**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**November 29th – Advent Sunday**

**‘Come Down!’**

**(Isaiah 64:1-9)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope that this finds you all doing as well as possible.*

*Today’s will be our last online service for a while (and hopefully, with the positive vaccine developments, it may even prove to be our final dedicated online service), since next Sunday, December 6th, sees us back in our church buildings – at St. John of Beverley, Whatton, at 10AM.*

*We’ll keep our rhythm of Sunday services between our three larger church buildings for the time being, so that means Orston on December 13th; Aslockton on the 20th; and Whatton again on the 27th, but we of course have our special Advent and Christmas services in all of our six villages. Dates and times of these are being finalised, taking into account all of the Government guidance, and will be communicated to you (electronically and via the Cranmer Group Christmas card through your door!) very shortly.*

*I look forward very much to seeing you at our services! God bless.*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you**

**The Collect for Advent Sunday
(Common Worship)**

Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world’s salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord,
**Amen.**

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

O come, O come, Emmanuel!
Redeem thy captive Israel
That into exile drear is gone,
Far from the face of God's dear Son.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, O come, Adonai,
Who in thy glorious majesty
From Sinai’s mountain clothed in awe,
Gavest thy folk the ancient Law.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, thou Root of Jesse! draw
The quarry from the lion's claw;
From those dread caverns of the grave,
From nether hell, thy people save.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O Come, thou Lord of David’s Key!
The royal door fling wide and free;
Safeguard for us the heavenward road,
And bar the way to death's abode.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright!
Pour on our souls thy healing light;
Dispel the long night's lingering gloom,
And pierce the shadows of the tomb.
*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**Bible Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9 (New International Version)**

**Read by Caroline Coulter**

*1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down
that the mountains would tremble before you!*

*2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze
and causes water to boil,
come down to make your name known to your enemies
and cause the nations to quake before you!*

*3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.*

*4 Since ancient times no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.*

*5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right,
who remember your ways.
But when we continued to sin against them,
you were angry.
How then can we be saved?*

*6 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.*

*7 No one calls on your name
or strives to lay hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have given us over to our sins.*

*8 Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.*

*9 Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord;
do not remember our sins for ever.
Oh, look upon us we pray,
for we are all your people.*

**Sermon: ‘Come Down’ - Rev. Tim Chambers**
Today, Advent Sunday, is the start of a new Church Year. This Year doesn’t begin on Christmas Day, with the birth of Jesus Christ; the coming to life, the incarnation, of Our Lord and Saviour. It doesn’t begin on Easter Day, as might easily be thought – although of course that resurrection day is the day from which every day thereafter is made new. Nor does it begin at Pentecost, although many people refer to that celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit onto the first followers of Jesus, as the birth-day of the church.

Instead the Church Year begins in the dark and the cold; in a time and a place, so it seems, of emptiness, of exile, of desolation, even. The time that we know as Advent.

The words of Isaiah speak to us across the centuries, from such a time and place then, and into such a time and place now, perhaps especially this Coronavirus year.

Isaiah is a deeply complex book, prophetic, poetic, united by a series of common themes, but which Biblical scholars now generally think was written not by one hand - the “Isaiah, son of Amoz” who refers to himself in the very first verse of the book – but by three or four distinct voices, who lived from the eighth to the sixth centuries B.C., in distinctly different contexts, into each of which they speak.

The part of the Isaiah from which this morning’s reading comes, is what’s generally thought of as the third of these voices, from the period in the history of the people of God after Jerusalem had been sacked, and its population taken forcibly into slavery in Babylon. Some of the nation is still there, but many have now been permitted to return to their historic home, the Promised Land, but under conditions that are deeply impoverished – both economically and spiritually. Those still in Babylon remain physically in exile; those who have returned to their former homes are nonetheless in a deep state of psychological exile.

I wonder whether there is a profound resonance in the situation that confronted this ‘Third Isaiah’, with our own, in this pandemic year of 2020. We find ourselves in what looks to most intents and purposes like the same home that we have inhabited over preceding years, but at the same time the landscape around us has shifted so radically; the assumptions underlying our lives have been torn up so utterly; that we too are actually in exile; exiles in our own time and place.

Into such exile, the words of Isaiah speak, as he cries out to the Lord.

Our reading is the second part of a lament to God – a prayer,

even though it perhaps might not immediately look like one – that begins in chapter 63. The author pleads with the Lord, for himself, and for the people of God: “Lord, I’m tired of trying to justify your anger with the people. I know that your people have turned away from you and your ways. They have nothing to offer you, but then they never did. But, you loved them anyway.”

“Come down, O Lord!” Come down in the way you did in the time of our forefathers, when you met with Moses on Mount Sinai. “Come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways”, Isaiah continues. / To paraphrase his words, ‘we know that we’ve done wrong, Lord; we’ve waited and waited and waited, God, and still you stay silent. We’re starting to think that maybe you’re not only punishing us by your silence when we cry out to you, but that you’re actually absent from our land, our nation, our lives, Lord. Maybe we’re even beginning to give up on you, things have become so bad. We’re broken, Lord, and you’ve hidden your face from us.

And yet, you’re still our Father. We’re still your people, Lord.’

And yet…

In perhaps the most traditional of the ways in which the four Sundays of Advent are marked by the Church, on this first Sunday we read of, and reflect upon, the People of God, and their relationship with Him as told in Scripture; on our relationship with Him. On the other three, we consider the Prophets; John the Baptist; and then finally Mary, the mother of Jesus, and we of course light a candle for each of them – as we’ve done this morning - as we progress through this month of Advent waiting.

But on this, the first Sunday, we see in our reading the nature of God, through his interactions with His people. His character is revealed not only in what He does – or does not do – but also from the way in which Isaiah, and the rest of God’s people in that time of exile, speak to Him, and respond to his actions – or inaction.

First of all, God is revealed as being MIGHTY. He has the capacity to rend the heavens; to cause the mountains to tremble; the nations to quake.

Secondly, the God of whom Isaiah writes, is a God who is HOLY. Where the Lord has withdrawn from acting on behalf of those who wait for Him to do so, it’s because of the sin of the people of Israel; they have turned away from the ways He prescribed for them to live their lives, so in his righteousness, He was hidden himself from them.

So, first of all, God is revealed in this time of absence and waiting, as mighty. Secondly, God is holy; righteous in how he distances himself from his sinful people. And, thirdly, God is JUST, and MERCIFUL. Isaiah knows that the Lord has distanced himself from his people precisely because they have strayed from His ways, because they have acted unjustly. But Isaiah also knows that the Lord’s anger is not “beyond measure”; that He will “look upon” them once again; and that He shapes each one of us with the skill, care and love that a potter lavishes on his clay.

So as he petitions the Lord, Isaiah knows how God has acted for His people in the past. He knows that God, despite everything that His people have done, remains faithful to them; He continues to “come to the help of those who gladly do right.” And Isaiah has faith that, even though God’s people are still waiting for Him to act for them once more, they continue, all, to be His people, and He will act for them all, again.

This is the message of Advent, God’s word to His people, as Isaiah wrote over two and a half millennia ago, and as we come to this season of waiting now, today.

Israel was waiting for its salvation in the person of the Messiah; the heir to King David who would once again bring peace and healing to that land.

We, of course, in our particular exile in this extraordinary year, are waiting for the vaccine to take us out of our current time of darkness. But we too, are waiting for the Messiah. We wait, firstly, in eager anticipation for the season of Christmas, in which we celebrate the coming to this earth of the Christ-child, Son of God, Lord and Saviour from all our sins. And we wait, too, as his disciples, for the day in which he will come to his earth again, in judgement, to reconcile Creation to himself once and for all.

We wait, knowing that God’s Advent message to each one of us, is “Not yet, but AND YET….” “And yet”, because despite all the darkness which we see around us, there shines a light; the Light of the World; the light that is Jesus Christ. The light that, as we place our lives in his care, and under his authority, has the capacity to bring hope; to bring healing; to bring reconciliation; to bring freedom; to bring joy; to bring love.

As we journey towards Bethlehem’s manger over the coming weeks, we do so acknowledging the brokenness of this world around us, lifting its pains and sorrows to our Heavenly Father in prayer, and asking for His forgiveness for our part in perpetuating them.

But we do so too, secure in the knowledge that, in the person of the one born in that stable, God with us, Jesus Christ, our Heavenly Father has given us the eternal “AND YET…”

“Come down”, O Lord; come to your people.

“O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright!
Pour on our souls thy healing light;
Dispel the long night's lingering gloom,
And pierce the shadows of the tomb.”

In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

I’ll lead us now in a brief meditation in response, as we focus, in the flame of our first Advent candle, on the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, inviting him, in response to each of our petitions, “Lord, come down”:

Into our emptiness,
into our brokenness:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our loneliness,
into our neediness:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our busyness
and our distractedness:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our chaos
and our unsettledness:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our shallowness
and our small-mindedness:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our past
and into our present:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our future,
with all its uncertainty:
**All: Lord, rend the heavens and come down.**

For those on the margins
and all the forgotten:
**ALL: Lord, come down.**

For those in the dark,
in chains of despair:
**All: Lord, come down.**

Into our world,
with all its unsettledness:
**All: Lord, come down.**

In places of war
and violence and conﬂict:
**ALL: Lord, come down.**

In all of our darkness
send us your light.
Break forth the daylight,
banish the night.
**All: Lord, rend the heavens and come down**

**Intercessions**

**Led by Jules Humpheson**

Everlasting God, as we come before you at the start of the Season of Advent we ask you to prepare us for the coming of your son Jesus Christ and to hear us when we pray in faith for the needs of the Church and the world and to thank you for your goodness.

Lord in your mercy:
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for your church today, gathering all around the world in tiny churches, great cathedrals and like us in their own homes to praise you and to hear your holy word. Give us a sense of expectation as we start and inspiration as we finish.

We pray for your blessing on all those who preach and teach the message of your salvation. We pray especially for Tim, as he seeks to do your will and guides us through our spiritual & worldly journeys.

Lord in your mercy:
**hear our prayer.**

Lord, drive away despair from our politics, revive our dreams of justice and truth, and restore our passion for what is good and right. Establish your just and gentle rule throughout the world, especially where there is conflict; where peace seems so far away and so many have lost everything, even the faint hope of a peaceful future. Govern the hearts and minds of all world leaders and those in authority that they may act justly, honestly and according to your will especially at this time of the global pandemic.

Lord in your mercy:
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those amongst our families, friends and neighbours who will only see in Advent a hectic and worrying run-up to the excesses of a secular Christmas. Help us as we try to set an example of a true spirit of preparation for that incredibly precious gift of the Christ-child. May they see in our Services, our Carols and Christingles, whether in church or online, the true meaning of Christmas and experience your love for them through the giving of your Son, Jesus Christ

Lord in your mercy:
**hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, we pray for those for whom this day will be long and painful, for those in hospital or ill at home, those struggling with despair or depression and for all who care for them. Comfort and heal all who suffer, especially during this Covid 19 pandemic, give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord in your mercy:
**hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we pray for those who have recently died and for those for whom this day will be their last. Be near to all who mourn and comfort them with the knowledge that in the coming of your son, Jesus, the gates of heaven will be opened wide for all who accept him as Lord and Saviour.

Lord in your mercy:
**hear our prayer.**

As we end our service today, Advent Lord come even nearer.

Come to rejuvenate our faith, come to fortify our social conscience, come to widen our eyes of wonder, so that when our Saviour comes he may steal into our hearts and find them ready.

**Merciful father accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen**

 **The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for Advent Sunday
(The Book of Common Prayer)**

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever.
**Amen**

 **Lo! He Comes With Clouds Descending
Played by Deborah Davies**

Lo! he comes with clouds descending,
Once for favoured sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluya! Alleluya! Alleluya!
God appears, on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold him,
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, Deeply wailing, Deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of His Passion
Still His dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation
To His ransomed worshipers:
With what rapture, With what rapture, With what rapture,
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, Amen! let all adore thee,
High on thine eternal throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory:
Claim the kingdom for thine own:
O come quickly! O come quickly! O come quickly!
Alleluya! Come, Lord, come!

**A Closing Blessing**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you,
scatter the darkness from before your path,
and make you ready to meet him
when he comes in glory;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**