28th November 2021



**Call to worship**

To be alive is sometimes to experience pain and even disaster.
Jesus warns us not to overreact to disaster, but to try to see
life from a wider perspective, looking for the coming of the kingdom of God. There is always hope: God will not forsake us.
Come, let us worship.



**A gathering prayer**

*This prayer may be used with an Advent wreath.*
*Light the first candle this week.*

As we light this Advent candle,
may its flame be for us a sign of hope;
may its warmth be a symbol of God’s love for us;
and may it inspire us to be hope bearers –
people of compassion and integrity,
as we gather in the name of Jesus
who is the light of the world.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of approach**

God of mystery,
we have stepped into Advent and await your revelations.
We have stepped into Advent, hoping that we and others
will see and feel and know your message.
You are a patient, persevering God, who offers your all for us;
you offer to us the depth of your being, the essence of life,
the gift of love beyond compare.
And we wait to celebrate again the gift of Jesus born for us,
given for us.
We look to you, for you will show us true life bursting forth.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of adoration**

Eternal God, hope of the world,
we cannot grasp the immensity of your being,
and yet all around us we catch glimpses of your power.
You speak to us in nature’s blessings.
You speak to us through science and creativity.
You reveal yourself in the love and the care
and the support of those around us.
You show yourself when we most need to see you.
When we least expect it, we see your hand at work.
We read your Word, time and time again,
and suddenly, we are amazed by seeing something new.
Eternal God, we adore you.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

We wait, but don’t always find it easy to wait,
and for that we are sorry.
We confess our impatience and our lack of attention
to the journey and its signposts.
Teach us that preparation is part of the journey
and that the journey is part of the gift.
You offer us a way to follow, a path to tread,
a journey that leads to hope, to joy, to trust and to love,
and we confess we do not always follow.
Now, may we step into this Advent as faithful people,
seeking forgiveness and trying to follow your path,
and believing you will be walking with us every step of the way.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

God promises to all who follow,
that he will take away our sins
and set us on the path to life eternal.
Hear God’s word, know God’s forgiveness,
and feel God’s peace.
**Amen.**



**Luke 21.25-36**

The Christmas TV adverts for 2021 have now launched, and many have an air of defiance after the so-called ‘cancelled Christmas’ of 2020, with messages such as ‘Can’t stop me now!’ and ‘Baubles to last year!’ Last year, we discovered that many of the things which had underpinned our celebrations were not as sure and certain as we had thought and many of the things that we put our trust in were little more than sinking sand.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In this week’s reading from Luke 21, Jesus warns of the confusion, danger and fear that humanity will face in the end times,‘there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars. There will be roaring seas and confusion on earth. It will seem like the world is in danger.’

When we reflect on the uncertainty and fear we have faced over the past two years and consider the many ways in which the world seems to be broken, an understandable response would be: ‘stop the world, I want to get off!’

We don’t have to look far for apocalyptic signs. New variant viruses threatening to get through our vaccine defences. Climate Crisis and the inability of world governments to agree and mitigate the effects of global warming. Migrants felling war torn nations, looking for a better life, being prepared to risk all in trying to find it, even drowning in the chilly waters of the English Channel.

Where do we go for hope at times like this? It’s enough to make you hide in Peppa Pig World[[2]](#endnote-2).

Some hide through shopping. Apparently fear makes us more materialistic, researchers have found.[[3]](#endnote-3)

As scared people seek out others because there is “strength in numbers,” the scientists said that we also find “strength in things”. A study involving 2,200 men and women from the UK, the US and China found that fear increased materialistic tendencies through a “desire for safety”.

Eugene Chan, the report’s co-author, and an associate professor of consumer science at Purdue University, Indiana, said that the findings could explain why people had bought so much during the pandemic. “People are scared about Covid,” he said. “Our work shows that one way to ‘cope’ with this feeling of fear is to buy more material things.”

The answers to their research suggested that fear increased the desire for safety, adding to a hunger for possessions. This desire had evolved because possessions gave our ancestors an advantage over others in terms of status seeking and pleasure seeking. In humanity’s ancestral past they said, there is often an advantage to owning goods. The more goods one possesses, the more likely they are to withstand adverse conditions and protect themselves. They offer ‘tangible security.’

Did you get any delas on Black Friday this weekend? Where is your security?

We have been having some meetings looking at the topic of Happiness over the last tow months. The last meeting was on Wednesday, and it looked at the topic of resilience. How do we cope when life doesn’t go to plan?

There were many suggestions: breaking the difficulty down, not thinking too far ahead taking each day, or hour as it comes. Calling on friends, a shoulder to cry on. Taking time out even if it is only a ten-minute walk to help you re -calibrate. Laughing: laughter is the best medicine they say. Storing up positive thoughts -drawing on the positivity you have banked when things get difficult. The psychologists on the Happiness Lab said that like every good movie there are four possible outcomes when life casts you in a difficult place. You can be crushed by it, survive it, recover from it, or thrive in it. Writing that final scene is determined by how you deal with the situation you find f yourself in. there are fundamentally tow responses when you are struck by a personal crisis.

Some people attempt to deal with the upsetting scenario by engaging in a problem-solving approach, while others attempt to adopt a more accepting response.

The problem-solving approach will try to obtain as much information as possible about the issues and then form a plan of action to deal with them. Often the biggest weakness of this route is that it deals with the effects and not the cause of what is going on.

When it comes to approaching difficult issues in a more accepting way, then we are thinking of how to reduce the symptoms of stress of the particular context we are in. not every situation we find ourselves in can be solved. When we are in that place, we need to think in terms of how best we can manage ourselves through the roller coaster that we are about to get on. Behavioral strategies - different ways of acting in these scenarios are important and cognitive strategies, how you think differently about your context. Some people just have to come to an acceptance that life isn’t’ perfect. Life can be difficult.

One thing that was interesting was the role faith and prayer can play in resilience and in coping with difficulties. One of the secular psychologists said that research shows that those who pray have better outcomes and cope better. Some don’t know who they are praying too – but talking things out, putting requests out there into the universe can help. Prognosis is better, people are less depressed, self esteem goes up, some of their physical ailments will be less painful, as a result of using prayer in that way. So prayer can help us and be enormously helpful in ways that improve our health.

That is all from a secular psychologist Dr Roger Bretherton, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Lincoln. Prayer is good for you.

For Christians, we know who we are praying too. And who we are praying through – in the name of Jesus.

Despite the apocalyptic predictions facing us in this passage Jesus points us to hope and faith.

When we look closely there is much to hope for as we see glimpses of the kingdom of God at work through the church and its people.

Jesus promises that ‘…my words will not pass away.’ (v. 33b). When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we have a sure and certain hope in him that will not fail. And that is something to celebrate.

The Gospel reading is set in Holy Week, a day or two before the arrest of Jesus. He had caused uproar in the Temple and spoken to the crowds. Both sets of religious leaders, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, tried to trap Jesus in arguments. At first glance this passage can seem full of big, threatening images. Yet, if we keep reading, we see the signs of hope: the buds on the tree heralding summer; the signs of God’s kingdom; and the encouragement to ‘raise your heads’ (v.28).

Sometimes it can be hard to see the joy that awaits, that will come…in time. But even in the most hostile of environments, there are signs of life. Indeed, life often needs a tough start in order to grow – e.g. a hard winter or a forest fire. Perhaps it’s the same for us, too. In tough times, we need to look for those little signs of hope.

Today’s Bible passages offer words of hope, safety and confidence to those who are deeply anxious. A fresh vision of the glory of Jesus helps

Jesus first talks about the signs of distress to be seen in the sun, moon and stars, the roaring sea and the waves. But he follows this with the signs of hope that could also be found – if one cared to look – in the shaking heavens and the sprouting trees. In today’s world, what might we see as signs of hope, and how might we respond?[[4]](#endnote-4)

Jesus tells us to be on our guard against the trials that can catch us unawares. He suggests we remain alert, and pray for the strength to cope. Being a follower of Christ does not mean we are free from struggle and strife, but maintaining a close relationship with him will help divert the pain. How might we do that?

 t is possible to be overwhelmed by the text and recent world events but, in the light of both, Jesus in his speaking and Luke in his editing offer signs of hope to look for, and ways of alert, hopeful living to be strong in.

In verse 28, there is the call to ‘stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is near’. These are confident, hopeful actions. In verse 31, there is the hopeful assurance that ‘the kingdom of God is near’. And in verse 33, we have the confidence-giving statement that Jesus’ ‘words will not pass away’. Throughout the passage there is an undergirding sense of the faithfulness of God fulfilling God’s purposes and not being thrown off course by tumultuous events. Alongside this is a reciprocal call to faithfulness on the part of God’s people.

In verse 27, we have the most exalted image of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel: the picture of ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory’. It is interesting that the church’s liturgical year ends with a celebration of Christ the King and the next year begins with this portrayal of Jesus. Joel Green[[5]](#endnote-5) in his commentary suggests that Luke has included this material in his Gospel because ‘his audience has not been living in expectation of the Parousia’. Parousia, literally ‘arrival’, refers to the second coming of Christ. Maybe we too can lose sight of or appreciation of the glory of Jesus – something that Advent gives us the opportunity to rediscover, in both the wonder of the glorious one who is to come and the sign of the vulnerable baby of Bethlehem.

Jesus comes to us when we call to him for help. He may come to us through a stranger or a friend, a gift, or a word or a feeling. The story I shared last week about the Syrian Muslim woman had Jesus appearing to her in her paralyzed state in a vision which led to her healing.

Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus Come. Will you pray that when times are difficult?

Come Lord Jesus, we need a saviour. Come Lord Jesus show us your glory. Come Lord Jesus Come.

**Prayers of intercession**

*The response can be sung using the*[*Taizé chant ‘Wait for the Lord’*](https://hymnary.org/hymn/RN1995/278)*.*

Your voice sings through creation,
from the dawning of light to the end of time.
You are our beginning and our end
and our days are held in the palm of your hand.
O God, you are the beginning and end of all things, we pray to you:
for those who nurture new life both physical and spiritual;
for teachers and leaders and those who have inspired our faith;
for midwives and prophets;
for the people who call us to start again;
for all who are at the beginning of a new adventure of faith,
and for all who feel that it is time to lay down some responsibilities;
for children growing up in challenging times;
for those we know who are approaching the end of their life;
and for all who watch at the bedside of the sick.

Give us expectant hearts as we listen for your voice.
**Wait for the Lord, his day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.**

Your voice sings through Scripture
and through the words of the prophets,
calling us back to your heart of love.
and filling us with hope in your vision of a better world
where justice and gentleness shape our lives.
God our protector and provider, we pray to you:
for trust in you when our world seems so troubled;
for faithfulness to your work of life in your church;
for a narrative of hope in society and in our leadership;
for the courage to challenge the lies of exclusion and inequality;
and for a new beginning.

Give us expectant hearts as we listen for your voice.
**Wait for the Lord, his day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.**

Your voice sings in the darkness
where people are lost and alone;
distant from home, sick or afraid.
O God, you mend what is broken, we pray to you:
for all refugees and asylum seekers;
for a decent, humane and workable immigration system;
for the collective will to face our responsibility for the conflict-torn areas of the world;
for Ethiopia, as the Prime Minister escalates war against thee rebels;
for Afghanistan as winter begins to bite and food is in short supply;
for support workers and volunteers working in rescue;
and for all who are in danger today.

Give us expectant hearts as we listen for your voice.
**Wait for the Lord, his day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.**

Your voice sings in the witness of faithful people through the ages
the ones who have stood on the edges,
and those who have felt the pain of the excluded.
God of challenge and love, we pray to you:
for the marginalised;
for those whose voices are silenced;
for the observers of the times and the critics,
and all who call our attention to the gap between the talk and the walk;
for serious government that meets the challenges of the day with wisdom.

Give us expectant hearts as we listen for your voice.
**Wait for the Lord, his day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.**

Your voice sings in the desert, in the land which is dry and parched;
in the hidden places where you are at work
and in the quiet places that are full of unseen acts of kindness.
God of peace and wholeness, we pray to you:
for the chance encounters of the week ahead;
for friends and family and the blessing they add to our lives;
for everyone that has helped us through the past year;
for people we usually overlook;
for the bereft and bereaved,
and for those who watch over them.

Give us expectant hearts as we listen for your voice.
**Wait for the Lord, his day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.**

Your voice sings of a future as yet unknown.
You ask us for our trust,
and you point us to the power of our everyday choices.
God of time and space, we pray to you:
for greater commitment to preserving the resources of the planet;
for true love of neighbours near and far;
for lives that honour your justice and your truth;
for gentleness with ourselves and one another.
Give us the ability to wait patiently for you.
Give us hearts that stay faithful,
hands that are ready to reach out to others,
and lives that are shaped by your love.

Give us expectant hearts as we listen for your voice.
**Wait for the Lord, his day is near.
Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart.**



**A prayer for all ages together**

Loving God, we give you our fears, *(hands in front of face)*
help us overcome them. *(spread hands apart)*
We give you our hopes, *(palms up, offering)*
help us bring them to life. (hands raised high)
May this Advent be a time of new beginnings
as we look forward to the coming of…
our friend and Saviour, Jesus. *(jump up and down)*
**Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

Loving God,
as we end our time together and leave this place,
let us go in hope, live by hope,
and be signs of hope for all to see.
In Jesus’ name.

1. *Becky May is Founder of*[*The Resources Cupboard*](http://www.theresourcescupboard.co.uk/) <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/116-november-december-2021-b/advent-1/the-week-in-focus> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-59376386> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/why-the-fearful-seek-refuge-in-shops-qgtl3dchr> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2021/116-november-december-2021-b/advent-1/explore-and-respond> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ([Joel B Green, The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, 1997 ISBN 978-0-8028-2315-1](http://www.eerdmans.com/Products/2315/the-gospel-of-luke.aspx) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)