

South Buxton and Talbot Street Pastoral Charges

Second Sunday of Advent – December 6th, 2020

Prelude: “Wondrous Love” – Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Good morning!

This past Tuesday was “Giving Tuesday”, and many Charities push for year end donations – much like our churches do. Kenesserie Camp posted on their Facebook Page that someone had agreed to match the first \$15,000 in donations to Kenesserie Camp 1 to 1 basis. The South Buxton Pastoral Charge thought we could be involved, and are offering another 1 to 1 match from our church donors to Kenesserie Camp (approved by the Official Board) up to \$1,000.

So today until next Sunday December 13th, if you wish to donate to Kenesserie Camp and for it to be matched by South Buxton Pastoral Charge (and then matched again by an anonymous donor - therefore each dollar equals a \$4 donation to Kenesserie Camp), please donate online at southbuxton.ca (put “Kenesserie Camp” in the memo), or write a cheque to South Buxton Pastoral Charge (memo; “Kenesserie Camp”) and mail to:

SBPC - George Darnley
106 Blake Street
P.O. Box 266
Merlin ON N0P 1W0

To keep things simple, you will be receipted by the South Buxton Pastoral Charge. Talbot Street is also involved as they contribute to the South Buxton Pastoral Charge yearly budget. Thank you for your support to our local United Church Camp!

Just a reminder for Talbot Street; you are welcome to donate to the Wheatley Community Chest, the Wheatley Food Bank and / or the Potato Project (which supplies potatoes to the Community Chest). Please make cheques payable to “Talbot Street United Church” (writing in the memo which projects you wish to support), and give or mail to Don Jackson by Next Sunday, December 13th.

Thank you for your gifts to St. Luke’s for the Chatham Kent Children’s Services. We sent a total of \$880 to help with Christmas for their clients.

The book, “Memories of Merlin” – which is a collection of stories from the village of Merlin, is in its second print. It is available for order from the Merlin Friendship Club. Call George Darnley or Sue Drew to order your copy. Cost is \$25 each.

Christmas Eve is only three weeks away, and the planning is started and we are collecting pictures you might have of past Christmas Eves. A suggestion was made to showcase the new

babies we are expecting or who have arrived this year. Please send me those pictures and any info you might have of who, what and when.

We have decorated the trees east of St. Andrew's United Church with lights.

Continue to keep in touch with others and to share our websites; at southbuxton.ca, and 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 1

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lowly exile here
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Lighting of the Advent Candle:

Video: "Jesus, Our Caregiver"

Eric: Who do you say Jesus is?

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

Eric: To me, a seed, Jesus is like a 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 4

4 O come, O Rod of Jesse's stem,
from every foe deliver them
that trust your mighty power to save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Acknowledgement:

Annette: *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.

Annette: *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.

Affirmation:

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

Eric: 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.

People: Thanks be to God! Amen!

Scripture: Isaiah 40: 1 - 11 *(in Story Form)* by Don & Nancy Jackson

Long, long ago many of the people of Israel had to live in a country not their own. Soldiers had taken them to Babylon and forced them to work for the king. For many, many years, the people were broken-hearted and wept tears of sorrow.

Just as everyone began to think that they would have to live in Babylon forever, someone came along who gave the people hope. It was the prophet, Isaiah. Isaiah had a special message from God – a message of comfort and hope.

“Listen, people. I have comforting words for you. We have God’s love. Your hard times are over. You have been punished enough.” And the people said...”That’s really good news”.

“We will leave Babylon and return to our homeland – to the heart and centre of our faith.”

And the people said... “That’s really good news”.

“We must make ready. God will help us. The pathway is so sure that it seems the valleys will be lifted up and the mountains levelled. Nothing will stand in our way.” And the people said... “That’s really good news”.

“God will lovingly look after us just as a shepherd gathers the flock together, cradling the lambs and carrying them to safety and rest.” And the people said... “That’s really good news”.

The people looked at each other. How comforting these words felt! God will always be with us.

And altogether the people said... “That’s really good news”.

How wonderful to be reminded of God’s everlasting, comforting love!

Message: “We Wait In Peace”

The busyness has already started. Last week when we were shopping for Christmas Lights, we saw line up after line up in front of many stores with people waiting to get inside to make their purchases. We need some time to ourselves. We need time to figure out what we will do this Christmas. We need time to find courage that will allow us to move forward in action this Christmas. 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 dull day to day of COVID restrictions and the hard work of staying apart, 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 it is hard work not to feel defeated from the COVID restrictions and the need to stay apart. For the Israelites 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 2020 to the Israelites in Babylonian exile? We have no real idea how long we will have to live in our current COVID exile. We have no idea when we will be able to return to our temple – our church - to worship in community. 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.

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. We hear once again, “We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God”.

Hymn: VU 18 “There’s A Voice In The Wilderness”

- 1 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,
a call from the ways untrod:
prepare in the desert a highway,
a highway for our God!
The valleys shall be exalted,
the lofty hills brought low;
make straight all the crooked places
where God, our God, may go!
- 2 O Zion, that bringest good tidings,
get thee up to the heights and sing!
Proclaim to a desolate people
the coming of their King.
Like the flowers of the field they perish,
like grass our works decay;
the power and pomp of nations
shall pass, like a dream, away.
- 3 But the word of our God endureth,
whose arm is ever strong;
God stands in the midst of nations,
and soon will right the wrong.
God shall feed the flock like a shepherd,
the lambs so gently hold;
to pastures of peace will lead them,
and bring them safe to fold.
- 4 There's a voice in the wilderness crying,
a call from the ways untrod:
prepare in the desert a highway,
a highway for our God!
The valleys shall be exalted,
the lofty hills brought low;
make straight all the crooked places
where God, our God, may go!

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:

Eric: Merciful God, speak comfort to us.

People: **We are waiting... for situations to change.**

Eric: For diagnoses.

People: **For treatments to work.**

Eric: For the start of a new life.

People: **For the end of suffering.**

Eric: For peace to come into this world.

People: **We are waiting for the one who cries in the wilderness.**

Eric: We are waiting for the Messiah – for God-with-us to enter this world.

People: **Sometimes it seems the waiting will never end.**

Eric: Sometimes it seems that we are stuck in this season of our lives:

People: **that the mountains are too high,**

Eric: the valleys too low,

People: **the road too rough and winding.**

Eric: We fear that we cannot move forward.

People: **Merciful God, speak comfort to us. Not in the red and green and of shop windows and clichéd Christmas clothing,**

Eric: but in the blues and purples of Advent waiting.

People: **In the colours that shift the nighttime of our souls to reveal a brilliant dawn.**

Eric: Speak tenderly to us, in our fear and our pain, remind us that you stay with us no matter how much we might turn away.

People: **Call us not merely to wait, but to prepare for the ways that you will enter anew into our lives.**

Eric: Help us to redefine our situations;

People: **to see the smooth, level path into your presence, rather than the peaks and valleys of our human lives.**

Eric: Merciful God, speak comfort to us.

People: **For you are here: Our God, our shepherd.**

Eric: You are here, holding righteousness and peace, steadfast love and faithfulness.

People: You are here, and from this time of waiting and preparation,

Eric: your glory shall be revealed, even to mere mortals.

People: You are here, and even we shall know peace, through your nurture and care.

Eric: Merciful God, speak comfort to us.

People: We are waiting and preparing for you.

Eric: As we share Jesus' prayer:

*Our Father, Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven,
Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

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: VU 7 "Hope is a Star" (Verse 2)

- 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: "Happy Xmas" – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.

We have offered prayer for these people each Sunday morning just before the Zoom Service.
It was suggested to share these names with the total group – as "In the Spirit We Are One".

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|--------------|---|----------|---|
| In hospital: | Cleata Ken | Passing: | Reverend David Fuller |
| Cancer: | Wayne Karen Ian Jasmine Gary Tom | Special: | Doug June Melonie Becky Bruce |