

Worship at Home for November 29 2020

**This is the first Sunday of Advent, and although there is not an Advent Wreath prayer or liturgy included in the service here, you might like to watch me light the first candle – the candle of hope - in the sanctuary at Applewood by clicking [here](#), or light your own candle at home with this prayer:**

Holy God, our focus as we travel together as your people this Advent 2020 is the question 'What are we waiting for?' We light this candle acknowledging that we are waiting with and for hope. Remind us God, that this circle of green represents the eternal circle of your love and your care. It has no beginning and no end.

Remind us God, that even a small light can bring hope into a world that is sometimes in despair, a world that needs it so desperately right now.

So we thank you, God for the gift of hope, a gift that Jesus brings to the world.

We thank you that your light can shine into places where people are lonely or afraid, or ill, or anxious or worried.

Let this candle remind us that the light of Christ is shining in our hearts, and can spread from us to others when we live in hope.

Amen

#### Centering Prayer

The days grow shorter, God – so grow your light in us.

The times are challenging, God – so challenge us to find peace.

Our worship is distanced, God – so send your Spirit to bring us together.

Amen

Opening Music: "Wait for the Lord"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7GexlvX8HU>

#### Opening Prayer

Advent summons us, O God

with the exuberant hopefulness of a child.

Help us to find hope in the dark places.

Advent holds us spellbound with child-like wonder.

Create in us a space for mystery and awe.

Lead us to actions and decisions that reflect

Advent hope, as we await the birth of Love

in a tiny child.

Amen

Scripture Isaiah 64:1-9 *The Inclusive Bible*

O that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would shake before you!

As fire kindles the brushwood  
and the fire makes water to boil,  
make your Name known to your adversaries,  
and let the nations tremble before you!  
When you did awesome things  
that we could not have expected,  
you came down,  
and the mountains quaked at your presence!  
From ages past no ear has ever heard,  
no eye has ever seen any God but you,  
intervening for those who wait for you!  
Oh, that you would find us doing right,  
that we would be mindful of you in our ways!  
You are angry because we are sinful;  
we sinned for so long – how can we be saved?  
All of us became unclean and soiled,  
even our good deeds are polluted.

We have all withered like leaves,  
and our guilt carries us away like the wind.  
No one calls upon your Name,  
there is none who clings to you,  
for you hid your face from us,  
and delivered us into the hands of our sins.  
Yet you are our mother and father, YHWH  
we are the clay, and you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hands.  
Don't let your anger go beyond measure, O God,  
don't remember our sins forever,  
for we are all your people.

Music: "Rend the Heavens – Isaiah 64"  
*a scripture song created and sung by Jewish artist James Block*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfQrnKPiAx0>

### Reflection

Our Advent scripture readings do not begin in an easy way. While they can help to guide us to that stable in Bethlehem, they begin in what seems like a very distant place. In the passage I've chosen to focus upon for this reflection, Isaiah seems to be reminding God and the people of their history and relationship. Remember, God, during the exodus when you came down spoke with Moses and made the mountains shake? Remember, people, when God could surprise us with awesome deeds?

In this passage, Isaiah calls to God, but also seems to call God 'out' – yes, we your people are sinful, but we have felt your absence God, we have experienced your hidden face. And Isaiah reminds God that we need shaping, and that God is the Almighty Potter who has the power to mold us and transform us like clay. These are powerful and perhaps disturbing ideas. Are we 'allowed' to cry out to God and name our disappointments? Are we allowed to be angry with God?

During these dark days of increasing isolation and restrictions, of rising COVID-19 case numbers and hospitalizations and deaths, perhaps we feel like crying out to God – where are you? O that you would rend the heavens and come down to fix this mess, and save our families and communities, and our world. We need you, God, don't forget about us.

Throughout time, and especially in the biblical writings of prophets like Isaiah and in the psalms, God's people have called out, have cried out. Have asked for a Messiah – have asked that God rend the heavens and come down. That God did come in the form of a tiny baby probably wasn't what any of those writers expected. We look for the BIG expressions of God's love, power and presence. Like the man who begged God to show him a sign, but who brushed away the Spirit-borne butterfly that brushed his cheek, we don't always see God's presence already among us in small yet profound ways.

We can be reminded, as we read this passage, that we need God to break into our lives. Whether God is noticed in the tired and worn faces of front line health care workers, or in the eyes-only smiles of those who serve us at the grocery store or bank, whether God comes in a phone call or a message, or in the voice of someone who reaches out to ask us how we are doing are really waits for our honest answer, we need that in-breaking love and compassion.

So in this Advent time of preparing for and waiting for God anew, let us call out to God – so that the holy can break into the daily, so that we can express our need for God and that transformative Potter's touch on our lives. May we also have a season of attentiveness to God's presence already at work among us all. Amen

*Where has God broken in to your thinking or your life? Where do you need God to be for you right now? How will you call out?*

Music: "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7ySn-Swwc>

Prayers of the People *from the Iona Community*

You keep us waiting.

You, the God of all time,

want us to wait

for the right time in which to discover

who we are, where we must go,

who will be with us, and what we must do.

Thank you . . . for the waiting time.

You keep us looking.  
You, the God of all space,  
want us to look in all the right and wrong places  
for signs of hope,  
for people who are hopeless,  
for visions of a better world which will appear  
among the disappointments of the world we know.  
Thank you . . . for the looking time.

You keep us loving.  
You, the God whose name is love,  
want us to be like you—  
to love the loveless and the unlovely and the unloveable;  
to love without jealousy or design or threat;  
and, most difficult of all,  
to love ourselves.  
Thank you . . . for the loving time.

And in all this,  
you keep us.  
Through hard questions with no easy answers;  
through failing where we hoped to succeed  
and making an impact when we felt we were useless;  
through the patience and the dreams and the love of others;  
and through Jesus Christ and his spirit,  
you keep us.  
Thank you . . . for the keeping time,  
and for now,  
and for ever.  
Amen.

Closing music: "Candle Burning" Pat Mayberry  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcT534xKYMM&list=PLz-IInMevuwXCDXWW0dNaOfnLXC6cj0n>

### Blessing

Go into your day ready to be shaped and molded by  
our creative Potter God, to find Advent hope, to live Advent hope,  
to celebrate Advent hope in our world. Amen