

Service of Morning Prayer Advent 3 – December 11, 2022

Hymn 6 – Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness arise! Triumph o'er the shades of night:
Day-spring from on high, be near; Day star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn, unaccompanied by thee;
Joyless is the day's return, till thy mercy' beams I see,
till they inward light impart, glad my eyes and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine! Pierce the gloom of sin and grief!
Fill me, radiancy divine; scatter all my unbelief;
Moe and more thyself display shining to the perfect day.

BCP - Page 40 - Greeting

Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

BCP – Pages 41 – Invitation to Confession

Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of Almighty God our heavenly Father, to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his Holy Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel or sit in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

BCP – Pages 41-42 – Confession and Absolution

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.*

*But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord;
And grant, O most merciful father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly,
righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

The almighty and merciful Lord, grant us absolution and remission of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit.
Amen.

BCP – Page 42 - Gloria

O Lord, open thou our lips.
And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

BCP – Pages 44-45 – Venite

O come, let us sing unto the Lord;
 let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,
 and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great god,
 and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are all the corners of the earth,
 and the strength of the hills is his also.
The sea is his and he made it,
 and his hands prepared the dry land.
O come, let us worship and fall down
 and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is the Lord our God,
 and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.
O worship; the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
 let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth,
 and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with his truth.

Psalm 146:4-9

First Reading – Isaiah 35:1-10

Second Reading – James 5:7-10

Hymn 414, stanzas 1-3 – God, my King, thy might confessing

God, my King, thy might confessing, ever will I bless thy Name;
day by day thy throne addressing, still will I thy praise proclaim.

Honor great our God befitteth; who his majesty can reach?
Age to age his works transmitteth, age to age his power shall teach.

They shall talk of all thy glory, on thy might and greatness dwell,
speak of thy dread acts the story, and thy deeds of wonder tell.

Gospel – Matthew 11:2-11

Sermon

BCP – page 53 - The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord;

who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven.

and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

BCP – page 54 – the Lord’s Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

BCP – page 55 – Suffrages A

O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;

And grant us thy salvation.

Endue thy ministers with righteousness;

And make thy chosen people joyful.

Give peace, O Lord, in all the world;

For only in thee can we live in safety.

Lord, keep this nation under thy care;

And guide us in the way of justice and truth.

Let thy way be known upon earth;

Thy saving health among all nations.

Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten;

Nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Create in us clean hearts, O God;

And sustain us with thy Holy Spirit.

Collect for 3rd Sunday of Advent

Stir up you power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.. *Amen.*

BCP Collect for Sundays

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

BCP – pages 58-59 - The General Thanksgiving

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we thine unworthy servants
do give thee most humble and hearty thanks
for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men.*

*We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for thine inestimable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.*

*And, we beseech thee,
give us that due sense of all thy mercies,
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful;
and that we show forth thy praise,
not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up our selves to thy service,
and by walking before thee
in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost,
be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.*

Announcements

Hymn 717 - America – portions of stanzas 1 and 3

*My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might, great God, our King.*

BCP – page 59 – Prayer of St. Chrysostom

*Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our
common supplication unto thee, and hast promised through thy well-beloved Son that
when two or three are gathered together in his Name thou wilt be in the midst of them:
Fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be best for us;
granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life
everlasting. Amen.*

BCP – page 59 – The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

Hymn 540

Awake, thou Spirit of the watchmen who never held their peace by day or night,
contending from the walls of Zion against the foe, confiding in thy might.
Throughout the world their cry is ringing still, and bringing peoples to thy holy will.

O Lord, now let thy fire enkindle our hearts, that everywhere its flame may go,
and spread the glory of redemption till all the world thy saving grace shall know.
O harvest Lord, look down on us and view how white the fields; the Laborers, how few!

Send forth, O Lord, thy strong Evangel by many messengers, all hearts to win;
make haste to help us in our weakness; breakdown the realm of Satan, death, and sin:
the circle of the earth shall then proclaim thy kingdom, and the glory of thy Name.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Sermon preached by the Rev. Charles Rowins on the 3rd Sunday of Advent
at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, December 11, 2022.**

Today's sermon title is "The Greatest Halftime Talk Ever!"

When we think of a Halftime Talk, most of us think of football. The first half is over. The second half is not far away. And we're tired. But we're also hopeful. Some things went right in the first half, but some things went wrong, or at least not as hoped.

Every sport has a version of a halftime talk. Tired, but hopeful. Religious faith also has a version of a halftime talk. And we're in it right now. Tired, but hopeful.

Let's look first at "tired." Why are we exhausted? Well, we missed some blocks. We missed some tackles. We called the wrong plays. We didn't recognize the strength of the opposition.

There were moments when we did okay, but not what we needed to do to claim victory. Nor what we wanted to do. And not what we trained for. And not what we hoped for.

But the first half is what it is. And, it's not the second half, so maybe there's still hope. Yes, we have a second half to get things right, or, if not "right," then better.

That would be the appropriate half-time talk. Honest, but determined to do better.

Well, you and I have just listened to one of the great half-time talks. This one came in four pieces. One piece from Isaiah, one from Psalm 146, one from the Letter of James, and one from the Gospel of Matthew.

From Isaiah: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom." From Psalm 146: "The Lord shall reign for ever, your God, O Zion, through all generations. Hallelujah!" And from the Letter of James – the brother of Jesus: "You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." And from the Gospel of Matthew: "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

In short, better days are coming. Indeed victory is coming. Stay with program. Keep the faith! The second half is ours, thanks to the Lord.

This Season of Advent is a Season of Honesty. We're in some trouble, and we can't seem to get out of this trouble on our own. We need some intervention. And who better to intervene than God.

It makes sense, doesn't it? God has skin in this game. God is determined to turn the tide. He is going to call the greatest audible of all time. He Himself will enter the contest and do what he needs to do to be victorious. Even if this strategy costs him his own life.

Crazy? No, not crazy. God is God after all. God can do whatever God wants. God can turn all sorts of tides in more positive directions. Christmas is coming. It is in sight. Oh yes, there is work to do. It is Advent after all. But it is God who is promising. It is the Creator of the Universe who can swing the tide.

From Isaiah: "Be strong, do not fear!" With an exclamation mark! "Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

But – and this is key and this is what good coaches do at halftime – you, Team, have to step up. I'm behind you, but I'm not going to do all the work.

You know what you're supposed to do. So do it! I'll be with you. I'll pick you up when you're down. I'll give you clues when you need them. I'll have your back in ways you'll never know about. But I'm not going to do everything. You've got to step up. Don't take my love – my very own Son – for granted.

He is a gift. So be thankful. But not cocky. There's still a long way to go in this contest. The Second Half will need your best effort. And it's an effort based on saying, "Thank you, Lord, for all your blessings, especially your Son Jesus, and all the second chances, the second-halves, that we are receiving."

Where are we in this picture? How do we fit? Is there really a chance that things will be better? And, if so, what is our responsibility? Just to wait for better things to happen, or to help make them happen?

Well, we know that answer, don't we? Our job is to help make "better things" happen.

And we do so in thanksgiving and in trust. Thanksgiving for having a role – "put me in Coach, I'm ready" – and for making a positive difference in the outcome – "I'm not sure if I can make a difference, but I'll try. I'll give it my best shot. And I'll do so, confident that, whatever my contribution, it will be acceptable to you, Coach."

This response on our part is offered in trust. We trust that there is a God. We trust that this God cares for us, including giving us an assignment. And we trust that no matter how small our contribution might be, God will use that contribution to further His Kingdom.

The Second Half is going to happen whatever decision we make. If we don't give thanks and if we don't trust, we won't change the outcome. The outcome is in God's hands. God wants us to participate. God expects us to participate. God will be sad if we don't participate. But if God wants a Second Half comeback, God will see that this happens, whatever you and I do.

But, if this is so, that God will achieve victory with or without us, why would we not want to participate? How sad for us. And how sad for those who might be moved by our faith? We are recipients of the Good News, with an expectation that we will share that Good News. Why would we want to disappoint the Author of that Good News? Jesus is going to die on a cross for us. Are we going to walk away from that death and call it quits? Or, are we going to fall on our knees in thanksgiving and then stand up and report for duty?

We wrestle with our response all the time. Most of the time, we're on board. Some of the time, though, we have second thoughts. And it's during those second thought times that we are vulnerable. We tired, and we need a break, a halftime. And, during that halftime, we need some encouragement. And, lo and behold, we have visitors to the locker room. Isaiah and James and Matthew. And individually and collectively they remind us of our part in the victory. Not to sit idly by, but to engage.

From the Letter of James: "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." In the second half, we trust. Amen.

Lessons for 3rd Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2022

Collect: Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beasts come upon on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 146:4-9

Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help!
 whose hope is in the Lord their God;
Who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;
 who keeps his promise for ever;

Who gives justice to those who are oppressed,
and food to those who hunger.
The Lord set the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind;
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
The Lord loves the righteous; the Lord cares for the stranger;
he sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.
The Lord shall reign forever,
your God, O Zion through all generations. Hallelujah!

Second Reading: James 5:7-10

Be patient, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who take no offense at me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

