

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

29 November 2020—Advent Sunday

For each generation there is a cycle of birth and death. All things pass away, except that ‘my words will never pass away’, says Jesus, the very words present at the very creation itself. That Jesus has not yet returned, in our human timescales, demonstrates the grace and mercy of God in a really powerful way. We still have the time and opportunity to obey and put into practice the teaching and expectation of Jesus in our generation, right here and now.

Remain Vigilant. Yet this is still an urgent task. We must not be complacent. We can regroup and refocus, but we must not delay. For, at any time Jesus will return—and neither the Son nor the angels in heaven know when that will be—in obedience to his and our heavenly Father. There is no time to sleep or to rest on our laurels (a strange phrase, because laurels are a prize for those who have been victorious—and we have yet to even begin the race). We must be on guard! We must be alert and pray!

Parable of the House Owner. As servants of the absent but expected house owner, we have each been assigned tasks. The Apostle Paul makes this clear at the start of his first letter to the church at Corinth: ‘you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus to be revealed.’ Later in the letter he shows how the gifts are to be used to build up the body so that it might strongly and confidently fulfil the

ministry and mission of Jesus. We don’t know if Jesus will return ‘in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn’, but we do know that he will return, and we do know that we should be awake and about the work he has given us and equipped us for. His Spirit remains with us, enabling us to fulfil his expectations. In step with his Word and is Spirit we will be ready for when the day comes. ‘He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.’ So, Advent is really good news!

SUGGESTED SONG

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

BLESSING

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. (Psalm 80:17-19)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. Amen.

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Dear Friends,

Advent is one of those times when I get very nostalgic. It has always meant a great deal to me. When we were growing up we lived in a big Edwardian house in Bath that had 17 rooms over 7 split-level floors including the cellar, where 3 generations of our family lived together. You can only imagine in the run-up to Christmas all the work that needed to be done. The whole house was cleaned from top to bottom, before decorations started to go up just a couple of weeks before Christmas. Baking started much earlier, with the cake and puddings already made before Advent Sunday; there was homemade mincemeat, of course, and chutneys made in the Autumn from leftover garden produce. I should add that my grandmother was the daughter of a cook in service who worked in big houses, including for an offshoot of the Fitzroy family in Weymouth. In those pre-Christmas weeks there were parties galore, hosted in the large downstairs rooms: for our friends, for the church youth group and various house groups we belonged to, and over Christmas for family—including various adopted members who would have otherwise been alone. It was over one Christmas that we met my Swazi sister,

who came to stay—subsequently diagnosed with double pneumonia—who has been an inseparable member of our family ever since. Yes, I can get very nostalgic. And yet, every Christmas was different. Strangely it was during November and December that we lost various family members, so there was often grief and sadness among the celebrations. This continues to make Christmas a mixture of memories and emotions.

What I remember most about Christmas was the preparation and the sense of anticipation. As children we would sit in the kitchen watching cooking that wasn’t for now but for another day, and in upstairs windows we would sit looking out for our guests to arrive. The waiting seemed almost unbearable. That’s what I miss most though, and why I will always resist the urge to get to Christmas too soon without a decent period of Advent—even this year; and why I am very happy to go on celebrating Christmas right through to twelfth night. The light shines brightest when we have experienced true darkness. ‘How long?’ cry the psalmists and the prophets and the people of old. (e.g. Psalm 80) Only when the time is right, and then God’s face will shine upon us, the bright morning star will rise, and we shall be saved.

Zoom is the safest way for most people to meet at this time and will continue to be the main way that we will be able to meet for a little while yet. Our Zoom Sunday Service is at 10.30am today; our Zoom Prayer Meeting is at 7.00pm on Monday. If you are able to join us, you will be very welcome. The Zoom links will be sent to those who have signed up to receive them. If you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs. There is lots more information on our website which you can find at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

CALL TO WORSHIP

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth... Awaken your might; come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. (Psalm 80:1-3)

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19](#)

[Mark 13:24-37](#)

[1 Corinthians 1:3-9](#)

SUGGESTED SONGS

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8E9G763lbs>

Great Are You Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjH4tduQOo8>

IN THE BLEAK MID-WINTER

In the bleak mid-winter,
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
Long ago.

FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Each week for our prayers during Advent we will use a verse from Christina Rossetti's well-loved Christmas carol. We can be almost certain there was no snow in Bethlehem at the first Christmas, but as metaphors snow and ice are powerful. The social, political, economic and religious landscape surrounding Jesus' birth was indeed bleak, one thing on top of another. So much so that the time was now right for God to send His Son into the world to be its light and its Saviour. Our Covid-ridden world, right on our doorstep, is cold and indifferent to the love of God in Jesus, the very thing it desperately needs. Think about the many obstacles to faith, the circumstances of people's lives, the tragedies people experience, the coldness of hearts, and pray that the love of Jesus will enter to defrost and bring warmth.

SUGGESTED SONG

In The Bleak Mid-winter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DH3uvupUh8>

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

There would seem to be something built into us that wants things now. Many of us find it very difficult to wait. Delayed gratification is not in our DNA, even though experience has proven its benefits over and over again. God comes and God moves when the time is right, and yet our human instinct is always that the time should be now. From almost the very moment Jesus talked about his going away and his coming again, Christians have tried to guess, or work out, or predict when that might be. The theme runs through the New Testament church. The Apostle Paul reminds us that at the Lord's Supper we eat and drink bread and wine to proclaim his death and resurrection until he comes again. (1 Corinthians 11:26) At the very end of the Bible, written as an assurance and encouragement through a very dark period of persecution, Jesus promises 'Yes, I am coming soon.' This is immediately followed by the response, 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus', or 'Maranatha' for those more familiar with the Aramaic. (Revelation 22:20) There was certainly an expectation that Jesus would return imminently, throughout the writings of the New Testament. This, of course, led to an urgency in the mission and witness of the church. Things needed to be done before he come again, it was imperative that his teaching and commission be fulfilled, that his commands and expectations be obeyed in full.

Signs of the End Times. Throughout history, at times of crisis or upheaval, there have often been those who have predicted the return of Christ, looking to various signs and indications. History is littered with millennial movements, as they have come to be known. Accelerated climate change, which we addressed last week, provides a powerful sign to some who would rather look to heavenly intervention than be part of a kingdom solution. I have lost count of the number of times the world is supposed to have come to an end during my lifetime! Curious, because the consequence of 'the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory' to 'gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens' is the final judgement.

Parable of the Fig Tree. Which is why the lesson of the fig tree is such good news. You know when it is going to be summer because throughout the spring the tender buds and leaves grow. Even when the seasons get a little confused, as they are at the moment, there is still order rather than chaos. The covenant promise of God through Noah that the created order of seedtime and harvest will endure, is still in place. We've just viewed Autumn Watch, and look forward to Spring Watch in due course, so we know that this is true. If we have had our eyes open we will have seen many of the numerous recorded rainbows in the local skies in recent months.