

Order of Service 28/11/21 Advent 1

Opening verse:

Luke 21:33 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away'

9:30am: Dave and kids ring the church bell.

Gathering, Greeting and Call to Worship

Kirsty

Let us come to hear the voice of God:

God who speaks to us from the deepest seas and the highest hills,

The Son who meets us in the cradle and the cross,

And the Spirit who breathes life and hope.

Song of praise

Come let us praise our God/A voice is heard (NCYC99.10)

*Chorus: Come let us praise our God,
Come let us sing for joy,
With a heart of thanks we give honour
You are a mighty God,
You are the source of life
Creator God we give praise*

*1. From the deepest seas (a voice is heard)
From the highest hills (a voice is heard)
From the rich dark earth (a voice is heard)
All creation sings! God is heard! **Chorus:***

*2. Through the darkest night (a voice is heard)
Through the breaking dawn (a voice is heard)
Through the heart of life (a voice is heard)
All creation sings! God is heard! **Chorus:***

SONG: [A voice is heard](#), by Trisha Watts & Monica O'Brien © Willow Connection 1998, from [It all depends](#), NCYC '99 Songbook, Uniting Church in Australia, Reproduced with permission under ONE LICENCE # 604502

Welcome and introduction

Kirsty

Welcome to a new year! Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Here we are already, looking forward with hope.

I am Kirsty and will be leading worship this morning with our minister Ian, and Peter Blair our Olive Way Pastor who will be preaching, as well as a large team of people who do a heap of different things to make worship happen.

The theme this Advent will be 'Finding our voice' and each Sunday we will focus on stories from the Olive Way and artwork from our recent 'Emergence' exhibition.

Today you will see pieces by Catherine Lesley and Colin Hunter which provide a starting point for our prayers of Adoration and Confession, as well as the artwork 'Tranquility' by Bev Evans. Bev's work features on the front cover of the booklet 'With Open Arms', a collection of stories from the Olive Way which you received on your way in and will be blessed in the service.

Now let us take a moment and pause, breathe, listen. Let us pray:

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of mystery,
 We are here
 Ready to start this Advent journey with you,
 Waiting expectantly for your birth,
 Listening for the signs of your presence among us,
 Looking for gentle ways to be a part of your creation.

We feel your flame of love that warms our hearts
 We chat with Jesus as he walks with us on life's journey
 And hear your presence in the laughter and voices that surround us.

We strive to live out your hope,
 seeking to emerge, to grow, to stretch our wings
 knowing you connect us all and help us find new ways of being.

We come ready to be your hands,
 Hands that help, hands that heal, and hands that bless
 As you offer us all a place where we are loved, a home.

We adore you.

Forgive us when we lose hope,
 When we do not hear *your* voice,
 When do not find *our* voice.
 When we want to stay in our cocoons,
 And not venture out with you in the new,
 When we put our hands behind our backs,
 Instead of reaching out in love.

Forgive us. Amen.

Word of Grace

In Jesus, God comes among us,
 Giving us the courage to find our voices
 And to work for justice and peace in the world.
 God knows this is hard, but is with us on the way.
 And so we can say with confidence:
 Our sin is forgiven
Thanks be to God.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and respect
 the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation,
 the traditional custodians of this land
 since time immemorial.
 We are learning that the land
 is not ours to own, but to look after;
 and that if we listen,
 we may hear in it the calling of the eternal Spirit.

**Responding to this call, we commit ourselves
 to work for justice, reconciliation and care of the earth**

Song

Hear the message we now are proclaiming

*Hear the message we are now proclaiming
about justice and peace for the whole world.
Hear the message we are now proclaiming
about justice and peace for the whole world.*

*With faith and with love
and with hope we shall fight for the world.
With faith and with love
and with hope we shall fight for the world.*

*El mensaje que hoy proclamamos,
Es justicia, es paz para el mundo.
El mensaje que hoy proclamamos,
Es justicia, es paz para el mundo.*

*La fe, el amor,
La esperanza de un mundo mejor.
La fe, el amor,
La esperanza de un mundo mejor.*

SONG: [Hear the message we are now proclaiming](#), Spanish words and music by Eleazar Torreglosa [English: unknown], © 2007; Administered by WCC-COE 150, Route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211, Geneva 2, Switzerland. For non-profit use only.

With the Children

Dave and Ian invite children down. Happy new year! 4 Sundays before Christmas, and in these next four Sundays we are going to build the nativity scene – just a bit at a time...

So, what have we got, in the nativity scene... gathered around Jesus' birth...

Kids and adults to contribute here...

Today, two things we are focusing on: the angels, and the star. Inviting anyone to contribute – bring along an angel if you like, or next week, the shepherds, sheep and animals.

Hoist the star. Get the kids to help. Bright star, sign of HOPE. Wondering about the wise ones who left all they knew to follow this sign of hope in the sky.

Conclude with candle and Flame of love

Candle Lighting (Advent 1) & Song

Ian

We light this candle for hope.

God of hope give us your strength for the days to come.

Flame of Love – Julie Perrin

*1. Flame of love come
Holy Spirit
Make in us your
Cradle home
For the Christ child
Who will meet and*

*Walk with us til
We are grown*

*Flame of love
Holy Spirit
Make in us
Your cradle home*

2. *Light of laughter
Balm in sorrow
You have been our
Cradle home
Called our names in
to the Silence
Flame of love by
You we're known*

*Flame of love
Holy Spirit
Make in us
Your cradle home*

SONG: [Flame of Love](#), Words: Julie Perrin,
Music: Helen Burnham & Julie Perrin, Arranged: Julia Potter & Elaine Potter

Bible Readings

Ralph Eduardo & Kirsty Brown

Ralph: a reading from Matthew 11:2-6.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

Kirsty: a reading from Luke 21:25-36.

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Ralph: Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Kirsty: "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

For these words of witness and for Christ the Word:

Thanks be to God

It seems that the last few times I've preached at Brunswick Uniting I've had an apocalyptic passage to contend with. Again today our lectionary gives us the tail end of Luke's version of the Little Apocalypse as it is known in Mark 13, perched as it is right at the start of advent. Fortunately for you we have skipped over most of the little apocalypse with today's reading, but fortunately for me, I happen to love apocalypses.

Why this passage appears in the lectionary at the start of advent is a bit of a mystery, but here we go. For modern readers of biblical texts like the one we have today, we can hear them as terrifying visions of the future. We might perceive them as bleak, or a forecast of doom and destruction. But for those who heard this text for the first time it would have been a vision of hope. I'll explore why that might be in just a moment.

I won't bore you with my little précis on apocalypses (I'm more than happy to bend your ear about it after the service if you're really interested), only to say that apocalypses are preoccupied with the present moment viewed from the God's eye point of view, or on an eternal time frame. In other words, Jesus here is talking about *his* present moment, as viewed and measured from an eternal perspective.

The word at the start of today's passage gives us a little clue as to how we are to interpret Jesus' words here. He uses the word 'sign' (or *sēmeia* in Greek). This word links us back to the Nativity at the start of Luke's gospel, where Jesus is revealed as a 'sign' to the shepherds, *waiting* and *watching* their sheep: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (2:12)

Similarly, after the nativity narrative Simeon blesses Mary at Jesus' dedication the temple, saying that he will be "destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a *sign* that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." (2:34) There's perhaps a whole a sermon to be had on that last bit, but for now we'll focus on what he calls Jesus here, a 'sign'.

In the Fourth Gospel the author refer to the miraculous works of Jesus as 'signs' (2:18; 4:54; 6:14; 12:18). John's Gospel is a little more explicit than Luke and the other Gospels in the way these kind of acts are described. For example, in Matthew's Gospel the same kind of acts that are described as signs in John's Gospel appear in Jesus' summary to John, who is being held prisoner:

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me."

In other words, Jesus lists these as the *signs* of God's kingdom amongst us. Where power structures of earthly kings are turned on their heads, where people are included where they would otherwise be rejected, where the excluded are brought back into community; that is where the Kingdom of God is manifestly present. Because each of these things that Jesus describes here in this breathless little list for John are markers not only of disability being overcome or healed, but of social exclusion and marginalisation being reversed. These are the things being turned on their heads in the reign of God.

What Jesus gives us here is firstly, a vision of an unjust and unbalanced world set right. However we view the 'coming of the Son of Man', as a literal event in the future, or as the creation of communities of justice and harmony, this vision gives the hope that justice, reconciliation, and peace will come and that we can 'stand up, raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near'. For those who were 'harassed and helpless' like the gospel describes the crowds of followers earlier on, this is really good news.

Secondly, this passage invites disciples of Christ to live in state of readiness for the reign of God, to live as though God's reign was imminent. Of this passage, CF Evans writes, "Its

teaching is less [about the future - originally *eschatological*] and more in the nature of moral exhortation... 'watching' is now given the moral meaning of constant preparedness for the judgement through godly living..." (C.F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, SCM Press, 2nd ed, 2008, p.760).

Jesus draws his followers eyes to the ultimate fate of the earth, not as a picture of despair but as a vision of redemption (v.28). The fig tree provides the lesson for his disciples. The fig tree gives signs of things happening, or that are about to happen; flowers mean fruit, changing of the leaves mean that winter is approaching, new leaves mean that summer is coming, and so on (vv. 29-31).

So what are the signs that we are to look for? I would think that 2000 years after the event of Jesus death, burial and resurrection that perhaps the kinds of signs that Jesus is talking about here are not signs of the end as such, but signs of the cycles of human existence, which I think is the point he's try to make here. Just like a fig tree that goes through cycles of life, death and decay, but also life and flourishing. They are a sign but not *the* sign. Perhaps we can paraphrase Jesus here as saying, "Look, there's going to be a lot stuff going down soon, some bad stuff, but don't go thinking that's me coming back. You'll know when it's me, you'll know the sign."

Since starting at Olive Way, all the way back in 2017, it's been a privilege to journey with people through the cycles of life, those cycles of devastation, loss, joy, hope and celebration. I can assure you that life there is never dull. In fact over the years I've been writing some of these encounters in the Olive Branch each month, small signs of the Kingdom of God amongst us. Richard had the idea a while back to collect these into a single volume, and a bit later we're going to share this with you. But before that, I thought I would share one of these little vignettes with you to give you a sense of the booklet, and a glimpse of God's Kingdom breaking through.

It's about one of our guests called Carol:

There's none quite like Carol. She tells you exactly what she's thinking. She's unfiltered, abrupt, and unpredictable. The first time I met her, on about my second week into the job she said to me "It shouldn't be a man in this place, it should be woman!" So after having told me that I was the wrong person for the job she sat down and, for reasons I'm not too sure of, yelled loudly at the person sitting next to her. It was left to Leanne to reign her in as I was still fresh and unsure of myself. I've since learnt to deal with Carol well, and we have a pretty good relationship despite her still telling me that I'm not the right person for the job.

Carol doesn't care if she offends you. That's way down in her list of priorities; most probably she's on the autism spectrum. But that doesn't matter to me. I'm actually quite glad she's a part of our community, even if she's not super regular these days. She was a regular at Lentil As Anything in Abbotsford for many years and called herself a volunteer, although I'm unsure what kind of help she provided. She would always talk about 'Abbot's Lentil'. The last time I saw her she told me she had been 'disinvited', presumably banned for inappropriate behaviour.

Carol still insists on informing me that I'm the wrong person for the job at Olive Way, even after four years. One day whilst putting up Christmas decorations a couple of years back she came up alongside me and said quite flatly, "Some people may miss you when you leave here Peter, but I won't." I didn't react, it's just part of the usual repartee of what happens when Carol is around. A couple of minutes after this she put her head on my shoulder and said "I love you Peter". You never quite know what to expect from her.

Carol feels at home in Olive Way. On the rare occasions she comes she is welcome with us. That doesn't mean she can get away with being abusive towards others, including our volunteers, but it is important to me that she feels that it is a place where she can feel safe and be welcomed into.

Carol reminds me of that part of Jesus 'teaching regarding love for enemies where he says "[I]f you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?"

(Matt 5:43,44) Although I don't consider Carol an enemy, nor do I show her love for reward, it is important to me that I am not loved by all who attend Olive Way. She keeps my fragile ego in check. Similarly, it serves as a reminder that the space we hold in Olive Way is not only for those who are just like us, or the easy to like, easy to get to know, easy to love. It is a space that allows for the 'other', those who are not just like us, who's social skills may be a bit off, or who struggle to fit in to places easily. This is the place that Jesus calls his church to inhabit (John 1:11-13).

Offering with Song

Kirsty

Love Divine all loves excelling TIS217(i)

As we sing together, let us make an offering for the work of the church in the world, either by using the offering bowl in the gathering space, or by committing anew to our direct debits, and the gifts of our skills, time and love.

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- 1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.*
 - 2. Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave:
thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.*
 - 3. Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be,
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.*

SONG: [Love divine](#) by Charles Wesley, from [Together in Song](#), Harper Collins; PUBLIC DOMAIN

Dedication of Offering & 'With Open Arms'

Ian, Peter

Today we are dedicating this little book of stories, With Open Arms, as an offering to God. In it you will meet a host of colourful characters, and find reflections on the ministry of hospitality that we offer as a church through the Olive Way.

In dedicating this booklet we honour the people whose stories are told in it. We honour the vision of the Olive Way and all the volunteers and workers who have made it a place where these stories can be told, where these lives can be celebrated and Christ's community of hope grown.

I commend it to you as a good read and an offering of thanksgiving for the Olive Way.

Let's stand together and open our arms as we pray:

We long for the time
when the meek shall inherit the earth
and all who hunger and thirst after justice
shall be satisfied,
and we believe that, despite the persistence of evil,
now is always the time
when more good can be done
and we can make a difference.
**May it be so, through the offering of these gifts
and the offering of our lives. Amen.**

[Source: Prayer for Justice and Peace, Iona]

Prayers of the People

Ian

Maranatha:

**come, Jesus, come;
bring healing, bring peace.**

We pray for the earth and all its creatures, for the water, the air, the minerals, stones and soil,
the oceans, mountains, forests and deserts, plants, animals, insects, fish and birds.

Maranatha:

**come, Jesus, come;
bring healing, bring peace.**

We pray for people everywhere, those at war within and without, those hungry and thirsty in
flesh and spirit, those sick at heart and sick in body, those mourning loved ones, those grieving
lost hope.

Maranatha:

**come, Jesus, come;
bring healing, bring peace.**

We pray for the church, Christ's people of hope, who follow the way of the cross and carry their
own crosses, who fall and fail, but know the grace that reconciles and makes new.

Maranatha:

**come, Jesus, come;
bring healing, bring peace.**

We pray together in the words Jesus taught us to say:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Sending Song

Dare to Dream

*Dare to dream of new beginnings
Paths untried by faith supplied
Dare to walk and dare to follow,
Bathed in light of Beth'lem's star
Led by light of Beth'lem's star.*

1. *Wake and breathe in scent of promise.
Shake the binds of dull despair.
Hear the call to generations –
God is alive – let all prepare.*
 2. *Travel light – no need for baggage.
Come explore the mystery:
God of prophets strong enduring
Christ child finite frailty. CHORUS*
 3. *Dance the timeless steps of rejoicing
Harmonise with angel's choir
Celebrate God's constant presence
By living infant Christ inspired.*
 4. *Boldly step into the unseen
Knowing God will meet us there.
Love unbounded throughout history
Be the road that we have shared. CHORUS*
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Christmas Bowl

Ian

In Advent during which we are invited to make donations to the Act for Peace Christmas Bowl appeal let's dedicate this bowl as a place for the offerings we will make physically and online. Read the stories each week in the Olive Press of worship email and look out for the FUNdraising catalogue.

Let us pray

Australian Churches, through the Christmas Bowl,
have acted together to bring peace and hope into the world.

Help us continue to act for peace.

As children of God we will share this year's bowl with people
who are displaced, oppressed or living in poverty

May their lives be filled with hope and peace.

Gracious and ever-loving God,

Open our hearts so we may courageously act for peace in the world.

Open our hands to share what we have with those who have little.

As we dedicate this bowl may it be filled

**with the fruits of hope, peace, joy and love so all people
may know your goodness and receive your grace. Amen.**

Blessing and Sending

Ian

Christ is coming to make all things new.
Go now to live out that hope.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
be with you always.

Amen

Thank yous

Liturgist:

Kirsty Bennett

Acknowledgement of

Country:

Claire Foley

Bible readers:

Ralph Eduardo & Kirsty
Brown

Children's time

Dave Hall
(Pastor: Children, Youth
and Young Adults)

Reflection:

Peter Blair
(Pastor: Olive Way)

Prayers of the People:

Ian Ferguson

Advent prayer:

Saide Cameron

Musicians

Elaine Potter (co-ordinator)

Andrew Dickinson

Glenice Cook

Joel Hallinan

Matthew Lees

Bronte Potter

Songs:

We will sing a new song
(Prelude)

Dave Brown, Gabriel
Brown

SONG: We Will Sing A New
Song, by Dave Brown, from
Tune In, UC Songbook,
Reproduced with permission
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We are marching
(Postlude)

Alistair Hunter, James
Balsillie, Courtney Rohde,
Shawn Whelan

SONG: We are marching in the
light of God, (*slightly altered*)
South African, from All Together
Okay, Open Book Publishers,
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Artwork:

'Tranquility' by Bev Evans,
Photo by Peter Blair
'Hands that heal'
by Colin Hunter,
Photos by Ian Ferguson

Editing / Production:

Jane Allardice
Ray Cameron
Saide Cameron

Livestream: Shawn Whelan

Sound: Jason Minator

Laptop: Owen Sun

Closing verse on screen:

Luke 21:33 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away'