



The 1st Sunday of Advent – Being Present with Hope

Prelude

Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella

Gathering—Advent can be filled with worry about finding the perfect Christmas gifts. Deep down we want people in our lives to know they are special and that we love them. But sometimes we overlook the greatest gift of all... our very presence. The 19th century poet, Christina Rossetti, wrote “In the Bleak Midwinter” that became a popular Christmas carol. Modern composer, Mark Hayes, set the last verse of that poem to music as our theme song for our Advent/Christmas series. It reminds us that even if we are feeling poor — in resources, in body or spirit — we can simply be a gift of presence, we can give our hearts.

Advent Wreath

Becky, Kelly, and Missy

Chorus:

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.*

*Reader 1: We unwrap a present on this first Sunday of Advent
with great anticipation for the gift that God will reveal.*

Let us open our hearts as we open the gift!

Reader 2: The promise of Hope is the Divine Gift we receive.

So, what will we do with it?

*Reader 1: The gift of hope is an essential survival tool
because it reminds us that the hard times do not have the last word.*

Hope is not simply a wish.

Hope calls us into action based on a belief that things can be different.

We can work to bring about the better world that we hope for.

We light this Candle of Hope as a sign that we will be

Present with Hope in the world.

Reader 1: As we welcome the light, join us in singing our Advent chorus:

Chorus:

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.*

Prayer of Presence

Reader 2: Let us pray...
Holy Living Light of God,
you are our Hopeful Presence.
Let this hope grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Hope to others.
Unwrap and open our hearts.
May it be so.
Amen.

Gathering Song

Come, Thou Long-Expected, Jesus, 153

A Time of Prayer— In our time of prayers during this Advent and Christmas season, we will take the opportunity to practice being fully present in the moment. Mindfulness has deep roots in our Judeo-Christian tradition. The scriptures say “be still and know that I am God” and, as we will hear in our scripture reading, Jesus speaks often about “staying awake” to what God is up to. Prayer is an intentional way to stay awake and alert to the presence of God among us. Let us pray: In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on those who are in distress. We pray this week for... In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on thanksgiving and joy. We give thanks this week for... In this prayerful, present moment we ask you, Christ Jesus, the Greatest Gift of All, to help us savor our journey toward the celebration of Christmas. Help us recognize and create moments of sweet presence rather than filling the voids with the things that do not last. Help us to stop, notice what we are experiencing, and accept it with open hearts and

minds. In doing this, we allow you to meet us in the right here, right now, right where we are...

The Lord's Prayer (unison)—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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

We Hear God's Word—*Mark 13:24-37 (NRSV)*

Greg Miller

24 'But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. ²⁷Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Meditation

Being Present with Hope

Hymn

Angels from the Realms of Glory, 189

We Gather at the Table

Set Your Place at the Table—Whatever you have on hand to celebrate

communion will work just fine, because this ancient ritual is not about what we use for this meal or where we partake of it. Instead, it is about the act of remembrance. So, gather around the table, prepare your place, and remember that Christ is in our midst.

Our Invitation— We are all invited to this table of Jesus. This is one of the ways that we acknowledge the continual gift of his presence with us. We remember the rituals of his Last Supper with his disciples in which he offered a poignant invitation for all of his followers to be together at meals, break bread and lift cups, and know that we are never alone. This is the invitation now. The gift of presence — with each other and with Christ. This is the mystical union that binds us to Christ, present in this moment, and to all who have ever gathered at this table... no matter where, or when.

A Prayer for Transformation— There are times when we have cut ourselves off from this gift of presence. We distance ourselves from the hope, peace, joy, love, and light that is ours as heirs in the family of God. It seems too wonderful a gift. And yet the Shepherd comes to find us, leading us gently back into safety, back into care, back into relationship. In this moment, we take a deep breath [*pause to do so*], we feel our bodies relax into the right here, and right now, and we acknowledge those regrets that are best let go....Amen.

Assurance of Grace— Know this... there are gifts with your name on them called “Grace,” called “Forgiveness,” called “Assurance.” They are yours whenever you accept and open them. They are already and always there for you... you do not have to “be good enough” to get them. They are there because that is the nature of our loving God, God-with-us, Emmanuel. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

The Words of Institution— On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: “Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, we remember...we offer ourselves...we proclaim God's love...

Blessing Our Meal— Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, so that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his love. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Amen.

We Share the Bread and the Cup – As you eat the bread, remember, “This is the body of Christ broken for you.” Take and eat. As you drink the cup, remember, “This is the blood of Christ shed for you and the forgiveness of sins.” Take and drink.

We Give Thanks—Almighty God, we give you thanks for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ's body and blood that we may faithfully proclaim the good news of your love and that your universal church may be a rainbow of hope in an uncertain world; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.`

We Respond to God's Word with Our Giving

Invitation—Let us bring forth our gifts this day—gifts of our resources, our time, our talent, our very lives—that through this ministry to which Christ has called us God's presence in this world might be made known.

December Benevolence—The Christmas Fund

Doxology

We Give Thanks—God of hope, bless these gifts that we bring before you this day. Use these gifts that your hope might be made known in this world through this ministry to which you have called us. Help us to be present in our community as we live out the mission you have given us. With gratitude we lift up these gifts to you. Amen.

Hymn

Go, Tell It on the Mountain, 218

Benediction—“The good news of Jesus Christ is that God is with us,
no matter what, no matter where, no matter when.
There is no place you can go where God is not,
no time of the day when God is off the clock.
This is the teaching of the Incarnation, God with us, Emmanuel.”
[adapted from Amy Oden, Right Here, Right Now]

So now go and be truly present
so you may be a gift of presence for others.
That’s all that is expected —
that the gift that is YOU
is the best gift you can give.

In the name of the Holy Presence,
the Divine Gift,
and the Spirit of Hope that is just waiting for us
to unwrap abundant life.

Amen.

Postlude

Hail to the Brightness