

Clairmont United Church
First Sunday of Advent – Hope
November 27, 2011

*We welcome you to our community of caring
where we celebrate the Christian story.*

We Gather to Praise God

Congregational Singing

Greeting

God be with you. **And also with you.**

Celebrations and Concerns

We share our joys, our prayer requests and our activities.

Call to Worship

This is the season of Advent.

A time for getting ready!

Just as we would prepare for a splendid feast.

Just as we would prepare for a little child joining our family.

Just as we would prepare to give or receive a most precious gift.

So let us prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Jesus!

Let us praise God for the anticipation of wonderful things to come.

Let us praise god together for this day!

*Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel verses 1, 2, 3, 7 VU 1

Lighting of the Advent Candles

(Seasons of the Spirit Seasons FUSION Advent Christmas Epiphany 2011-2012)

*Advent Hymn A Candle is Burning verse 1 VU 6
Children leave for class following this hymn

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Readings and Reflections

Prayer of Approach and Confession

**O God, we look forward to Christmas Day
and think of your coming to us as a baby,
laid in a manger, so many years ago.
Help us, also, to be alive to your coming at any moment,
in the pleading eyes of a child,
in the outstretched hand of one in need,
in the voice of an excited fool.
We confess that much of the time,
we sit back, tuned out to your presence,
hoping that the world's problems will go away
or that someone else will take care of them.
Forgive us, we pray,
and fire us up with the enthusiasm of your creative Spirit.
..... Silent reflection Amen.**

Words of Assurance

Our God is a loving and forgiving God who knows our weaknesses and our strengths.
Be assured that God is always ready to forgive us and strengthen us.
With God's understanding and forgiveness comes the challenge: to live life anew, led by the Spirit in all that we do. **Amen.**
(Whole People of God online Nov. 27, 2011 Wood Lake Publishing)

Prayer for Illumination

*Psalm 90 O God, Our Help in Ages Past VU 806

Hebrew Scripture Reading Isaiah 63:7 - 64:12

On the basis of God's gracious activity in the past, the community appeals to God for mercy and help in its present miserable circumstances.

Gospel Reading Mark 13:24-37

Active Waiting

Reflection What Are We Waiting For?

Affirmation of Hope

VU 656

*Hymn It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

VU 44

Our Response to God's Word

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

(sung VU 959)

Minute for Mission

Invitation to Offering

*Offertory Hymn In the Bleak Midwinter Verse 4

VU 55

What can I give him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb,

If I were a wise man, I would do my part,

Yet what I can I give him – give my heart.

Prayer of Dedication

Ever-compassionate God, you lavish us with limitless blessings.

**We praise you that these gifts will be transformed into seed,
hope, and caring outreach.**

Receive our commitment and our faith.

This we pray, in the name of the giving Christ. Amen.

(Gathering A/C/E 2011/2012 Laura Turnbull)

*Hymn May the God of Hope Go With Us

VU 424

*Commissioning and Benediction

Congregational Response Go Now in Peace

Go now in peace, go now in peace.

May the love of God surround you everywhere,

Everywhere you may go.

(What are we waiting for?

Whole People of God online Nov. 27, 2011 Wood Lake Publishing)

Prayer for the Week

In the changing seasons of life

we acknowledge your presence in our lives and in our space,

Creator God.

Still, Holy One, we wait longingly for the time

when we live in unity with your will for the world. Amen.

Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy 2011 (B)
Seasons of the Spirit Seasons FUSION Advent-Christmas-Epiphany 2011-2012

First Sunday in Advent November 27, 2011

Leader:

Advent is a season of waiting;
waiting for the hope, peace, joy and love of God
to break into our lives anew through the story of the birth of Jesus,
and through acts of hope, peace, joy and love.
Advent is a season of lighting candles;
lighting candles for the hope, peace, joy and love for which we wait.
Today we light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Voice 1:

We wait
not because we do not know the story of Jesus,
and not because Jesus is not already and always here.
We wait
because to wait is to expect something more.
To wait
is to expect that the story might enter our hearts and our world in new ways,
to bring the change for which we long.

Light first Advent candle

Voice 2:

As we light the candle of hope,
we remember the stories of God with us,
when life has been hard, and not what we expected.
We can trust that God is with us,
as we wait for hope to be born, anew, in us.

Advent Hymn: A Candle is Burning VU 6

Sing verse one

Second Sunday in Advent December 4, 2011

Leader:

Advent is a season of waiting;
 waiting for the hope, peace, joy and love of God
 to break into our lives anew through the story of the birth of Jesus,
 and through acts of hope, peace, joy and love.
 Advent is a season of lighting candles;
 lighting candles for the hope, peace, joy and love for which we wait.
 Today we light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Voice 1:

We wait
 not because we do not know the story of Jesus,
 and not because Jesus is not already and always here.
 We wait
 because to wait is to expect something more.
 To wait
 is to expect that the story might enter our hearts and our world in new ways,
 to bring the change for which we long.

Light two Advent candles

Voice 2:

As we light the candle of peace,
 we remember the stories of times God has been our comfort,
 when God has been our comfort,
 when God has heard our cries for justice, for certainty, for peace,
 and God has led us home;
 and we know that we can trust that God is leading us forward,
 as we wait for peace to be born, anew, in us.

Advent Hymn: A Candle is Burning VU 6
 Sing verses one and two

Third Sunday in Advent December 11, 2011

Leader:

Advent is a season of waiting;
 waiting for the hope, peace, joy and love of God
 to break into our lives anew through the story of the birth of Jesus,
 and through acts of hope, peace, joy and love.
 Advent is a season of lighting candles;
 lighting candles for the hope, peace, joy and love for which we wait.
 Today we light the second candle, the candle of peace.

Voice 1:

We wait
 not because we do not know the story of Jesus,
 and not because Jesus is not already and always here.
 We wait
 because to wait is to expect something more.
 To wait
 is to expect that the story might enter our hearts and our world in new ways,
 to bring the change for which we long.

Light three Advent candles

Voice 2:

As we light the candle of joy
 we remember the stories of God's loyalty to all creation.
 We give thanks for the messengers – the apostles, prophets, artists, sages, faithful ones –
 present in every age, who brings us the good news of God's restoring love;
 and we shout with joy,
 trusting that God is with us and before us,
 and that joy will be born anew in us.

Advent Hymn: A Candle is Burning VU 6
 Sing verses one, two and three

Fourth Sunday in Advent December 18, 2011

Leader:

Advent is a season of waiting;
 waiting for the hope, peace, joy and love of God
 to break into our lives anew through the story of the birth of Jesus,
 and through acts of hope, peace, joy and love.
 Advent is a season of lighting candles;
 lighting candles for the hope, peace, joy and love for which we wait.
 Today we light the second candle, the candle of peace.

Voice 1:

We wait
 not because we do not know the story of Jesus,
 and not because Jesus is not already and always here.
 We wait
 because to wait is to expect something more.
 To wait
 is to expect that the story might enter our hearts and our world in new ways,
 to bring the change for which we long.

Light four Advent candles

Voice 2:

As we light the candle of love
 we remember the stories of God's faithfulness and steadfast love
 which surrounds us and will not be contained.
 We trust that God is with us always.
 As love bursts forth from all God's people, love is born again and again in all creation.

Advent Hymn: A Candle is Burning VU 6
 Sing verses one, two, three and four

Christmas Eve

Voice 1:

We wait

not because we do not know the story of Jesus,
and not because Jesus is not already and always here.

We wait

because to wait is to expect something more.

To wait

is to expect that the story might enter our hearts and our world in new ways,
to bring the change for which we long.

Light all four Advent candles

Voice 2:

In the stillness of this night,

we sense the first stirrings of Christmas joy and know the wait is almost over.

This is often a season filled with flashing colours and boisterous joy.

But now is a time for stillness.

Now is a time to catch our breath; to settle in and settle down and reflect on the beauty of
this night.

Voice 3:

We are aware of the gentle turning of the Earth;
the balance and harmony of creation.

Voice 1:

May Love find a welcome here.

Voice 2:

We hear stories of acts of love among us
and wait patiently for more promises to be fulfilled.

Voice 1:

May Love find a welcome here.

Voice 3:

We give thanks for this community that works side-by-side for love's restoration.

Voice 1:

May Love find a welcome here.

Next page

Voice 2:

Love is coming to life
and appears in acts of kindness, voices for peace, and movements for justice.
These are small, twinkling signs that love is real.

Voice 3:

When we are still and pay attention,
we see the gentle revolution and know,
without a doubt, that Love is welcome here.

The Christ candle is lit.

Thanks be to God for the gift of Emmanuel!

What are we waiting for?

Materials Needed: Shakespearean Fool's costume (like Joker on a deck of cards).

Note:

This theme conversation was originally designed to be part of an intergenerational worship service. It was intended to be used at a different time than is usual, right after the opening hymn, although it can be adapted for use on its own at the regular time. (e.g. Person's first speech would be "...I'm waiting to hear the Theme Conversation. It is my favorite part of the worship.")

After the opening hymn, the worship leaders take their seats.

Allow 30 seconds to a minute of complete silence.

Plant a few people in the congregation to then make loud whispering comments such as, "What's going on?", "What are they waiting for?" and "Somebody should be doing something."

Then have a person enter the church dressed as a Shakespearean Fool/Jester, who moves about, saying:

Fool: **Hey, everybody!**
Something very exciting is going to happen soon!
Stay alert!
You never know when or where it could happen.
It could be here, or here, or there.
But we must be ready!

(One of the planted persons engages the Fool/Jester in conversation:)

Person: *(from near the front of the church)*
Be ready for what? I'm just waiting for this service to get going.

Fool: **Yes, it's hard to wait sometimes.**
You waited just 1 minute, but some people waited hundreds of years for this news.
I promise you, something wonderful will happen soon,
something really worth waiting for!

Person: **Well, tell us then.**
We haven't got all day.

Fool: **This is it:**
a baby will be born soon!

Person: **That's it?**
Come on! Babies are born every day.
What's so exciting about that?

Fool: **Every baby who's born is exciting.**
But this one is special.
This one will be the Savior of the world!

Person: **Oh, you mean Jesus. We all know that.**
And we know when that's happening—on Christmas Day.
I thought you had something new to tell us.

Fool: **Jesus being born is always new.**
He is always looking to be born in our hearts and in our lives.
And now is the time to get ready.
Now is the time to make room for hope, peace, joy, and love to be born in our lives.

Person: **I get it. This is the first Sunday in Advent.**
You mean we're supposed to start getting ready for Christmas now?

Fool: **You got it!**

Person: **That's nothing new!**
The stores have been telling us to get ready for a while now.
The stores were putting up Christmas decorations before Hallowe'en this year!

Fool: **But this is a different kind of getting ready.**
It's not about things.
It's about feelings and thoughts deep inside us.
This first Sunday of Advent is a time for hope
—hope that the peace and joy and love that each person in the world longs for,
will truly happen.

Person: **Do you mean it could happen for me?**
For all of us?

Fool: **Absolutely!**
Christ's coming is not just something from the past that we celebrate.
It's something we look forward to
—the coming of God's reign of love in all its fullness.

Person: **Wow, that is exciting.**
We'd better start getting ready!
(Turns to the congregation)
Are we ready to begin this Advent journey toward Christmas?
(Pause, looking out at congregation.)

Fool: **I think you've got it!**
(The Fool/Jester is now beside the person.)
All right! Gimme five!

Person: **Actually, gimme four, since there are four Sundays in Advent.**

Fool: **All right, again. Gimme four!**
(The two do a "high-four" and sit down together.)

**Liturgy and Reflection
Advent 1 Year B
November 27, 2011**

Prayer for Illumination

Open these age-old words of scripture to us, O God.

Open to us so they can be new and fresh.

Open them to us so your call can be heard again in this time and place.

Give us what we need so that we too can answer in grace and in truth. Amen.

Gathering A/C/E 2011/2012 Beth Johnston

Invitation to Offering

God is not a vague concept, common sense, or a sentimental attachment.

God is not Santa Claus without the red costume, with angels instead of reindeer.

Rather, God is

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing,

I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me”. (Matt. 25:35–36)

Our gifts to the Mission and Service Fund, our money, time and talents, and our gifts given through PAR, meet God face to face. Let us bring forward our gifts now.

Commissioning and Benediction

And now into a waiting world we go,

waiting for the birth of the Christ Child who will change the world,

waiting for the Spirit that is Christmas to descend,

finding in the midst of all the frantic activity a quiet place to pray,

hoping for the peace the season promises,

and knowing that, in spite of all evidence to the contrary,

God is in charge and comes to us in love,

to hold us and keep us all our days.

Gathering A/C/E 2011/2012 Bob Root

Or Simply:

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Romans 15:13

The season of Advent invites us to acknowledge times of deep belief, and also times of great doubt.

Advent calls us to remember the times when we have experienced God's presence most clearly, and when we have felt deserted by God.

It reminds us that our relationship with the One who creates is ongoing and we are not alone.

Isaiah 63:7 - 64:12

Often we think of Advent as a time of patient, hopeful waiting for the joyous event of Christmas.

At that time, God comes to us as a little child.

We wait, then God comes.

All is right with the world.

But all is not well with our world, nor was all well with the world in which this passage from the book of Isaiah was written.

On this first Sunday of Advent our Hebrew scripture reading is a lament.

A lament is a prayer that cries out to God from the midst of desperate grief, pain, or a circumstance that seems out of control.

A lament vocalizes the hurt to God with the conviction, the faith, that God can and will bring relief.

A lament is not just the venting of frustration and pain; it is a profound statement of faith in God from the midst of utter human hopelessness.

The person trusts God with his pain, believing that God cares about the condition, and will somehow bring relief.

This reading is vivid in both images and feelings.

This is a no-holds-barred call to God.

This passage likely refers to the Jewish exiles who have returned to Jerusalem, expecting life to improve for them.

But things did not improve.

Problems multiplied, ugliness and evil continued to exist.

Some of the people have turned once more to the worship of idols, as though they have no knowledge of the one true God.

They are discouraged,

and filled with a deep longing to be reunited with God in an intimate way.

The writer implores God to take responsibility as Creator and Potter and mold the people into the people of God.

Consider reading from The Message (Eugene H. Peterson)

Mark 13:24-37

The community to which the gospel of Mark was written were also longing for a better world.

This morning's reading is taken from

Jesus' final talk with his followers before his arrest and execution.

It assumes the disciples' deep feeling of loss in Jesus' absence.

This passage was written during a time of great violence and destruction.

The Roman Empire was determined to put down the Jewish rebellion for once and for all.

Civil war erupted among the Jews.

Jewish Christians argued among themselves.

Christians were betrayed by their own family members.

The Temple was destroyed.

The people longed for peace in their hearts and in their country.

The followers of Jesus are summoned to faithful vigilance, to active waiting, to expectant living.

Consider reading from The New Revised Standard Version

Reflection: What are we waiting for?

The first snowfall of the year found me late to pick up granddaughter Mira for her dance class. Although I had prepared my car for winter by having the snow tires put on, and finding the snow brush, I had not prepared myself for the extra time it takes to clear the snow off the car, and to drive more slowly from one end of town to the other. So we really did not have time to play in the first snowfall before going to the dance studio.

Feeling like a Grinch, I promised Mira that we would catch snowflakes on our tongues after her class. Despite being only three, Mira is learning to be good at waiting, and obediently climbed into the car, enjoyed her lesson, and then we happily played in the snow. Thank you for waiting to play with me, Mira!

Advent is about preparing, and waiting. It is a difficult time in which to be part of church, because we are out of step with the secular world, and because what we are doing and saying do not always match up with one another. The secular world has been advertising for Christmas since before Hallowe'en, while the church wants to talk about Advent. This morning's heavy and difficult scriptures stand in opposition to the Festival of Trees and to Downtown Vegas night shopping.

The minister preaches about preparing and waiting, but wants the choir to begin practicing special music for Christmas Eve, and the Sunday School teachers and children to start preparing their pageant. Said minister (or worship leader) will have begun their preparations for special services some time before giving the information to the choir and teachers. Said minister may even have begun to panic, along with those already working extra hours in retail, about finding time to do their own shopping, baking and decorating. I have only sent Christmas cards once in 8 years of ministry. And trying to send cards at Easter doesn't work either!

Then there are those who come to this busy crazy time of year with grief in their hearts. Death of a family member, serious health problems, loss of a relationship, a sudden move, loss of a beloved pet, even looking at the daily world news – can all lead to depression and the feeling of being out of step with the rest of the world. This can be especially difficult in the midst of the apparent happiness of the rest of the world that is preparing for a great party.

Perhaps that is a part of why Advent is important. Many of us need permission to feel whatever we are feeling at this time of year. But really, not every one can be happy all the time. Human beings are meant to feel both pain and joy; we are created both to laugh and to cry.

Author and theologian C. S. Lewis rightly said, “The Christian faith is a thing of unspeakable joy. But it does not begin with joy, but rather in despair. And it is no good trying to reach the joy without first going through the despair.”

Did you know that half of the 150 psalms are prayers and songs written out of profound distress? They were prayed in sickness and adversity, betrayal and abandonment, sin and guilt, persecution and oppression. The writers give details about their deep pain and suffering, but they also express the petitioner’s confidence and trust in God’s power and willingness to help. As a Christian, even in the darkest times, I too trust that God is present, although sometimes seemingly silent and unseen.

When God seems to be silent and absent, that is when we need to lament. We also need to hope. Everyone has the capacity for hope. Hope is looking forward with both confidence and doubt to something good. Hope is anticipating that something we want to happen can indeed happen, even when it seems unlikely. Even if others disagree about the future we are hoping for, it can still happen. Hoping is expecting that the future can somehow be better, no matter what our present condition is.

Hoping affects the present, too. We can still help create a tomorrow that we’re prepared to be a part of, even if that tomorrow looks different than we thought it would. We can still find meaning in what our days hold, even if it takes us a while to see our situation in a new light.

Hoping is not wishing something will happen - “I wish that I had a million dollars” – when you know that it is unlikely that will actually come to pass.

Hoping is active; hope requires personal involvement, and takes effort.

Hoping is not the same as coping. Coping means adapting, doing what one can to get by; concentrating on fixing problems and finding solutions. One can cope but not believe the future will be any better.

Hoping, however, remains open to all the possibilities, including the possibility that things may turn out differently than imagined and still be okay. Hoping involves believing, feeling, doing, and it includes every part of us – our mind, body, heart and soul.

Sometimes hoping means active waiting – like we do before Christmas.

I can safely predict, based on past experience, that sometime in the week before Christmas one or both of my younger sons will call home asking for suggestions about someone's gift. Often their last minute shopping delays their trip home by a day or more. So this year I suggested they shop early in order to avoid this occurrence. Neither of them was willing to do so. When questioned, David said that to shop before the second week of December was to put an emphasis into the future, whereas he wanted to be free to celebrate other events as they came up.

David is right, we can get so focused on making Christmas Day perfect that we miss the delights of the whole season. One might feel compelled, for example, to stay home and clean house rather than go to a concert, thereby missing the opportunity to be still and receive the gift of music. I have learned, although I often forget, that the things that are truly important will somehow get done, but I am the only one that can care for my spirit.

Advent is about waiting to celebrate the birth of the Christ child in a humble manger once again. Advent is about preparing ourselves – mind, body, heart and soul – for that celebration. And Advent is about being awake, alert to the presence of Jesus the Christ in our homes, our places of work, our places of play, in the shopping centres, and on the streets of our communities.

Advent is about taking time to catch snowflakes on our tongues! Thanks be to God!

Prayers of the People

God of hope, we come before you this morning aware that as Christians we are often out of step with those around us.

Guide us, we pray, in this time of Advent waiting, into times of still listening, that we may not let the sounds of ho-ho-hos and cash registers drown out your voice.

Guide us, we pray, in this time of Advent preparation, into generous giving and living to and with those whose needs are greater than ours.

Guide us, we pray, in this time of Advent feelings, to be the voices of encouragement and hope for those who need to know your love.

Guide us to be patient with the little ones, to discern what is just and kind and loving, and to be intentional about taking Sabbath time for our own spirit's renewal.

Compassionate God, we hold before you the names and places that we know are longing for your peace, your love

(Individual needs are named at this time)

And in the silence, hear the longings of our hearts ... *(silent prayer)*

Advent God, in the quiet we listen for your word to us this morning ...

(silent prayer)

We pray in trust, in confidence, and in hope.

And we pray together, singing ... *(Lord's Prayer VU 959 – or as is your custom)*

Amen.