knowingly. Then she told me how normal this was, especially for women!

On almost every significant level of your life, there has been drastic change, she said.

This has made for a kind of chaos in your inner world, she said, and making some kind of order in your outer world, even compulsively so, is helping you to sort through the inner chaos.

What she was getting at was, though I thought I was cleaning house, in fact I was cleaning the inner house by cleaning the outer house. And I believe she was right. This happens in many arenas of our life: when we lose power in one arena, or we lose order in one arena, we set about establishing power or order somewhere else if we can, because we are, in some ways, preparing a way for ourselves.

I talk about weirdness: affirming your own, and sharing a wee snippet of mine, because I have come to realize that even in our weirdness, we are made in God's image and likeness ... there are no mistakes here, and it is not intrinsically a sign of "something being wrong" that we have weirdness. Some of the most beloved characters in scripture are full of weirdness ... enter John the Baptist, stage left!

You would be very hard pressed to find a character more weird than John. Chomping on insects and honey, wearing a camel's hair coat, and located in the desert – John is the personification of weird guy. I feel sure that the New Testament dictionary has John the Baptist listed as the definition of weird. John is out there in the wilderness by the river doing two things:

- 1) Proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (this is a somewhat different kind of baptism than when we are baptised in Christ; it is a baptism that marks one's turning back to God to receive the forgiveness of sins).
- 2) John is also preparing the way for Jesus. He says "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." John acknowledges openly that what is made available in, with and through Jesus is way more powerful than what he is offering, camel's hair outfit and all.

And we hear this scripture along with the Isaiah 40 scripture every second Advent if we are using the revised common lectionary, because the two scriptures together tell us of "Preparing the way for the Lord"... the Lord language was well understood in the Biblical context of patriarchy and slavery. A more contextual way to put this for our time is preparing the way of Divine.

We tend to look at this preparation as a preparation for one who comes from outside somewhere. But what if we are preparing the way for the divine that pours out of us, bringing hope and peace, joy and love from within us to bear on the chaos of the outer world? What if this preparing the way is about getting our inner selves in order, separated from the chaos that abounds around us, so that we can shine forth unconfused, and with the most purity possible the light and love of Christ that is within us, indwelling – the source from whence the realm of God proceeds?

Last Sunday, I spoke about the Christ within us, Jesus inside us, knocking to be let out. If we follow that thread of thought, preparing the way of Divine, is about preparing to make a clear pathway so that Jesus within us can come shining, pouring, flowing, flooding out: light and love abounding ... We are preparing the way for an all out love-fest, Jesus party!

Can you picture that?

Nestled within each of our individual weirdness and oddities is this reality, this divine reality, that is just looking to break free of the many and various things we have learnt to use to keep love in check, and this divine reality is surging, pushing, looking to be born through each one of us ... looking to enrich the world, enlighten the world, share love with the world in, with and through each one of us.

So ... how do we get from here: inner chaos that matches outer chaos,

to

there: preparing the way of the divine or that which the scriptures call “preparing the way of the Lord”?

Again there is a dichotomy, or a two way approach:

- 1) First: We could take a deep personal moral inventory, make a long list of our wrongs and try to make up for each one of them (good luck with that). I imagine that if I tried to do that in today’s context, I would be put away shortly after beginning the project ... not because I am a particularly bad person ... but because the things I do and leave undone, in thought word and deed that are hurtful to others or our planet are innumerable. My efforts alone, my confession alone, my apologies alone cannot make these things good again. I recognize these things as being too much to fix all on my own, which is why I need God, which is why I need the reconciling relationship provided by Jesus, which is why I am so thankful to God for providing that way home.
- 2) Second (and my preferred option): We could take an Isaiah 40 approach, a John the Baptist approach ... we can rely on God who will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. And we can truly apply the meaning of repentance: turn back into a full relationship with the One from whom we were brought forth: Godself.

Bringing this all home again is an exercise in moving from the theological to the practical.

If I may invite you to the image of my early-20’s student self, on my knees in my bathroom scrubbing down bathroom tiles because the inner chaos in my life was such that cleaning the outside things was a way to access organizing and tidying the inner things ... think of all the things rolling around in that young 20-something mind and heart: homesickness, heartbroken-ness, fear of failure, fear of being inadequate, and all the cold and snow she wasn’t used to.

I didn’t clean my way from there to here. God did all the heaviest lifting. The turning point for me came with the turn into a full relationship with God. And since that big turning there have been all kinds of smaller turns required, when bright, shiny, tempting things take my attention away ... so this second week of Advent, we apply the next layer ... along with waiting, alert, quietly in the midst of chaos (COVID, lockdown, job insecurities, health challenges – take your pick of chaos, there is plenty to go around) ... along with this waiting we turn ourselves back to a full relationship with God, trusting in Christ within us to emerge, when we prepare the way for Divine ...

Are you ready for this step of the COVID evolution? Emerging from this chaos into the most full recognition of oneness with God?

Are YOU ready to prepare the way?

Let us do this together ☺ Amen.

Hymn of the Day: Lay Me Low, With Lyrics; Text Shaker, adapted; Tune Daniel Schwandt, Bradley Moggach, Vocal, Piano

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYjfJaXK0QU>

Text: Shaker, adapted; Tune: Daniel Schwandt; © From Singing in Community, Daniel Schwandt

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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. (If you have others around you, share a sign of peace in a non-infectious way)

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.

Sending Hymn: Il signore. Taize; Bradley Moggach, piano, Debbie Lou Ludolph, vocal

The English translation for the words from this Taize Hymn are especially applicable to our message today:

The Lord restores you Il Signore ti ristora

God does not turn away Dio non allontana

The Lord comes to meet you Il Signore viene ad incontrarti

He comes to meet you. Viene ad incontrarti

The Lord restores you Il Signore ti ristora

God does not turn away Dio non allontana

The Lord comes to meet you Il Signore viene ad incontrarti

He comes to meet you. Viene ad incontrarti

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93PRP79QbIQ>

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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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