

Come Pray Wait And Watch

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[0 : 0 0] do some planning and to help you with your planning a book has been prepared for you to take home with you which you'll get at the coffee hour if you don't get it through your children and it helps you to plan all the four Sundays of Advent in preparation for Christmas. We have to in some way put our lives in order and we have to prepare our lives even as we prepare our homes as has been suggested for the coming which we celebrate at Christmas. Just you know I do this to you from time to time but because it's Advent Sunday I'm going to do it to you again and that is have you look up in the prayer book on page 555 at the every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame for himself a rule of life in accordance with the precepts of the gospel and the faith and order of the church wherein you may consider the following. I think that's a brilliant statement as I've told you that doesn't tell you you have to do it nor does it tell you at this moment you should do it. It only says that from time to time you should consider the possibility of doing it and and that's I don't know if that's just wonderfully Anglican or whether it's acknowledging the ultimate triumph of grace alone you know but then it lists off the things that that you should review as you are considering the possibility of from time to time doing something about your own spiritual life and it suggests to you would be good if you read it why don't you read it and you read me one and I'll read you one and we'll preach to one another for the next few minutes so you read the first one.

The practice of private prayer Bible reading joining Bible study groups and self-discipline. The boldness of your spoken witness to your faith in Christ. The personal service to the church and community. The offering of money according to means with the support of the work of the church and the ministry of the church at home and overseas.

So that's I noticed in the New Zealand the new prayer book in New Zealand they have a section like that at the end of the catechism in their new prayer book and it talks about what is Chris what is a Christian lifestyle and it goes ahead to explain to you what a Christian lifestyle is.

Well those are things that you should consider. You should consider this little book you should consider the daily services in the church during Lent. There will be services every evening at 545 and there will be a communion service on Tuesday mornings at 730 and all these should be listed in the bulletin but they're not and I suspect there's a plot behind that.

The nature of the nature of the plot is a sort of contest that goes on between Steve and I. He thinks that a church in order to pray has to be led by the spirit admonished with the scriptures and pray spontaneously.

[3 : 5 1] And I think there should be a liturgical systematic traditional dependence on the historic disciplines of ordered prayer.

So that's why I advocate that you spend your time at the services and I noticed that it did make it into the bulletin that there is a focus on prayer where the aforementioned will be practiced at 745 on Wednesday night.

The truth of the matter is that if you know what the spontaneity of prayer can be then you should be interested in learning about kind of lectionary discipline liturgical prayer.

And if you know that very well then you should probably go Wednesday night. So that you know that you should be interested in learning about kind of lectionary discipline and I think it's important to learn about kind of how we can go to pray. But it's that somehow we as a congregation should pray.

And a lot of people are speculating about the possibility of an earthquake tomorrow.

[5 : 0 8] An earthquake would have a very profound effect. But the word of God has a profound effect too.

And it's a lot gentler in dealing with it. So the purpose is that God should be able to speak to us through his word. And that's why I'm glad we're here today. That we can hear his word and understand it. And I want to give you from the lessons which were read for the scriptures today, four words for you for Advent.

Four Sundays till Advent, four words, four candles to mark the Sundays in Advent. And these are the four words. The first from Isaiah 63.

I think that I come to this sermon from the brink of depression, acute depression. It's cute for me anyway.

[6 : 05] And, you know, I very often find that myself in a state of depression and wondering what's happening.

Sometimes that has physical reasons. Sometimes it has mental and emotional reasons. Sometimes it has spiritual reasons. But depression is not an unfamiliar place, I presume, for any of us.

And therefore, it's a lovely thing in my life that I am required, even though I've just done it, not to share with you the extent and nature and geography of my depression, but the, and the way it comes.

But the reality of the patience and comfort which the scripture consistently gives. I mean, that lesson from Isaiah this morning is a magnificent lesson.

If you have any tendency to feel depressed, it's beautifully done because it accepts that fact. And listen to what it says, you know.

[7 : 16] It turns, the Isaiah turns to God and says, Well, I, you see, he's blaming God for it all.

You are our father. You are our father. Be our father. You've let us wander from your ways. Bring us back. You've let the desires of our hearts go off in the wrong direction.

Now recall us. And, of course, that's so right, you see. That's the way we should do it. You are our father, our God, and we can't do this apart from you.

Unless you break in, unless you intervene, unless you come into our life, we're not going to get there. And that's the toka, that's the, in a sense, the first word that I want to give you, which is the word come.

And this whole passage from Isaiah rings with it. It's almost a cry from the heart. God, you've got to do something.

[8 : 39] Look at our world. Can't you see that something needs to happen? You must come and do something. And every line of that passage in Isaiah emphasizes that.

And we find it ringing out that we in our hearts are echoing the cry of Paul when he says, you know, that I have suffered the loss of all things for the excellency of knowing Christ.

Was I wrong to do that? No, Paul says, I count all of that, but dumb for the excellency of the knowledge. The loss that I've suffered.

And you have it again in Hebrews when you hear of describing Christ who with bitter cries and tears pours out his heart for the condition of his world.

And he prays to the Father for his world. And when we look at our world, it would not be inappropriate that we should cry out to God and say, what about the disease?

[9 : 49] What about the big cities? What about the children? What about the poverty? What are you going to do about it? We need to do that. We need to say, God, you've got to come and you've got to do something.

And so that's the first word that we need to learn. As our lives echo, in a sense, the dereliction of Christ on the cross, when we say, my God, my God, why have you forsaken us?

Demonstrate your power and your authority and come among us. Come. And that's what we need in our hearts and in our lives, that he should come.

The second passage of scripture that you looked at was Psalm 122, which you read with Steve. And it is really a psalm about prayer and a praying for the peace of Jerusalem.

You know, peace be within thy walls and plenteousness within thy palaces. Now, I think God is specially concerned about Jerusalem, but no more specially concerned about Jerusalem than he is about Moscow or Tiananmen Square or London or Ottawa or Berlin or Baghdad or Cairo or Tokyo or Buenos Aires, that these are concentrations in great cities of the people of God who desperately need the peace and the prosperity which only God can bring to us.

[11 : 34] You know, we think we're in a recession. But that just means money's a little short. The recession is that the vast wealth that belongs to us is in the people and that the resources that we

need are in the people.

And those resources need to be tapped. And those resources are unlimited. And those resources are the thing that God must come and he must act among us to bring to the fore all that's required and needed by our very needy world.

So we are to pray. We're to say, come. And we're to pray. And we're to do is taken from the the the the epistle from Corinthians 1 Corinthians chapter three, chapter one, verse three following.

And it's this third word is we are to wait. We're to cut. There is to come to pray to wait. and it's a magnificent picture of the congregation.

Even, I might say boldly, this congregation, we as a group of people, sensing desperately the need of our world, we are called to be a waiting church.

[12:58] And it says very specifically in those verses, we are to wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have an expectation. Not the expectation that doom, despair, and despondency will ultimately triumph, and if I can beat another day without it, I will be well.

But the waiting which waits for, the coming and the authority and the recognition of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And so in that passage, he says, for the waiting church, you are well equipped.

You have sustaining grace. Look at it. Just give me a minute to find it, and I'll look at it with you. But it's a beautiful passage in chapter 1, verse 3 following.

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. He has equipped us for this weight with the abundance of his grace.

The present reality among us of God is his grace. Somebody said yesterday, I thought this was good.

[14:14] You may be disturbed by it, but it will probably help you because it may help you to think about it. But give me one reason why I should become a Christian. And he said, I can't give you one reason, but I can give you a thousand.

You know, that there is so much evidence that pushes you in the direction of recognizing the abundance of the grace of God at work in our midst.

And you can see it on every hand and in every situation and circumstance. Because we are, while we wait, we are sustained by his grace.

We are enriched with all speech and knowledge. That's what it says. It's not just a matter of an unarticulated expectation.

It is one that has been given to us. One that we can grasp with our minds and our hearts. One that we can understand with our reason. We have been enriched with all speech and knowledge.

[15:16] And then it says that among us, as a waiting church, the testimony of Christ is confirmed. The continuing witness to the fact that Christ is who he says he is.

And Christ will be who he promises he will be. That testimony is confirmed among us as a waiting church. And then it says of us that you're not lacking in any spiritual gift.

Well, I don't think we're lacking in any spiritual gift. I think we have those gifts in abundance. In every pew in this church is heavy with the gifts of the spirit.

What we do lack, I think, is the kind of structure in which we can make room for the gifts of people. So that they can be exercised. We tend to become very structured and very ordered and very institutionalized.

And it all tends to break down because the gifts that people have, the fact that we come behind in no gift, and it's very hard to find opportunity to exercise those gifts.

[16:26] And we desperately need to do that, to make room for the gifts of people. The whole organizational structure of the church needs to be such that it makes room for the exercise of the gifts which we have in abundance as a waiting church.

And then that passage concludes with the word that we're going to be sustained. And so that those things are part of our waiting.

You see, the abundance of grace, the enrichment with knowledge and speech, the testimony of Christ confirmed, the spiritual gifts poured out in abundance, and God's faithful sustaining power keeping us.

Those are the conditions in which we wait for Christ to come. We wait for God to break in on our world afresh and anew.

Then the fourth word is, remember them all, there is come, pray, wait, and the fourth word is watch. Watch for the unknown hour.

[17 : 39] This is hard for us because we find it very difficult to deal with time. That's because, of course, we were built for eternity, not time. That's a throwaway line.

You can spend your time thinking about it. But the fact is that we are to watch, to watch for that hour.

And as it's described for us in the gospel of Mark, in Mark chapter 13, we're to watch through all the watches of the night, through the evening watch, through the midnight watch, through the cocks crow, through morning.

We're going to watch because the journey on which our master has gone, he will return, and he will come and expect us to be ready, and we're to be ready.

But we're very like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who expressed their great disappointment, when Christ joined with them, and walked with them, in their very presence, though they did not recognize him there.

[18 : 44] And he said, what's troubling you? And they turned to him and said, have you not heard? There was a great prophet among us. He was acknowledged by the things he taught, and the deeds he did.

And our chief priests and leaders have taken him, and have had him crucified. And he's now been dead three days. We are in despair. Well, that's the kind of despair, I think, which is appropriate for Christians, you know.

And it's the kind of despair, which is answered by the reality of the fact of Christ being among us in his risen power, and that we need to know and acknowledge his presence among us.

That's what Advent is. That we may say, God, you've got to do something. You've got to come here into our broken world and do something.

And we're going to pray that you will bring your kind of peace, the only kind of peace that brings healing. We want you to bring it to all the cities of our world.

[19 : 58] And then we want to be given, we want to claim such abundance of your grace that we as a church may wait, knowing that we are sustained, knowing that we are enriched, knowing that we are gifted, that we may wait, and that we may watch as the panorama of history unfolds, that we may be conscious of your presence hidden among us, and look for your presence among us to be revealed, that you may be glorified.

Four words for Advent, and I commend them to all of us, particularly if you have seasons of despair.

Take those seasons of despair and use them the way a blacksmith uses his forge, to put into it the steel that your hope may be shaped by the reality of even the despair that surrounds us.

In that despair might be forged the hope that belongs to us in Christ, individually and as a congregation and as a church in our world.

Amen. Amen. Amen.