



The Methodist Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 29th November 2020

This short act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman, to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

I have included some links to allow you to access versions of the hymns / songs / music via YouTube

1st Sunday in Advent...I encourage you to light a candle at the start of this act of worship as we sing the first verse to the tune, Oh worship the King, all glorious above

Life as life is meant to be:
make us humble in believing,
and, believing, bold to pray:
“Lord, in us your aim achieving,
come and reign in us today!”

@ Ivor.H. Jones

The candle of hope we light in this hour
Proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,
When Christ in his glory will make all things new.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xumqvMbABaE

Opening prayer:

O God of grace and truth, we gather together here in this space to offer you all thanks and praise, Gathered with the promise that even when heaven and earth pass away, your words will never pass away.

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www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6HNI5TRdHk

Pause for a few moments to reflect as you set out on your advent journey....

Like a potter you created the earth,
and we are your handiwork.
And today we stand full of Advent expectation,

Let's begin by singing together: STF 318 sung to the tune for Love Divine, all loves excelling

waiting for a sign, waiting for a light in the darkness.

Christ, our king before creation,
Life before all life began,
crowned in deep humiliation
by your partners in God's plan:
make us humble in believing,
and, believing, bold to pray:
“Lord, forgive our self-deceiving,
come and reign in us today!”

In Jesus, you have come among us,
teaching us to live in readiness for your reign, for your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.
Though he was killed, you raised him to life,
restoring to us the light of your presence,
and empowering us by your Holy Spirit..

Lord of time and Lord of history,
giving, when the world despairs,
faith to wrestle with the mystery
of a God who loves and cares:
make us humble in believing,
and, believing, bold to pray:
“Lord, by grace beyond conceiving,
come and reign in us today!”

Therefore, with our hearts full of excitement we offer to you all that we are and all that we can be.

Word that ends our long debating,
Life of God which sets us free,
through your body recreating

Forgive us that we still fall short, that we still falter,
that we still fail

Allow us to hear your words of grace telling us that once again you offer grace and forgiveness.
And be with us this morning in this act of worship.
Amen

This morning's reading: Mark 13:24-37

²⁴“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its

light,²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.²⁷ Then 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.²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.³¹ Heaven 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.³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.³⁴ 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.³⁵ Therefore, 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,³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

**Let's sing again, new words to the tune for
"It came Upon the Midnight Clear"**

God, you alone know what you've planned
For earth and sky and sea.
Creation waits your loving hand
To bring in what will be.
When things we trust in shift and shake
And sorrows multiply,
We hear you calling, "Keep awake!
Redemption is close by!"

O Christ, you taught us, "Watch the trees
As seasons change each year,
For when they bud and grow new leaves
You know that summer's near."
May we look round this changing earth
And see with faith-filled eyes
Your signs of newness, life and birth
That witness to the wise.

Though heav'n and earth will pass away,
Your word will still be true.
O Son of Man, on that great day,
We'll be secure in you.
For at the close of history
When all that's past shall end,
The one who judges us will be No stranger,
but a friend.

So by your Spirit may we share
The life you're bringing forth:
May we seek justice, end despair,
And work to heal the earth.
For there's a new day coming near
With no more death or pain;
Till then, we'll seek to serve you here
And welcome in your reign.

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www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBiKxP3-vLA

Today's message

Hands up how many of you are unable to watch an entire, film, drama or documentary without falling asleep. Thank God for catch up TV or even the repeats that seem to occur so frequently these days. What I need to try and do is take note of the instruction given in our gospel reading this morning. Matthew wastes no time on subtleties and gets straight to the point. Depending on which translation you read Jesus command is simple

"Stay awake, Keep watch, be vigilant,
be alert!"

Some of you will know that I have spent a part of my life living and working at a street clinic for destitute in Calcutta, India. When I first started working there, whenever I returned to the UK I would be bombarded with questions from family and friends and one of the things they wanted to know was what had I found the most difficult thing to deal with. Was it the poverty, the climate, the culture, the language, the food, the lack of hygiene? It was none of those things.

The hardest thing I ever had to deal with during my time in Calcutta was walking down a street one morning and walking past someone sat on the pavement, dressed in little more than rags, hand outstretched, desperate for assistance from any

passer-by. And I didn't even notice they were there.

Something that would and should have stopped me dead in my tracks a few weeks earlier was now something I didn't even see. The hardest thing I ever had to come to terms with during my time in Calcutta was "Myself" My sense of care and compassion has fallen asleep.

It was the moment when I suddenly realized that unlike Jesus I was longer awake, alert, vigilant, in tune, responsive, sensitive to the needs of those around me. Unlike Jesus who managing to spot a woman bent double in a crowd, was able to feel someone simply touch the hem of his cloak in a busy market place, could identify the lost and lonely amongst a sea of faces, I wasn't even able to see someone I virtually had to step over. Far from being awake I walked around the city's streets in a deep sleep.

Sometimes waiting can be exciting, often we literally can't wait. A bit like how we sometimes treat the season of Advent, the start of which we celebrate today, wanting to rush through it at break neck speed so that we can get to real event of Christmas. In our haste we often we seem to be celebrating Mary's contractions even before we have had confirmation of her pregnancy.

Waiting can also cause us to become impatient and too grumble as anyone who has ever taken part in Britain's national sport of queuing in a post office can testify. Ultimately waiting can bring about a sense of resignation and finally a sense of apathy sets in. Waiting can be seen as a waste of time.

If even the disciples, those closest to Jesus found it difficult to wait and stay awake for just one hour in the garden of Gethsemane, how much more difficult for those who have waited for Jesus to return for over 2000 years to expect to be able to keep alert, keep vigilant, keep awake, keep on guard.

Indeed I wonder how many of us as individuals, as faith communities, as churches have simply thought we were resting our eyes for five mins waiting for Christ return only to discover that we have in fact fallen sound asleep.

Maybe what we need in our churches is not new hymn books, fancy projectors and screens, talks about removing pews, or proposed changes in décor but a giant alarm clock to shake us out of our apathy.

That is of course assuming that we are anticipating God to fulfil God's promises at all. That we still believe in a faithful God. We wait for the second coming but do we really expect it...I hope so. We pray come Lord Jesus come but do we really believe it...I'd like to think so. We invoke the power of the Holy Spirit but do we really want it...I'd want to say yes

The American writer Annie Dillard writes, "Does anyone have the foggiest idea of what sort of power we are trying to invoke" Or, as I suspect, does anyone actually believe it will happen? Churches are like children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT which could kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Stewards should issue life jackets and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews ready for when the sleeping God may wake someday and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to a point from where we can never return."

We do not precisely know how except that it will change everything. We do not know where but it could just as easily be Nottingham as anywhere else. We do not know when, only that it will be sudden and unexpected. It could be today, it could be here, it could be right now

Are we really ready, alert, and awake for when, not if, that moment will happen? Or will it come like a thief in the night and catch us unprepared?

But whilst we wait for that glorious moment to come, what about right here and now in the routine of our ordinary lives, what are we supposed to be doing. Just sit with idle hands, twiddling our thumbs. I suspect not.

We as Christians have been fortunate to have caught a glimpse of God. A glimpse of the divine in the face of Jesus, the words of Jesus, the thoughts of Jesus, the acts of Jesus.

A glimpse of the God who so loved the world that he sent his son to become incarnate as one of us. To live amongst us, alongside us, with us. A glimpse of God incarnate in human form who was fully awake to the need of others. A glimpse of God whose aim was to transform the people he encountered to be wide awake to God, their neighbours and the society in which they lived.

Through his preaching Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was near. Through his life, works, death and resurrection, I believe that such a kingdom or rule of God broke into this world 2000 years ago, is here with us today but at the same time is still to come in its fully glory and majesty.

To use an analogy from the world of cinema in Jesus we have seen a few frames, a highlight, a sneak preview, a tantalising trailer for the main event. We do not want to be out buying chocolates in the foyer when the main picture starts. We need to be awake to the signs of the times in our lives, for opportunities for us to act and to be the channels of peace which bring about change the society in which we live

According to Matthew, only the Father knows when the son will return, but waiting does not mean being idle, being inactive, being passive. It does not mean simply sitting back, hands in pockets, feet up in the air, cup of cocoa in hand. It does not mean being resigned to our current situation or more importantly accepting the situation many others in our villages, towns, cities, countries and world find themselves in.

Back in 1983 the American singer songwriter Bruce Hornsby wrote a song that soared to the top of the pop charts, its piano refrain becoming the ubiquitous sound of that summer. The chorus of that particular song is one that will be familiar to many

“That’s just the way it is, something’s will never change. That’s just the way it is”

Not as many people however can remember the next line

“But don’t you believe them”

By being active as we wait, let’s believe that somethings can and will change. Change for the

better. Change as a result of our actions, our words, our being. We can be the agents of the change we want to see in this world. We really can! But only if we stay awake, keep watch, be vigilant, be alert!

Awake to where we can bring about change.
Watchful of when we bring about a change.
Vigilant to how we can bring about change . And equally importantly, alert to how we might need to change. Change our words, our actions, our focus.

So let’s not hit that snooze button again, tempting as it is. Let’s hear that alarm bell ringing. Let’s rise from our slumber. Let’s get ready and prepared because we all might be surprised at just who comes to join us for Christmas dinner! Amen

Prayers of Intercessions

Let us pray for things in this world that need to change

Let us pray for all those change makers in the world

Let us pray for how we, with God’s help, would like to change.

Lets pray for how the church might change for the better

We join together to say the words of the Lord’s prayer...Our Father.....

Let us conclude this act of worship by singing STF 491 (omitting verse 1 in the books) It is sung to the tune for The Lord’s my Shepherd

Our task is not to calculate
what angels do not know
but faithfully to watch and wait
and Christ’s compassion show

Not loading fragile human schemes
with hopes they cannot bear
we trust the promise that redeems
the present from despair

For Christ the lord will surely come
the king whom kings will fear
And God with perfect justice plumb
the justice we do here

Revealing that the present age
with every age that’s past

are not the final moral gauge
that judges us at last

So guide Lord Christ our every choice
that when our hearts shall hear
your step, your knock, your calling voice
we will not hide in fear

But welcome you from realms above
to your estate below
where justice, mercy, peace and love
abundantly will grow

@Thomas H Troeger words @Oxford University Press Inc 1986

www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2PNMd-4LEg

A blessing...

May the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love
of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with
us all, now and forever. Go in peace, to love and
serve the Lord. Amen