**Home Service Sheet Sunday 26th November 2023 (Advent Sunday)**

**Call to Worship:**                  **Psalm 72:1-7**

Give the king your justice, O God,
    and your righteousness to the royal son!
May he judge your people with righteousness,
    and your poor with justice!
Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,
    and the hills, in righteousness!
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
    give deliverance to the children of the needy,
    and crush the oppressor!

May they fear youwhile the sun endures,
    and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!
May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
    like showers that water the earth!
In his days may the righteous flourish,
    and peace abound, till the moon be no more!

**Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this new season of Advent. We celebrate this time of anticipation where we may reflect on every good thing that You have already done for us in and through Your Son, Jesus Christ. We look forward, too, with hope to the glorious things yet to be realised, of which Your Word tell us. We praise You for coming to earth and taking on flesh and blood at Bethlehem all those years ago. We worship You because we know that You will return

to bring in your Kingdom in all its fullness. This Advent, fill us to overflowing with gratitude, humility and joy. May we recognise in all the blessings You have given us and bring You the praise and thanks You deserve in return as our act of worship. This we pray in Jesus’ Name, amen!

**Hymn                                     Hail to the Lord’s Anointed**by ***James Montgomery***

<https://youtu.be/_mCCwBqiQdk?si=8f62xAR0wbSh8ZsA>

Hail to the Lord’s Anointed; great David’s greater Son!

Hail, in the time appointed, His reign on earth begun!

He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,

To take away transgression, and rule in equity.

Anointed One, and Saviour! He comes to those in need;

And mercy, peace and favour descend their souls to feed;

He gives them songs for sighing, their darkness turns to light,

Whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in His sight.

Kings shall fall down before Him, and gold and incense bring;

All nations shall adore Him, His praise all people sing:

For He shall have dominion o’er river, sea, and shore,

Far as the eagle’s pinion, or dove’s light wing can soar.

For Him shall prayer unceasing and daily vows ascend;

His kingdom still increasing, a kingdom without end;

The mountain dews shall nourish a seed in weakness sown,

Whose fruit shall spread and flourish, till time itself has run.

O’er every foe victorious, He on His throne shall rest;

From age to age more glorious, all blessing and all blest,

The tide of time shall never His covenant remove;

His name shall stand for ever, that name to us is − Love!

**The 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 that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

**1st Bible Reading                Isaiah 64:1-9**

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
    that the mountains might quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
    and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
    and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
    you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From of old no one has heard
    or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
    who acts for those who wait for him.
You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
    those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
    in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
We have all become like one who is unclean,
    and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
    and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls upon your name,
    who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
    and have made us melt inthe hand of our iniquities.

But now, O Lord, you are our Father;
    we are the clay, and you are our potter;
    we are all the work of your hand.
Be not so terribly angry, O Lord,
    and remember not iniquity forever.
    Behold, please look, we are all your people.

**2nd Bible Reading               Mark 13:24-37**

**“**But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.And 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.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. 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 servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning - lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

**Reflection**

Let’s begin with a quick reminder – what is Advent about? It’s the coming of Christ, but firstly the second coming of Jesus with glory at the end of the age. Christmas, rather than Advent, tells us about Jesus’ first advent, or coming, when he was born in flesh, fully man and fully God. Advent encourages us to focus on the second advent of Jesus, when he will return to judge the living and the dead. Christmas is about celebrating what God has already done in and through His Son Jesus, whereas Advent is about looking forward with certain hope to what God has promised He will do in the future.

In our Bible reading from Mark’s Gospel, Jesus describes an horrific scene, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” (Vv.24-25) When we read passages like this, we struggle to imagine such a catastrophe happening in our time. However, with all that we’ve seen in the last few years, perhaps it doesn’t seem quite so unimaginable any more! There are certainly people pointing to the news and saying it points towards the end of the world. Perhaps, though, we should be a little more cautious.

Strictly speaking we’ve been in the ‘last days’ since Jesus ascended to his Father in heaven and sent the Holy Spirit as our Helper. We are closer to Jesus’ return now than we ever have been, but it could still be another 2000 years, or more. Jesus could return tomorrow, but we just don’t know! We need to be ready for His return at any moment, but we still have work to do in the meantime. Let us remain faithful and focus on all that God has called His Church to do in proclaiming the Gospel and loving one another.

The picture Jesus paints of the end of the world does give us some signs to look for. However, He also warns us that no-one except the Father knows exactly when this will be. When people make predictions about when the world will end we need to recognise that all they’re doing is making a guess, and we should ignore them. Jesus gives us some much more helpful teaching on how we are to live now. He says, “Therefore stay awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come” (v.35). We must remain alert, on our guard, ready for Jesus’ return because it could be at any moment. That is the central message of Advent – be ready, be prepared. Live as though Jesus is returning today, because He could. Let us do the works he calls us to do, living by faith, with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Our Old Testament reading, from the prophet Isaiah, is a warning about the consequences of not being ready. The Israelites had turned their back on God, ignoring His ways and doing their own thing. What is described is the consequence of sin that is not forgiven – God’s anger and judgment. Those who are Christians receive forgiveness for their sins through Jesus Christ, who has paid the price for them on the cross. However, if we do not have faith in him, which is demonstrated through the way we live, then we also will be punished for our sin. We are saved by God’s grace, but that is not an excuse to do whatever we want.

Even within the prophecy of Isaiah, though, there is hope; hope of salvation and forgiveness. Isaiah writes, “You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?” There is only One who has worked righteousness, Jesus Christ; He alone is without sin. As we remember Him, and His death for us on the cross, by faith we receive forgiveness and salvation. Even though we have sinned, and continue to sin, we can repent of our sin and ask God for His forgiveness. We mustn’t forget that God hates sin, but neither must we forget that Christ has paid the price for us at Calvary. The implied answer to Isaiah’s question, “Shall we be saved?”, is yes! Whatever we face, if we are in Christ, we have a great and certain hope for the future whenever Jesus returns. Hallelujah! Amen!

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank You for revealing to us in Your Word the end from the beginning. Thank You also for the many wonderful truths we have in Scripture that Your Holy Spirit helps us to understand. Thank You that the Lord Jesus is coming back very soon to judge the earth and establish His Kingdom. Keep on reminding us that whatever may happen before He returns You are still in control of all things, and we can trust in You. Help us to live our lives in ways that we will be ready for Christ's return at any time of day or night. Lord, we thank You that Your plans and purposes are designed to bring many sons to glory. Help us to play our part in the mission and ministry of Your Church here on earth. This we ask in Jesus’ Name, amen.

**Benediction**

May Christ the Son of Righteousness shine upon us, scatter the darkness from before our path, and make us ready to meet Him when He comes in glory; and may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us all this day and forevermore, amen!