

Prayers and Readings for Private Use

Sunday 6 December 2020 – Second Sunday in Advent

By using this sheet at home, you are joining other local Christians in the worship of God and sharing in our common prayer at a time of national need. You may like to light a candle as you pray.

“Stand up and raise your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near”.

Luke 21.28

Approaching God

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A voice cries out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’
So let us listen, and turn to the Lord in
penitence and faith. *cf John 1.23*

Turn to us again, O God our saviour,
and let your anger cease from us:
Lord, have mercy.

Show us your compassion, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation:
Christ, have mercy.

Your salvation is near for those that fear you,
that glory may dwell in our land:
Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God,
who sent his Son into the world to save sinners,
bring us his pardon and peace, now and forever.
Amen.

Almighty God,
purify our hearts and minds,
that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as
judge and saviour
we may be ready to receive him,
who is our Lord and our God.
Amen

Listening for God: Isaiah 40 vv 1-11

The prophet speaks of God’s comfort

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,

that she has received from the Lord’s hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our
God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,

and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

A voice says, “Cry out!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain,

O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,

“Here is your God!”

See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Thought for the Day

The prophet speaks to his people when they are in exile, in mourning, and close to despair. He speaks words of comfort, but what is their source and how reliable are they? The comfort that the prophet announces is rooted in the nature of God and in his relationship to his people.

He reminds his hearers of a number of truths: they still have a place in God's heart, and God is intent on restoring them. They are still "my people" – God has not abandoned them in their distress. They have been forgiven – God intends to restore their relationship with him. God is going to create a way through the wilderness, and will tend, gather, carry and lead his people like a shepherd caring for his flock (v.11). God can be trusted to act on his word, for whilst human lives pass in the way that grass withers and flowers fade, the word of the Lord stands forever.

This year has been miserable for many – bringing fear, sickness, loneliness, and death. Our way of life has been severely disrupted by COVID-19. What comfort can we find from the prophet's words today? Well, God is still God – majestic, mysterious, unchanging, steadfast. The coronavirus reminds us of our mortality, our vulnerability, our lack of control over our lives. But God's supremacy is not threatened by the virus. There is comfort from the stability that the presence of God offers. God does not stand aloof from the world and its troubles, but reaches out to people to befriend us in our struggles. Like a new way through the wilderness, God is able to do things not seen in the world before. The speed at which vaccines have been developed to counter the virus is unprecedented. Might we thank God for this, whilst also recognising the skills of scientists? During the year, we might have been able to draw comfort from many different human sources, but it is right also to take comfort

from divine sources. The comfort of God remains when human resources run dry. It is the word of God that remains when human words fall short. There is infinite and everlasting comfort from the nature of God, the love of God, the power of God, and the word of God.

Response *cf 2 Corinthians 1 vv3-4*

'Praise be... to the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.'

Prayers

In joyful expectation of his coming to our aid we pray to Jesus.

Help us to live in the light of your coming
and give us a longing for your kingdom.
Come to your world as King of the nations.
Banish violence and war in your reign of peace.
Bring your comfort into our lives,
where we struggle with sickness and distress,
and set us free to serve you for ever.
Guard and shepherd our souls,
that with all the faithful departed
we may share your victory over evil and death.

Come, Lord Jesus, do not delay;
give new courage to your people,
who trust in your love.
By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of
your kingdom, on earth as in heaven,
where you live and reign
with the Father and the Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.