

A Journey to Hope: Love – Isaiah 61:1-4

Sunday 13 December 2020

Before You Begin

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us to engage meaningfully with God's word and invite us into a sense of worship, despite being unable to meet face-to-face. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you.

A table of contents has been added to give you a sense of what will follow and allow you to move more easily through the worship elements.

Prepare

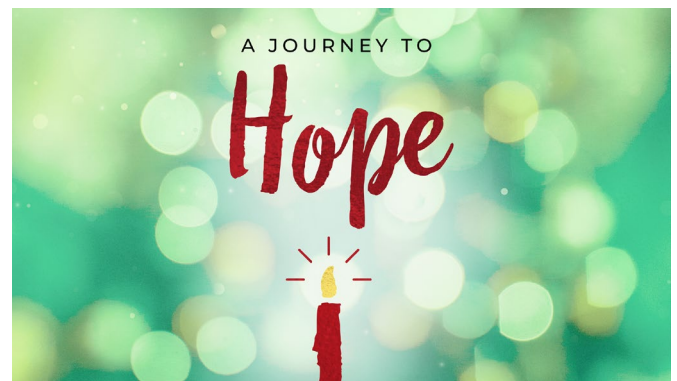
Have your Bible close by and some food and drink prepared for communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'Sacred' Space

Be intentional. Sit somewhere. Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image) or you might play some reflective music. Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

What will work for you in the space you have? If you have others in your house (housemates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.



What's Inside

On a computer, you can click these links

Call to Worship

Song: O Come All Ye Faithful

Advent Reflections

Bible Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4 (NIV)

Song: Noel/Joy to the World Mashup

Message

Song: You are My King (Amazing Love)

McCrae SUFM Update

Communion

Connect cards online

Call to Worship

Ben Graham-Nellor

Welcome to church this week. Things are really starting to look like Christmas. Kids are getting ready to finish up at school, decorations are being put up and we are moving through Advent as our expectation and anticipation rises.

When the world was crying out for a saviour, little did we know that it would arrive as a baby, able to grow, be tempted, overcome that temptation and then, save the world. What a great story.

It would be great if you could take some time today to reflect on your own Christmas story or celebration that you have been a part of this year. What is something that has happened that you are really grateful for? If you can, share this with those around you, and listen to theirs.

I hope that within our community there have been some wonderful Christmas stories this year. Stories of love, hope and happiness.

Let's pray as we begin.

Lord, we thank you that even though this year has been troubled, we are able to come together in this way. Wherever we all are Lord, be with us as we explore with expectancy how you came into this world and what that means for us and those around us. As we sing age old carols together, help us to find new meaning and true worship in the words we have sung so many times before. It is all about you Lord.

Amen

I hope you find paper church this week engaging and filled with joy.

Song: O Come All Ye Faithful

O come all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye O come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold Him
Born the King of angels

O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Sing choirs of angels
Sing in exultation
O sing all ye bright

Hosts of heav'n above
Glory to God all
Glory in the highest

O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

Yea Lord we greet Thee
Born this happy morning
Jesus to Thee be all glory giv'n
Word of the Father
Now in flesh appearing

O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him
Christ the Lord

CCLI Song # 31054
C. Frederick Oakeley | John Francis Wade
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Bible Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4 (NIV)

If you are with others perhaps take turns to read different sections

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord

for the display of his splendour.

They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

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Song: Noel/Joy to the World Mashup

Even in what seems familiar and known, there is always something new to find ... what are you finding in Advent this year? What are you expecting?

Love incarnate love divine
Star and angels gave the sign
Bow to babe on bended knee
The Saviour of humanity
Unto us a Child is born
He shall reign forevermore

Noel Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel Noel
The story of amazing love
The light of the world given for us
Noel

Son of God and Son of man
There before the world began
Born to suffer born to save
Born to raise us from the grave
Christ the everlasting Lord
He shall reign forevermore

Noel Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel Noel
The story of amazing love
The light of the world given for us
Noel

Joy to the world the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room

And heav'n and nature sing
And heav'n and nature sing
And heav'n and heav'n and nature sing

Joy to the earth the Saviour reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods
Rocks hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat repeat the sounding joy

Noel Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel Noel
The story of amazing love
The light of the world given for us
Noel

Noel Noel
Come and see what God has done
Noel Noel
The story of amazing love
The light of the world given for us
Noel

Noel

CCLI Song # 7050419

Chris Tomlin | Ed Cash | Matt Redman

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Joy to the World

CCLI Song # 24016

George Frideric Handel | Isaac Watts

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Message

Penny Martin

“Whenever I get gloomy with the state of the world, I think about the arrivals gate at Heathrow airport. General opinion is starting to make out we live in a world of hate and greed, but I don’t see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often, it’s not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it’s always there. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends. When the planes hit the twin towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from people on board were messages of hate or revenge. They were all messages of love. If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaking suspicion that love actually is all around.” - Love Actually, 2003

The world is full of dog-eared platitudes and overly - romanticised versions of love. We can be pretty jaded at times about how we have used and misused this rather inadequate little word to describe something profound about our human experience – we realise too quickly that definitions and descriptions of love slip through our fingers like water and sand - and as soon as we think we have it all nailed up, we are schooled again and again by the powerful and transcendent force of love.

When it comes to Advent and our journey toward hope – what can we learn about love? Seems an odd question – there are some pretty obvious things that roll around in this story.

- God’s love for his created world in sending his son. John 3:16 tells us of the deep love God showed in sending Jesus.
- Mary’s love for God in her faithful, trusting obedience (as Craig spoke beautifully about last week).
- Joseph’s love for Mary and love for God – that is about to trust and hope beyond complex and confusing circumstances.
- Mary and Elizabeth’s love for one another.
- Mary’s love for the child in her womb.

There’s a lot of love evident in the Christmas narratives ... so what can we be reminded of anew this year? What is God drawing our attention to in this time? Is there something new? Or is there something old and enduring that will continue to give us a sense of sustaining hope in this season?

The reading for today is a bit weird as it relates to Christmas but stay with me. This Isaiah reading is almost exactly what Jesus quotes early in his ministry in Luke 4 as he stands up in the Synagogue and sets the trajectory for his ministry and mission on earth. When Isaiah wrote this text, he saw into a Kingdom future that was both begun and fulfilled in Jesus.

Isaiah writes about the character of a deeply loving God ... who desires the very best things for his creation.

Love is graceful, unconditional and good! (vs. 1)

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,

because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,

Love is tied up in healing and wholeness and is a safe and comforting place from which to venture. (vs. 2-3)

to bind up the broken-hearted ...
... to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

Love is about a fearless freedom to wholeheartedly be who we were created to be – with no shame and with deep purpose (vs. 1, 3).

to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners ...
... They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

Love is never passive and true love summons new love into existence. (vs. 4)

They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

The character of God in this prophecy comes to fruition in the advent of Jesus. As Jesus was born into the world, we get a deep sense of God placing all that character into a small, vulnerable baby.

In the very act of a risky pregnancy – God shows his true character.

“The interior secret is a vulnerable relationship between two individuals. The forming child trusts the mother to provide all it needs – nourishment, rest, energy, protection – so it can be knit together to its wondrous completion. The mother offers herself to the forming child, trusting it will take what it needs to mature into completion while refraining from harming, hurting, depleting her own delicate body of what it needs to survive. Both parties grow together, connected at their vulnerabilities. Both parties take the risk of creating something new together.”

(Scott Erickson “Honest Advent”)

The risks are all too painfully real in bringing life into the world ... Imagine the risks for a teenage, refugee girl with no attending mid-wife, no epidural, no support team ... imagine the risks ...

*“What does it say about a God ... who’s willing to be this vulnerable with us?
Who’s willing to come into the world through the statistical risk of childbearing?
Who’s willing to be attached by a placenta for nourishment and life to His own*

creation? Who's willing to wait and grow in the human womb? Who's willing to be fearfully and wonderfully made, just like we are?

Any real connection involves vulnerability because it takes the act of making oneself open to truly be known. God came to us floating in embryonic fluid. Slowly forming and taking shape. Embedded in the uterine wall of a Middle Eastern teenage woman God trusted to care for the fragile knitting process.

What is says about a God who's willing to be this vulnerable is that God is willing to open Himself up to deeply connect with us. The real question is, are we willing to do the same?"

(Scott Erickson "Honest Advent")

In sending Jesus, God demonstrated to us that love has to become an action. The Word, became flesh (John 1:14). A small, sweet baby was born into a poor and occupied land – to bring gifts of hope of peace and the joy of salvation to a world in need, and to inspire each of us to speak hope, live peace, embody joy and work for salvation – to be LOVE IN ACTION.

From Dave Wilkins ...

What would it look like for each person in our community to reach out to one or two people in our community in these next few weeks of Advent? One of the wonderful elements of being in community is the incidental connections and conversations that happen on a Sunday and then continue through the week. So, in this space and time it may be a card, a call, a text, maybe a visit. In this year and in this season, it needs to be intentional. Perhaps a word of encouragement, of hope to someone we have not seen all year. To allow the Spirit to guide us as to who we connect with. Maybe a person or family within the Geographic Care Circle (or not). And perhaps considering at least one beyond our normal channels of friendship.

And what would it look like to do the same with one or two people we have connected in new and surprising ways with over the course of this year – neighbour, coffee shop barista?

Prayer

Penny Martin

Loving God, thank you for ancient words. For prophetic, powerful words that depict something profound and important about your character and your nature, in loving us, in welcoming us, in reminding us of our truest identity. In encouraging us to step purposefully into a future of hope and restoration. The words of Isaiah 61 echo powerfully this season, to call us into your character and the fulfilment of that beautiful love in sending your son, Jesus, as a tiny, vulnerable baby into this world. To once again demonstrate the depth of your commitment to us, your people. Your desire to be earthly invested and intimately involved in our lives and draw us as your hands and feet in this world to bring hope and love to all of those whom we encounter. Would you give us the courage and the wisdom to step more boldly and more powerfully into those places in these coming days as we look forward to that tiny baby, full of hope and good news being born again into our hearts and our minds.

Amen

Song: You are My King (Amazing Love)

I'm forgiven
Because You were forsaken
I'm accepted
You were condemned
I'm alive and well
Your Spirit is within me
Because You died
And rose again

Amazing love
How can it be
That You my King
Would die for me
Amazing love
I know it's true
It's my joy to honour You
In all I do I honour You

You are my King
You are my King
Jesus You are my King
Jesus You are my King

CCLI Song # 2456623

Billy J. Foote

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McCrae SUFM Update

Cam Moss

Hi everyone and 'Gday McCrae'!

We're so looking forward to getting down to McCrae, and yes we are running this year – which is awesome! We've got some old faces on team and some new ones, we've got some people from Ringwood and some from our youth! We're looking forward to hearing from the campers down there to hear what this crazy year of 2020 has been like for them. We can't wait to get down there and share Jesus' love with the community there that we've been able to have connections with for so long. Just like church this year, we're going to be putting out online videos every day and some face-to-face activities.

We would really appreciate your support – we know what a massive support Ringwood has been over the years. We'd love your prayer as we come into mission around how we should best use our time and resources – just clarify and discernment on what we should be doing down at McCrae. If you are in a position to give financially, we'd be very happy to see what we can do with those resources to better prepare ourselves and also provide better resources for the campers. If you have any questions or want to find out more, send me an email or call the church office.

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or via Facebook live rngwd.com/fbv

If you are unable to join us, then please use the following reflection to take communion in your own way today and after, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

Welcome to this time of Communion. Today our Advent theme is Love.

Ben Graham-Nellor

There are only a few weeks to go until Christmas. In my house, November 1 means I'm allowed to put on Christmas carols. Mostly Frank Sinatra, with a few others thrown in. I love Christmas, not only for the fun of it. But also as a time to reflect on what the 'true meaning of Christmas' really is.

As we have moved through the weeks of Advent and we build our feeling of expectation, I reflect on the fact that the saviour that was promised for generations didn't come to earth riding on the back of giant horse with an army ready to take back what belonged to him. Rather, a baby, born into poverty, born in a stable, born to a young girl and born human. It is with this humility that I consider and find the true meaning of Christmas. *Relient K*, in their song *I celebrate the day* sing:

*To look back and think that
This baby would one day save me
In the hope that what You did
That you were born so I might really live
To look back and think that
This baby would one day save me*

*And the first time
That You opened Your eyes did You realize that You would be my Savior
And the first breath that left Your lips
Did You know that it would change this world forever?*

*And I, I celebrate the day
That You were born to die
So I could one day pray for You to save my life*

It's easy when things are repeated so often, to forget what they really mean. Christmas, which does get so busy and so messy and so difficult sometimes, can become just another day to get through. And Communion, which we take every week, the same way, can become a bit of a habit that can lose its true meaning.

As we take communion today, and as we approach Christmas, my prayer for you is that you will find meaning in both of these traditions, and a meaning that will refresh you. I would love you to look beyond the glitter and the marketing to see inside Christmas.

That God would come to earth, fully human and as a baby. Would grow and die as an adult and would rise as our saviour. Humility, love and sacrifice, this is the meaning of Christmas. Jesus Christ, the saviour of a broken world. A world that has now been saved but doesn't always realise it. A world that we can show the true meaning of Christmas.

We invite you to eat and drink in remembrance of Him

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can be praying with you.

Thank you!