

**Waterloo United Free Church Sunday
Worship
29th Nov 2020 - 1st in advent
Rev Linda Hopkins**



1 Corinthians 1: 3-9

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— ⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Opening declaration

Among the poor, among the proud,
among the persecuted,
among the privileged,
Christ is coming to make all things new.

In the private house,
in the public place,
in the wedding feast,
in the judgement hall,
Christ is coming to make all things new.

With a gentle touch,
with an angry word,
with a clear conscience,
with burning love,
Christ is coming to make all things new.

That the kingdom might come,
that the world might believe,
that the powerful might stumble,
that the hidden might be seen,
Christ is coming to make all things new.

Within us, without us,
behind us, before us,
in this place, in every place,
for this time, for all time,
Christ is coming to make all things new. ¹

Song

Faithful one, so unchanging,
Ageless one, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all, I depend on you,
I call out to you, again and again.
I call out to you, again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm
Your love is, the anchor
My hope is in You alone.²

Prayer

Lord God, our ways are not your ways, and your love is not like ours.
Our love judges by appearance but yours looks deep in the heart.
Our love coldly counts the cost but yours is freely given.
Our love cannot bear much pain but yours is ready to suffer.
Our love wants instant results but yours keeps waiting and hoping.
Holy God, in Christ
we celebrate
the warmth of your welcome, the strength of your goodness, and the folly of your faith in us.
Glory to God!

Lord's 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;

¹ Gathering for Worship p.292

² Copyright © 1989 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing. Brian Doerksen. CCLI license number 414523

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,
For ever and ever. Amen

Mark 13: 24-37

²⁴ “But in those days, following that distress,
“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’
²⁶ “At that time people will see the Son of Man
coming in clouds with great power and
glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his
elect from the four winds, from the ends of the
earth to the ends of the heavens.

²⁸ “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As
soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come
out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so,
when you see these things happening, you know
that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you,
this generation will certainly not pass away until
all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and
earth will pass away, but my words will never
pass away.

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not
even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only
the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not
know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man
going away: He leaves his house and puts his
servants in charge, each with their assigned task,
and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not
know when the owner of the house will come
back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or
when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he
comes suddenly, do not let him find you
sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone:
‘Watch!’”

Sermon

It’s the first Sunday in Advent and the beginning
of the season of waiting and anticipation in the
Christian year.

Of course, we wait for and anticipate the
festivities of Christmas, and often we may equate
the sense of waiting at Advent with waiting for
good Christmas food and presents and
gatherings, and the secular side of everything
‘Christmassy’! This year our waiting will be mixed
with much more uncertainty as we have no idea
what we will be allowed to do during Christmas in
terms of meeting up with other people to
celebrate with. Our waiting is even more filled
with anticipation and perhaps worry too.

Yet as Christians Advent waiting is about much
more than waiting to share presents and food
(even though that is really good and enjoyable), it
is about waiting on God and waiting for God. We
are expectant in the waiting as we remember and
prepare to celebrate what God has done in
coming to earth as a baby all those years ago.
And we anticipate Jesus’ return one day. For this
we wait.

Jesus, speaking in the passage in Mark calls
people to be on their guard and to keep alert.
Our faith is based on the assurance that at the
end of all time Jesus will return, to bring to
completion all that God has planned. I know that
many people find the passages that talk about
Jesus’ return a bit frightening and it makes them
fearful, because it is very unknown what that will
look like. Additionally, given the amount of
chaos and disaster and struggle in the world we
may well feel that those times Jesus talks about
that will mark the end time are very near. Now,
more than ever, in the midst of a global
pandemic, we might read this Scripture and think
that the time is near. But hasn’t that been the
case for many years gone by already? And
should we really be fearful about it?

Jesus will return, of that there is no doubt. The
beginning of the passage in Mark Jesus explains
that, ‘people will see the Son of Man coming in
clouds in great power and glory.’ It is a powerful
image of heaven and earth meeting, and it is a
glorious image of angels gathering in the elect.
While we don’t know in reality what that might
actually look like, we know that this is what we
should anticipate with a sense of joy and hope,
and peace and wonder rather than fear. But
when that will be, we have no idea.

Over the centuries people have looked for signs and predicted about the end of the world but that really is quite futile. Instead, we are called to keep watch, be alert, and keep doing what God calls us to do.

We are encouraged to live each day as it comes; live in the 'now' of each day, and to attend to our salvation. In other words, don't put off sorting out your lives with God; seeking God's forgiveness and renewing. In this time of waiting, draw close to God. For God came to earth as that vulnerable baby to draw us close to Him.

In 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9 Paul writes to the church in Corinth to remind them of their faith in Jesus and how that equips and strengthens them for each day:

'For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I've chosen an old hymn to close today's service, 'Will your anchor hold in the storms of life'. Perhaps it talks more about perseverance than waiting, but the two can go together!

If we truly trust in God and his grace revealed to us in Jesus Christ, we do have a strong anchor in life. In the times in which we live we will get buffeted and there will be times of chaos and concern around us, but if we have Jesus at the very centre of our lives and our being, we will remain firm. This doesn't mean abandoning any responsibility ourselves for our faith, Jesus clearly calls us to stay alert. For me I think there is something about staying closely in step with Him about this command. We keep alert when we live each day faithfully loving God and loving neighbour.

When we are alert, when we know a solid 'anchor' of Christ with us and guiding our ways, we face the days before us with the strength Paul

clearly writes about, and reminds us that 'God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (1 Cor 1:9).

Reflective Prayer

Close your eyes, and think of a time when you were waiting for something: for the results of an exam or a medical test; for a message or a phone-call; for someone to arrive... or to leave; for a train, or a bus; a birthday or Christmas; for holidays to begin, or lockdown to end; waiting for a birth...or a death; or just waiting, not sure what for. Remember what waiting feels like: the pacing up and down, not able to settle; checking the time, looking out the window; the anxiety... and hopeful expectation. And now, with the butterflies flitting prettily around in our stomachs, let us pray:

Advent God,
this is the church's time for waiting: not yet time for carols and celebrations (too much could still go wrong),
but hope is in the air.
There is no special star yet in the night sky;
nothing to rouse the shepherds from their slumbers or distract the wise ones from their calculations, but something is definitely in the air.
Gabriel is plotting his flight path to Nazareth; the heavenly host are doing vocal warm-ups, and the world is waiting.
The hungry are waiting to be fed, the blind are rubbing their eyes,
and the lame trying on new trainers. The poor are waiting, desperately, to be lifted up,
and the mighty have no idea that they will soon be toppled from their thrones.
God, we are waiting too,
with a mixture of excitement
and resignation.
May our hope prevail over our fear.
May we do what we can do,
and trust you for what we cannot.
May we work, and rest, and be ready, and be first in the queue to welcome you when you come in glory. Amen.³

³ Spill the Beans 37

Song

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

Refrain:

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
When the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rage, and the wild winds blow,
Shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow?

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil.

Will your eyes behold through the morning light
The city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
When life's storms are past for evermore?

Sending

Go with your heart and soul
in eager expectation,
awaiting the coming of Good News.
Be a living witness of that hope, sharing the
blessing of God
in word and action.

**The Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Love of
God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be
with us all, evermore. Amen.**

Offering

The offering for the Lord's work is gratefully
received. Please send by cheque (to Sue W), or
direct payment.

Homegroup/Bible Study

We are meeting for small group Bible study at
8pm on Tuesday evenings via video meeting. You
can join if you have online access, or by
telephone. Contact Sue or Linda for joining
information.

Christmas Angels

This is the final week for getting Christmas angels
to us. Please contact Linda or one of the deacons
to arrange for them to be collected.