

WATCHUNG AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
GUIDE TO WORSHIP
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November 29, 2020

10:00 AM

*On this first Sunday in the season of Advent, the key theme is:
Keep your eyes open! Be alert! Expect Christ to come among you today.*

GODS PEOPLE GATHER

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

GREETING

May the joy of the advent season with its message of mighty hope be with you all!

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsive/responder)

Leader: In this uncertain season of Advent, we wait.

People: **Hoping, hoping God is coming to us.**

Leader: In the vagueness of these days, we try to listen.

People: **Hoping, hoping the Word will be whispered to us.**

Leader: In the weariness of our times, we wait, we listen, we watch.

People: **Hoping, hoping the Spirit will be found in our midst.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH OF HOPE (Video) Alice Lester & Gwyn Gronlund

OPENING PRAYER (one voice/una voz)

Let us pray: To you, O Lord, do we lift up our souls; and with the season of Advent comes the promise that you will make your home in our arms. And where you are, there will be justice and righteousness. May we welcome you with open arms and open hearts as we worship. **Amen.**

OPENING HYMN

#83, Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

THE PREPARATION

CALL TO CONFESSION

We try to stay faithful but fail. We long to care for others but end up focusing on us. We think we are being safe but know how often we live dangerously. Yet, God knows our foolishness, and forgives our mistakes, so we can be made new people. Let us pray, as we say,

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (responsive/responder)

Leader: Come, God-who-draws-near-to-us, for we live in fretful times, wondering if we will ever come out of them.

People: **Come to us, with your grace.**

Leader: Come, God-who-has-walked-these-roads, for we long to be faithful in these days, but find it all too easy to be seduced by worry.

People: **Come to us, with your hope.**

MOMENT OF SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS (responsive/responder)

Leader: In the midst of all our uncertainty, we are reminded of the old truths, that God loves us,
God forgives us, God restores us to new life.

People: The Child has come, bringing grace, offering mercy, and wrapping us in arms of love!
Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI

#582, Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me

THE HEARING / PROCLAMATION

NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLE LESSON

1 Corinthians 1: 1-9

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God.

NEW TESTAMENT GOSPEL LESSON

Mark 13: 24-37

Leader: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

HOMILY

"We Must Be Ready"

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

THE RESPONDING

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (together/juntos)

Let us confess our faith as we say:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE / PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER (together/juntos)

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 sins, as we forgive those who sinned 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. Amen.

OFFERING MESSAGE

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (together/ juntos)

You gift us, Loving God, not so we will hoard, but would share with others; not that we might accumulate more, but offer gifts to those who have so little. In the waiting, may we realize the wanting; in the listening, may we hear the brokenness; in the watching, may we see the weariness, and pour out our gifts, our lives, and our hearts on others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

#354, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory

BENEDICTION (responsive/responder)

Leader: On this pilgrimage of uncertainty,

People: may we remember God has walked this road many times before.

Leader: As we live through these endless moments,

People: may we remember Jesus shares hope with us every day, every day.

Leader: In this season filled with isolation from others,

People: may we remember that the Spirit knows our loneliness and cradles us in love.

TOLLING OF THE BELL

POSTLUDE

There will be a "Coffee Hour" Zoom Chat immediately
following worship service at 11am.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ **NO IN PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES:** All worship services will be pre-recorded & streamed online until further notice. For details & to sign in, go to our website home page, www.wapc.net. Also visit our YouTube Channel to see past services.

Please remember, if you are in the buildings at any time, the following health precautions must be used:
 - Mandatory face coverings at all times
 - 6 feet social distancing maintained when at all possible
 - No socializing inside; leave the premises immediately after your event is over
- ❖ **NOTICE:** WAPC will be streaming worship services only on the first, third & fifth Sundays of the month. On the alternate Sundays, WAPC will stream the **Westminster Presbyterian Church of Berkeley Heights'** worship service on our website.
- ❖ **TODAY! ZOOM CHAT "COFFEE HOUR"** will be held immediately following worship at 11am.
- ❖ **BACK PACK BENEFIT CONCERT WITH DINNER TO GO HAS BEEN CANCELLED** due to the increase of Covid-19 cases in NJ.
- ❖ **ONLINE SILENT AUCTION:** fund raiser for the Back Pack Project is LIVE! and accepting bids NOW! Just go to www.wapc.net and click on the word "**HERE**" to place your bid. All bidding stops on December 14th at midnight. *Good Luck!*
- ❖ **CHUCKLES CORNER-** submissions are needed for the December newsletter. We all could use a giggle or two.
- ❖ **SAVE THESE DECEMBER DATES!:** Christmas Eve Online Candlelight Worship, at 7pm and New Year's Eve Online Worship, at 6pm. Details to be announced soon.
- ❖ **2021 PLEDGE ENVELOPES-** have been mailed and should arrive at your home soon.
- ❖ **PRAYER SHAWL GROUP-** has been meeting in the Parish Hall **every second Saturday of the month at 1pm**. Please confirm meeting by contacting Gwyn Gronlund, 908-305-7465. *All Are Welcome!*
- ❖ **THURSDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY-** is on hiatus until January 2021.
- ❖ **Any time is a good time to use AMAZON SMILE!!** www.smile.amazon.com. Remember, when making purchases on line with Amazon, use this website address & **choose WAPC as your charity**. Amazon will donate .5% of your eligible purchase price to the church. Every little bit helps!
- ❖ **OFFICE HOURS:** Office administrator, Greta Martin-Worthy, will be in the office on Wednesdays, 9am--3pm & Thursdays, 12noon-5pm. During this period, she will also be working from home. If you have a need, please email or call the office & someone will respond as quickly as possible. *Thank you!*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Lay Reader: Paul begins this letter to the church in Corinth by giving thanks for the testimony of Christ that has become known among them. This church in particular has experienced much conflict and division, especially over spiritual gifts. However, in this introduction, Paul begins by giving thanks for the testimony of Christ and encourages them that God will strengthen them through any spiritual gift God has given them. Paul also reminds them that they have been called into fellowship through Jesus Christ, the Son of God—not any other.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 NRSV

¹Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ²To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind — ⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you —

⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God

As Jesus neared the end of his life, he began to speak of the Day of the Lord in Mark 13:24-37. Jesus begins by quoting from the prophet Joel about the sun being darkened and the moon turned to blood. Jesus uses the metaphors of harvest—we know the signs when it is time for harvest, so we also know the signs for Christ's return into our world and into our lives in a new way. Jesus tells the disciples to keep awake, for we know not the day or the hour. As a master goes away, leaving servants in charge, so we must be ready for the master to return.

Mark 13:24-37 NRSV

²⁴“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸“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. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Leader: This is the Gospel of the Lord

People: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

We Must Be Ready – Mark 13:24-37

Let us pray: God of faithful love, may our actions honor you, our words praise you, our thoughts marvel in you, and our spirits utterly adore you. Through Christ Jesus, who comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead. *Amen!*

Save the last dance for me. A song made popular in 1960 by Benny King. Maybe some of you may remember that song. Well, back “in those days,” I was quite a dancer. When the music would start at the club, I was the first one looking for someone to ask me to dance.

That rhythm and beat from the music would get me every time and I would get a little antsy when the announcement was made that the next song would be the last dance and I still had not been asked to the dance floor.

For those who like to dance, you get a similar sense of urgency from when you hear “Last Dance,” reminder – that this would be the time to build up the courage to ask the one you've been waiting all night to ask you to dance. I would sometimes eye someone across the room hoping they would get a subtle hint that I wanted an invitation to the dance floor. Waiting with anticipation was hard.

On this, the first Sunday of Advent, we also get a “Last Dance” warning.” The word “Advent” comes from the Latin “Adventus,” meaning “coming.” It's a season the Church has used to focus not only on the forthcoming Incarnation of God in Christ, but also a time, when 'warnings' are ushered through Scripture that give us a chance to get it together before it is too late.

It sounds ominous and it is. Advent is not just a liturgical season of the church year. It is a reality of life. It happens in all sorts of ways. It comes at various points in life, not just the four or five weeks before Christmas.

The Lesson from Mark is about the return of Jesus. It is about that 'second coming' of Christ to bring final judgment on humanity and to usher in the final revelation of the Kingdom of God. Much has been made over the 'end times.' There are some evangelists who are predicting that we are living in the end times now.

It is not the first time others have predicted and pointed to that same kind of cataclysmic day when the world as we know it will pass away and the perfect and completed Kingdom of God will be ushered in.

And because of all the people who are dying all around the world from Covid-19, that some fear that history as we know it, is coming to a close. But our lesson is clear, “*But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*”

So, what then is the purpose of Jesus telling His followers about this "last day?" He goes on; *"Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake!"*

Jesus' word was not designed to prompt one so much to fear as it was to take action. The warning does not say the dance is "over," it announces now is the time to get ready. We must be ready for when the time does come.

What Jesus tries to urge us to understand is that the primary duty of the servant is to care for the house in a way that if the Master were to return today - or a thousand years from now - he would be pleased to find the servants demonstrated good stewardship, the job of taking care of something or someone. That is what good stewardship is all about.

So, what does good stewardship mean to you and me? Well, it means a lot to God that we believe in Him and obey Him; that we proclaim Him in word and deed. Why? Because our lives, our gifts are from God who He entrusted to us.

It matters that we take seriously the call to follow Jesus because that was at the core of His teaching. It matters how we treat this world of ours, because God calls us to care for His creation.

And it matters - matters deeply, how we treat one another - how we live with our families, spouses, children, friends; how we care for our colleagues and work mates; and how we treat strangers, the hungry, the homeless - the lonely.

We find throughout Scripture that these things matter very much to God. This means that we should live in a 'heavenly way.' C.S. Lewis once said, "Aim at heaven, and you get earth thrown in, aim at earth and in the end, you get nothing." When we aim only "at earth," when all I am is wrapped up in myself, my world, my issues and my needs, I've lost the meaning of Christ's call.

But when we aim at heaven, life here takes on an entirely different meaning. We begin to see ourselves as servants of God - preparing for His return - we live in a constant awareness, that each minute is an opportunity, a gift, to receive, to give, to live in a way that says I believe in more than what I see on. It says, I believe that someone is Jesus, and He has come, He is here, and He is coming again!

I believe Jesus' teaching on this point has much more to do with how we live than 'when' this will happen. I feel certain that the Second Coming of Christ is not designed to judge or condemn inconsistent and imperfect Christians. No, in a sense, I believe Jesus holds this before us as a reminder of who we are called to be and how we are to live in relationship with God and one another.

Mother Teresa often reminded her sisters that Christians were not called to be successful, but they were called to be faithful. The call of Jesus - is not to be perfect...it is not even to have success as the world may measure it; it is, instead to be faithful - to live in a 'heavenly way,' in all times - whether they be the 'end times' or not.

All Christ asks of us is that we let Him come - let "Advent" happen - in our hearts - and in doing so, we are empowered to live with our God, our world and our fellow humans in a way that will not cause us to be afraid or worried or even surprised at the Master's return - but overjoyed.

There are several wonderful stories about the great, yet incredibly humble, Ignace Jan Paderewski, the Russian composer-pianist who died in 1941. It seems one evening he was scheduled to perform at a great concert hall.

In the audience of black tuxedos and long evening gowns was a mother with her fidgety nine-year old son. His mother brought him in hopes her boy would be encouraged to practice the piano if he could just hear the immortal Paderewski. So, against his own wishes, he had come.

As she turned to talk with her friends, the boy slipped from her side, and without much notice from the sophisticated audience, the boy sat down at the stool, staring wide-eyed at the black and white keys, he put his small fingers upon the keyboard.

He began to play "Chopsticks." The roar of the crowd was hushed by hundreds of frowning faces turned in his direction. An angered audience began jeering at the boy, booing and hissing for him to be taken from the stage.

Backstage, the master overheard the sounds out front and quickly put together what was happening. Hurriedly, he grabbed his coat and rushed toward the stage. Without one word of announcement, he stooped over the boy, reached around both sides and began to improvise a counter melody to harmonize and enhance the tune.

As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy's ear: "Keep going. Don't quit son. Keep on playing. Don't quit. I'm right here...don't quit!"

As God's children, many times we Christians are tempted to feel like we are spending our lives pecking out meaningless and inconsequential little tunes, thinking as we do that our gifts are just too small for God to use in any significant way. And yet, that is all He desires of us: our willingness to use and share whatever talent(s) we have been given.

By God's grace, let this Advent open our eyes to the wonderful hope and joy for us in the coming of Jesus. He has come. And his "Two Minute Warning" is merely a reminder to live knowing that He is here...whispering, "Don't quit. I am right here. Don't quit. Keep on playing...I love you...I am right...here."

As the dawn of Advent breaks once again this day, and as we turn our hearts toward the coming of Jesus, may we pause, take a deep breath, and "aim at heaven." Can we perhaps commit ourselves, again, to the hope that in Christ, life makes sense - even in the darkest of times?

So then what do we do? In this Advent season, we wait. Not only for the coming birth of Jesus, which we know to have already happened, but we also wait for the coming of the light of God into this world to make everything right again.

And as we wait, we light one small little advent candle. And then next week we light another. And then another. And then another...for the Son of Man is coming in the clouds with great power and light, which means darkness and despair will not be the last word and we will be ready. AMEN.

Let us pray: Almighty God, give us grace to cast aside the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER FOR MARK 13:24-37

Let us pray for ourselves, and also for other people around this planet. God of justice and peace, from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness, that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder before your marvelous deeds.

Raise our heads in expectation, that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Not many of us, loving God, get through life without some pain and some sorrow. Help us to meet such hard times as a part of the mysterious tapestry of providence, and by the initiative of your grace, turn setbacks into growth and fruitfulness.

Wherever there is disease and handicap, agony and grief, please grant to your children the ability not merely to cope, but to find some glimmer of triumph even through the bleakest day and darkest night.

Holy Friend, enable us and all people of kindness and hope, to challenge the greed, violence, injustice and neglect, that so magnify the pain and sorrow of humanity. With Christ's word and way as our guide, assist us to play our part in the ongoing work of salvation, counting no person as too insignificant, or no one as too evil, to be outside your redeeming love.

Help your church, we pray, to mend its rifts and demolish its many walls of division, that together we may be able to testify (by our own love for one another) to a God who seeks to reconcile all things through grace, mercy and peace.

Let us pray for all the dearly departed who have died from COVID-19. Do not let our hearts be troubled for they are with God and are our guardian angels. They are at peace with our Lord where there is no more sorrow, pain, or grief. They will always be with us in our hearts.

PRAYER LIST

Healing, comforting, and/or supportive prayers for:

- *All the victims of the Covid-19 virus; those that have lost friends or family and those who have contracted it.*
- *Marla Miksa, recovering from surgery.*
- *Jim Thomas' brother, Bart Thomas, who is slowly but continuing to recuperate from a successful brain procedure.*
- *Marilyn Cortright, recovering at home and continued prayers for her husband, Tim Cortright.*
- *Amanda Lake for health concerns.*
- *Susan Sendelsky & her sister, Kerry, members of Pastor Lindsey's former church family, Oak Tree Presbyterian, both fighting cancer.*
- *Jane Windbush, Pastor's sister & Stephanie Weaver, Pastor's niece, who both suffer from Rheumatoid Arthritis.*
- *Jackie Slattery & Sean Slattery, daughter & grandson of Estelle Kennedy during a difficult time.*
- *Gail Schmeisser, continuing to be challenged with mobility issues.*

Continued prayers for those people at home or in continued care:

- *Grace Landsperger, Margaret Herman-Angely, and Estelle and Betsi Kennedy at home.*
- *Gail McKenna, at 2225 Kirkland Village Circle, Bethlehem, PA 18017.*

Prayers of support and thanksgiving for:

- *Jim Roselli*
- *Pastor Madelynne Lindsey*