

Devotion for the week to the 29th of November 2020 Advent 1

This service is written for Stretton Park and McDonald Wing in Maffra, Laurina Lodge in Heyfield and Royal Freemason's in Sale, but with the intention of being available for any who are interested for their private use.

INTRODUCTION

This is the first week of Advent, there are only four Sundays before Christmas day. This week we think about God coming to the earth.

Our Psalm reading today comes from Psalm 80, verses 3 to 7. Restore us O God, make your face shine upon us that we might be saved. How long will your anger smoulder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears. You have made us a source of contention, our enemies mock us. Restore us O God, that we might be saved.

HYMN No. 11 - The Church's one foundation

You can read the words to yourself, or out loud. If you remember the tune well enough you can sing it yourself. You can, of course sing just the first, or the first and last verses.

OLD TESTAMENT READING - Isaiah 64: 5, 6, 9

You come to help those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin you were angry, how then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away. Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, do not remember our sins for ever. Look upon us we pray, for we are all your people.

PRAYER

We thank you O Lord, that you never leave us, even when we ignore you and go our own way. Even when we forget you, you do not forget us. We might disappoint you, but you do not disappoint us. Lord God, for all of those times when we have forgotten you, put you aside, or not followed your way, we ask for your forgiveness. We know we may not deserve your love and grace, but we ask anyway, knowing that through Jesus our Saviour, you save us from ourselves and our shortcomings. Help us, once more to be the sort of people you would have us be, ready, prepared and waiting for you and your presence. For this, we pray in Jesus name, Amen

HYMN No. 6 - Jesus, lover of my soul

NEW TESTAMENT READING - Mark 13 : 24 - 37 (or the whole of chapter 13)

REFLECTION

How do we understand this reading? Jesus said that before those people who were listening had passed away, those things that he spoke of would have happened. The world did not end then, but perhaps the world of the temple-worshipping Jews did. Within the life-time of some of those who heard Jesus statement, the Roman army dealt very harshly with what they saw as a threat to their power. As part of their response, the Romans tore down the Temple in Jerusalem, putting an end to the Temple-based worship that was central to the Jewish faith of that time. A few verses earlier in this chapter, Jesus talked specifically about the destruction of the Temple.

The Romans destroyed the centre-piece of the Jewish faith. People, good Jewish people, were killed. If you wanted to save yourself from the destruction you had to run away out of the city to the comparative safety of the hills (verses 14-18).

The whole of this chapter of Mark reads a bit like a puzzle, and a bit like the Book of Revelation. Verse 29 says “when you see the signs, you will know the time is near”, but the verse 32 says “no one knows the day or the hour”. It can seem puzzling and contradictory. It is a story of betrayal within families, religious persecution, false leaders, wars and upheavals in the earth. And yet, among all this, in the worst of the worst, Jesus, the son of man gathers his people to himself. He wants to take them to be with him. I think this is the important message for us: no matter how much bad stuff happens, no matter how bad the world seems to get, through earthquake, bushfire, Covid and world politics; God still cares. When-ever or how-ever it might happen, God wants you to be ready to go and be with Him.

HYMN No. 17 - I cannot tell

PRAYER

God our Father, today we pray for all of those people in times and places of distress; for people in places where there is war, or famine, or sickness, or family unrest. This world always seems to be full of troubles, and these days we hear so quickly about troubles far away. Things seem to be different these days, there does not seem to be the stability and the rules that there used to be. We worry about our families, and people we know who don't have the simpler life that we experienced. Help them Lord in their worries and concerns. We pray for those who will not have what they need this Christmas. We pray for those who are ill and we also bring to you the concerns our own hearts..... Be with us and be with those we care for, we pray, and we pray together:

THE 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, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. 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

HYMN No 2 - Blessed assurance

The BLESSING

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

He will keep you strong to the end, so you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And may the blessing of the almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

be upon you and remain with you always, Amen