

# *South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges*

## *Second Sunday of Advent – December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023*

**Prelude:** – Christie Coatsworth

### **Welcome & Announcements:**

Continue to keep in touch with others and to share our websites; at [southbuxton.ca](http://southbuxton.ca), and [talbotstreet.ca](http://talbotstreet.ca)

Thank you to Christie Coatsworth for our music this morning. Thank you to Tracey Major for putting together the Power Point slides.

### **Call To Worship:**

**Eric:** Praise God from the tops of the highest mountains! Grant us peace, Almighty God!

**People: Praise God from the bottoms of the deepest valleys! Grant us peace, Merciful God!**

**Eric:** Praise God from the bumps in the road! Grant us peace, Gracious God!

**People: Praise God from the still waters! Grant us peace, Compassionate God!**

**Eric:** Praise the God of highs and lows, rough places and smooth.

**People: We come to praise the God who brings peace to us all.**

### **Advent Reflection:**

**Eric:** On this second Sunday of Advent, we focus on peace. Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.”

**People:** Our scripture today speak of hills and mountains being made flat – easier to travel, and you can see for miles. This gives the traveler comfort and ease. Isaiah says “God is here”! “God carries the lambs in his arms while gently leading the mother sheep”. As we continue our journey through Advent, let us ponder:

- In what ways are you troubled or in fear of? *(pause)*

- What are you looking forward to? *(pause)*

- How are you or those you love, feeling this Advent season? *(pause)*

### **Hymn:** VU 1 “O Come O Come Emmanuel” Verse 7

O come, Desire of nations, bind  
all peoples in one heart and mind;  
O bid our sad divisions cease,  
and be for us the Prince of Peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

### **Lighting of the Advent Candle:**

**Eric:** Who do you say Jesus is?

**People:** To me, Jesus is like a tree, with a strong root, giving me strength and support.

**Eric:** To me, Jesus is like a seed cared for by the loving gardener, nurturing and caring for me.

**People: We wait for Jesus, the firm foundation and careful gardener, who nurtures peace.**

*(Light second Advent candle for Peace)*

**Eric:** We wait for Jesus.

**Hymn:** VU 1 “O Come O Come Emmanuel” Verse 3

O come, O come, great God of might,  
who to your tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times once gave the law  
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

**Acknowledgement:**

**Eric:** Holy God, too often we descend into the deep valleys of this life and find ourselves stuck in their shadows. The hills and mountains around us seem to edge us in as walls in a prison. In our anxiety, it is easy to convince ourselves that there is no way out, no way forward.

**People: Forgive us when our fears tell us to hunker down and turn inwards. Remind us that from the depths, you will lift us.**

**Eric:** Merciful God, too often we find ourselves balancing in the heights, feeling as though there are no ropes or nets to catch us. The perspective seems solitary, and we feel trapped, afraid of falling.

**People: In our anxiety, it is easy to convince ourselves that there is no way down, no way forward. Forgive us when our fears tell us that any move we make will be disastrous. Remind us that you will not let us fall but will bring us to humility and safety.**

**Eric:** Gracious God, from all of the places of fear in our lives, speak comfort to us, call us to prepare our way back to you.

**People: Remind us that even in the wilderness moments of our lives, we will find the way back to you. Forgive us when we act out of anxiety, rather than faith. Forgive us when our human reactions of fear, anger, and vengeance close us off from the ways of peace that you desire for us.**

**Eric:** Open our eyes and open our hearts that the path to you might be revealed before us, guiding us in compassion and mercy to your holy and everlasting peace. Amen.

**Hymn:** VU 1 “O Come O Come Emmanuel” Verse 5

O come, O Key of David, come,  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

**Affirmation:**

**Eric:** The words and deeds of humans are just for a season, only a part of this great Creation.

**People: But the grace of God endures forever, filling all that has been, all that is, and all that is to come. In all our seasons, we are called to prepare for our God, who forgives all our sins. Thanks be to God! Amen!**

**Hymn: VU 1 “O Come O Come Emmanuel” Verse 6**

O come, O Dayspring, from on high,  
and cheer us by your drawing nigh;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

**Responsive Psalm: Psalm 85: 1 – 2, 8 – 13**

***A Prayer for Peace***

Our Lord, you have blessed your land and made all go well for Jacob's descendants.

**You have forgiven the sin and taken away the guilt of your people.**

I will listen to you, Lord God, because you promise peace to those who are faithful and no longer foolish.

**You are ready to rescue everyone who worships you, so that you will live with us in all your glory.**

Love and loyalty will come together; goodness and peace will unite.

**Loyalty will sprout from the ground; justice will look down from the sky above.**

Our Lord, you will bless us; our land will produce wonderful crops.

**Justice will march in front, making a path for you to follow.**

**Scripture: Isaiah 40: 1 - 11**

Our God has said: “Encourage my people! Give them comfort. Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce: Your slavery is past; your punishment is over. I, the Lord, made you pay double for your sins.” Someone is shouting: “Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God. Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground. Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!” Someone told me to shout, and I asked, “What should I shout?” We humans are merely grass, and we last no longer than wild flowers. At the Lord's command, flowers and grass disappear, and so do we. Flowers and grass fade away, but what our God has said will never change.

There is good news for the city of Zion. Shout it as loud as you can from the highest mountain. Don't be afraid to shout to the towns of Judah: “Your God is here!” Look! The powerful Lord God is coming to rule with his mighty arm. He brings with him what he has taken in war, and he rewards his people. The Lord cares for his nation, just as shepherds care for their flocks. He carries the lambs in his arms, while gently leading the mother sheep.

**Message: “We Wait In Peace”**

The busyness has already started. This past week has been busy with getting the Cyber Monday deals and now many of those deals have been held over to Tuesday even Wednesday. We need some time to regroup, to be apart, to recharge. For many of us that is Sunday morning at church. We may be already wondering what we will do this Christmas. We need time to find courage to take action. Our actions will be based on sharing God's message of Peace!

Isaiah is so good on encouraging the People of Israel to look to their past for the healthy traditions that reveal God's comfort and peace to the world. Isaiah encourages the People of Israel to look for more of God's peace in their future. Maybe this year more than any other Advent, we too need to be reminded that God is comfort and peace. Scriptures, including Isaiah share the stories and feelings of the experiences of our Spiritual ancestors. This year we can relate to their feelings of fear, of uncertainty, of impatience and longing for a sign of God's guiding presence. Let us this Advent, break away from the busyness of our days, and let us be invigorated by the comfort and peace of God, shared with us by the prophet Isaiah. We are after all expecting the coming of the messiah; Emmanuel – God with us.

We may be feeling more uncertainty, more impatience and more longing this year because life continues to be a journey of hills and valleys. It is hard work to travel up and down the hills and valleys. Behind every turn could be danger. So when Isaiah says, "Prepare the way of the Lord! The path will be smooth. The valleys will be lifted and the mountains leveled. Nothing will stand in our way." When you can see for a mile or two, you feel very safe, as nothing can sneak up on you. You can see the danger long before you are actually in danger. Leveling the playing field gives us great comfort.

When Isaiah was talking to the People of Israel, they were still in exile in Babylon - although they were about to head home to Jerusalem. Yet the people of Israel knew the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and their country was in shambles. What future could there possibly be in Jerusalem for these enslaved people, who have mingled with the Babylonian culture and their identity has been blurred by slavery in Babylon? Are they really God's Children – as the people of Israel? Isaiah says, "Hold fast to who you are as God's people and make use of this time in exile to prepare for what is coming". How long will they continue to prepare? No one really knows - except God. Isaiah shares a metaphor; humanity is being like grass and flowers that wither and fade, yet God's word remains. This means it really doesn't matter how long or how soon, because either way - God is forever. Don't be afraid! God's eternal words give comfort to the people of Israel regardless of where they are. Their mission is to prepare the way of God.

Do you see any similarities in how we are living today in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to the Israelites in Babylonian exile? We have no real idea how long we will have to live with the upset in our world today. We have no idea how much longer we can afford the 10 United Churches South of the 401 in Chatham Kent. Much like the Israelites

we are wondering what our future will bring. Isaiah's message to the Israelites exiled in Babylon is a relevant message for us today. It really doesn't matter how long or how soon, because either way - God is forever. Don't be afraid! God's eternal words give comfort to us today regardless of where we are. Our mission is to prepare the way of God.

We can look at peace several ways. We have our own internal peace, where we feel at peace with ourselves and the world. This may be the peace of the heart. We also have world peace, where everyone gets along with each other. That is a harder battle to overcome. In today's world, peace is usually offered by someone overlooking the situation and ensuring everyone plays right. Usually there is a financial carrot offered to help rebuild the war damage. Are we claiming peace, by holding power over someone else – whether it is the power of force or the power of money? For long term and even everlasting peace we need divine intervention.

With all the conflicts that are going around the world today, even in the area where Jesus was born, lived, worked and died – it can be difficult for us to take in the clanging, heaven splitting, road leveling, prophetic urging of the Advent scriptures. As we feel our hearts beating and our blood pressure rising, may we remember that the very Jesus who will soon be born, is also the Christ through whom God calls us into partnership. As God calls us, God strengthens us. One moment we could be utterly exhausted, and then, with one whisper from the Holy Spirit, one nudge, our hearts stir or even leap awake to the presence of the Divine.

How might we as modern day Christians prepare the way of God? We understand God's nature to be comfort and peace. Isaiah tells us to be working towards God's mission - which is to be ready. Be prepared. It's going to happen! God will provide. Hang in there – we are in this together. It does not matter how long it takes – God's word is eternal.

Near the end of today's story, Isaiah shares a comforting vision of God when we are told, "God will lovingly look after us just as a shepherd gathers the flock together, cradling the lambs and carrying them to safety and rest." Not only is God's word eternal – God's peace is eternal.

On this Sunday of Advent, the scriptures are similar words used by John the Baptist to announce Jesus' ministry coming to life. Advent reminds us that God has a plan. God is preparing to give birth. God's plan is almost ready to be born among us. "We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God".

**Reflection Hymn: VU 684 “Make Me a Channel...”**

Make me a channel of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me bring your love;  
where there is injury, your healing power,  
and where there's doubt, true faith in you:

Make me a channel of your peace:  
where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;  
where there is darkness, only light;  
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

O Spirit, grant that I may never seek  
so much to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
in giving to all that we receive,  
and in dying that we're born to eternal life. \*\*

**Invitation to Share Our Gifts:**

Eric: As we wait in Peace - let us give in love.

**Offertory: VU 541 “Praise God From Whom...”**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

**Offertory Prayer:**

**We offer our gifts, both tangible and spiritual, to level the ground and make smooth the way ahead. We prepare, not just for our individual relationships with God, but for the wider community to find comfort and nurture. We offer ourselves, our minds, and our hearts to reveal the presence of God in our midst. May the glory of God be revealed to us and in us. Amen.**

**Hymn: VU 400 “Lord, Listen To Your Children Praying”**

Lord, listen to your children praying,  
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;  
Lord, listen to your children praying,  
send us love, send us power, send us grace! \*\*

**Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer:**

**Closing Hymn: VU 676 “God Make Us Servants...”**

God, make us servants of your peace:  
where there is hate, may we sow love;  
where there is hurt, may we forgive;  
where there is strife, may we make one.

Where all is doubt, may we sow faith;  
where all is gloom, may we sow hope;  
where all is night, may we sow light;  
where all is tears, may we sow joy.

Jesus, our Lord, may we not seek  
to be consoled, but to console,  
nor look to understanding hearts,  
but look for hearts to understand.

May we not look for love's return,  
but seek to love unselfishly.  
For in our giving we receive,  
and in forgiving are forgiven.

Dying, we live and are reborn  
through death's dark night to endless day;  
God, make us servants of your peace  
to wake at last in heaven's light. \*\*

**Benediction:**

**Eric:** Peace be with you. Comfort be with you. Go out into the world revealing God's glory to all you meet, now and forever more.

**Hope Is a Star:**

- 2 Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,  
giving a promise of safety and worth.  
When God is a child there's joy in our song.  
The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,  
and none shall be afraid.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

**Postlude:** – Christie Coatsworth

**Prayers:** - Please include these people in your prayers this week. It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as “In the Spirit We Are One”.

**Carol**

**Susan**

**Barb  
Margie  
Jerry  
Erin**

**Larry  
Ken  
Natalie  
Joan  
Rick**

**David**

**Dave  
Elizabeth  
Mike and Janice  
Barb  
Rick**

**Don  
Audrey  
Harry/Ruth  
Joyce  
Jordan Family  
Gilbeault Family**