

Worship 29th November 2020 – Advent 1

Aberlour Parish Church

Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Intimations:

The buildings are open for in-person services of worship again– in Craigellachie at 9.45am and Aberlour at 11.15am.

Services will be not be ‘normal’: they’ll be shorter, and we won’t be able to sing together; we’ll have to limit numbers according to the capacity of the building; it might be chilly because of having doors and windows open to increase ventilation; we won’t be able to shake hands, hug or kiss; and we’ll be seated 2metres away from other households; there’ll be hand gel, and face-coverings, and one-way systems – but it will be worship in-person all the same. Not everyone will feel comfortable with this, and I can assure you that I’ll be continuing online digital services at <http://aberlour.video/services> for everyone to access. These digital services will be as close to identical to the in-person services as is possible.

If you wish to come in person, **you must ‘book’ a place**. This ensures that we keep to a safe capacity for each building as well as giving us ‘track and trace’ details in the event that any potential Covid-19 transmission might be detected.

To book: email aberlourchurchbooking@gmail.com

Or call Jane Tweedie 01340 871515

Heather Cruikshank 01340 871898

Rev Andrew Kimmitt 07752306462

Introduction

Hello and welcome to worship this Sunday, the 29th November.

This week is the first week of Advent, as we prepare our hearts, minds and souls for the coming of the Messiah, God-with-us.

NB – for the in-person services and on the videos, worshippers are encouraged to join in with the leader for the words in UPPER CASE

Advent Litany

Among the poor,
among the proud,
among the persecuted,
among the privileged,
Christ is coming,
HE IS COMING TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

In the private house,
in the market place,
in the wedding feast,
in the judgement hall,
Christ is coming,
HE 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,
HE IS COMING TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

That the kingdom might come,
that the world might believe,
that the powerful might stumble,
that the humble might be raised,
Christ is coming,
HE IS COMING TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

Within us,
without us,
among us,
before us,
in this place,
in every place,
for this time,
for all time,
Christ is coming,
HE IS COMING TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

Godly Play story – advent 1

In our in-person and recorded services, Andrew is telling the ‘Godly Play’ stories for each week of advent. To see a recording, go to www.aberlour.video/advent1

Lighting the advent candle

[CH4 284, v1]

*Hope is candle, once lit by the prophets,
never consumed though it burns through the years.
Dim in the daylight of power and privilege,
when they are gone Hope will shine on.*

Richard Leach
CCLI Licence No. 649173

Reading

Daniel 6:6-27

6 So the presidents and satraps conspired and came to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! 7 All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever prays to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.”

9 Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict.

10 Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously. 11 The conspirators came and found Daniel praying and seeking mercy before his God. 12 Then they approached the king and said concerning the interdict, “O king! Did you not sign an interdict, that anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human, within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions?” The king answered, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” 13 Then they responded to the king, “Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the interdict you have signed, but he is saying his prayers three times a day.”

14 When the king heard the charge, he was very much distressed. He was determined to save Daniel, and until the sun went down he made every effort to rescue him. 15 Then the conspirators came to the king and said to him, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no interdict or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

16 Then the king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!” 17 A stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. 18 Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no food was brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

19 Then, at break of day, the king got up and hurried to the den of lions. 20 When he came near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?” 21 Daniel then said

to the king, “O king, live forever! 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.” 23 Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. 24 The king gave a command, and those who had accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. Before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

25 Then King Darius wrote to all peoples and nations of every language throughout the whole world: “May you have abundant prosperity! 26 I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel:

For he is the living God,
enduring forever.

His kingdom shall never be destroyed,
and his dominion has no end.

27 He delivers and rescues,
he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth;
for he has saved Daniel
from the power of the lions.”

Reflection

Advent is the beginning of a new Church year. And I’ve decided that for the next year, we’re going to join with churches around the the country and world in a structure of readings each week known as the ‘Narrative Lectionary’. One of the ideas behind the Narrative Lectionary is that -unlike the lectionary we’re more normally used to, which jumps about the bible each week- in the space of the year we cover the broad swathe of the biblical narrative, the bible story, from beginning to end. It gives us a chance to travel the broad arc of the bible’s stories about God’s relationship with God’s people and really concentrate on the figures we meet along the way. For those of you that feel familiar with the bible, that often brings out new depths and fresh perspectives, while for those of us who sometimes struggle to place our Josephs, Jeremiahs and Jehosaphats it gives us a more smoother transition between stories.

It does sometimes mean that we find ourselves at odd place in the bible at different times of the year. The NL begins the cycle in Genesis at September, and winds up in June – matching the cycle of the school year. And so at advent we are just bridging the Old Testament into the New Testament. Which means this first week of advent we have Daniel, and the lions’ den.

It’s a story that we maybe think we know well. It one of those Sunday School stories, that we often teach children: perhaps because like all good children’s adventure stories it has a good hero, Daniel, who is innocent, yet trapped by enemies is a situation of danger, and we wonder how on earth he’s going to get out of it. And, of course, there are Lions, and lions are cool.

And when you read it in totality, like we’ve just done, it’s easy to see that it’s a story about lots of things, lots of very relatable and timely things for us today. It’s about powerful men abusing their positions to make unjust rules designed to trap and harm people they don’t like; it’s about the hubris of an emperor who allows flattery to blind him to the wickedness of what he’s asked to do; it’s about standing up for what’s right in the face of danger; it’s about faith; it’s about vendettas; it’s about revenge and poetic justice; it’s about friendship; and it’s about God promise to the faithful.

And it's about prophets. Prophets who - as we heard in the Godly play story – point the way to how God is acting, prophets who point to the way to God's truth, and who point the way for the rest of us to have hope.

Daniel is in many ways a prophet of hope. And we could talk about Daniel's hope in this story – the way he trusts in God, even in the worst of times when a bloody death seems certain. And we would learn much from Daniel as an example.

But almost more fascinating is the character of King Darius, the Persian Emperor who, on the one hand is vain and idolatrous enough to allow his satraps and courtiers to make a law that prayers should only be said to him; but on the other, recognises the power and authority of Daniel's God. When Darius realises the way he's been trapped, into authorising a law – of the Medes and Persians – which cannot be revoked; when the illusion of his unlimited power is shown to be laughably and ironically false; as the almighty emperor can't even save his own friend because he has he trapped himself with his own words; it is to Daniel's God he turns in desperate hope. "May the living God deliver you" – he says as the lions' den is sealed for the night. And early in the morning that follows a sleepless night, he runs to see what has happened. Only a hopeful man would run; the rest of us might trudge resignedly to see the horror, or wait for news of the worst from a servant. And of course, Darius' hope was justified: Daniel is alive and well.

Fascinating how Daniel's faith, Daniel's steadfast life of prayer, becomes a source of hope for the otherwise heathen emperor. Prophets are examples in themselves of hope lived out, but more than that, they inspire hope in others. That is what it means to point the way to Bethlehem. Prophets are those who come so close to God, and God comes so close to them, that they know just what God wants.

The role of the prophet didn't end in biblical times. There are prophets today: those who -even in the murkiest of times- live in a way directed towards hope; those who inspire hope in others.

We too, this advent, are invited to join in the prophetic task of pointing towards hope springing alive. As we pave the way in our hearts and lives for Christ coming anew, let us tell and live the story of hope in human form – and the promise of God in Jesus Christ.

Amen

Prayer

O Come, O Come Emmanuel,

Come into our hearts, as we seek hope and sustenance for the days that lie ahead

Come into our lives, and let us give hope with our actions and words

Come into our relationships, and bolster us as a community that clings to your promise

Emmanuel,

Come into all the places of darkness and despair in our world

For your light casts out all shadow

Come into all the places of need in our world,

For you provide the bread of life,

Come into all the places of injustice in the world,

For you are justice and mercy for those the world passes over.

Emmanuel,
God-with-us,
If we feel you close, let us know you nearer still,
If we feel distant from you, wrap us in the certainty of your embrace.
And give us today, your hope.

We pray in the hope of the Messiah, who taught us to pray saying:
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,
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Advent Blessing

God of the watching ones,
the waiting ones,
the slow and suffering ones,
the angels in heaven,
the child in the womb,

GIVE US YOUR BENEDICTION,
YOUR GOOD WORD FOR OUR SOULS,
THAT WE MIGHT REST AND RISE
IN THE KINDNESS OF YOUR COMPANY.

AMEN.