



**Sunday 29th November 2020
Advent Sunday
Notices, Prayers, Readings
and Reflections,**



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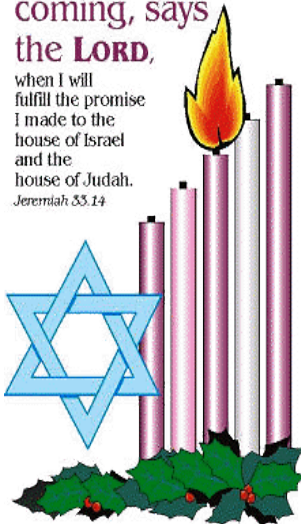
To receive the newsletter each Thursday by email contact David at: david11hoar@gmail.com

Toothill Church website: www.toothillchurch.org.uk

In Partnership (The Partnership Monthly magazine): <http://wswinlyd.org.uk/news>

The days are surely
coming, says
the **LORD,**

when I will
fulfill the promise
I made to the
house of Israel
and the
house of Judah.
Jeremiah 33:14



First Candle - The Candle of Hope

The Patriarchs, Abraham, the Old Testament Ancestors of Jesus

Light and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord
Thanks be to God

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, in which we recall the hope we have in Christ.

God told Abraham that through him all the nations of the world would be blessed, because he trusted and put his hope in God. The Old Testament spoke of the coming of Christ, of how a Saviour would be born, a king in the line of King David. He would rule the world wisely and bless all the nations. We too believe in God's promise to send Jesus again to this world to establish his kingdom upon the earth.

Hope is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle we celebrate the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

All: God of Abraham and Sarah and all the Patriarchs of old, you are our Father too. Your love is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, Son of God, and Son of David. Help us in preparing to celebrate his birth, to make our hearts ready and to place our hope in you. Help us today and every day to worship you, to hear your word, and to do your will by sharing your hope with others. We ask it in the name of the one who was born in Bethlehem. Amen.

Prayers for today



Do please let us know if there is someone you would like to add to the list for prayer, remembering that we must have the permission of the person for whom we would be praying. Please pray for Sarah, Hazel, Emma's special friend, Michelle who is beginning to recover a little in New York and all those you know who are in need of God's special love, care and healing.

We pray for our ministers Clive, Rachael, Trevor and Teresa and all our worship leaders; bless them with wisdom and strength for the challenges of each day. Please pray for the Partnership and your home congregation that they may be sustained until we can meet together again. We pray for Grace, Peace and a way forward in your Love in these uncertain times in our lives. May we continually thank God for his great Love and Faithfulness.

Services for this Sunday

Toothill Church – Zoom Service – Rachel Dowling

To join the service on a PC, laptop, tablet or smart phone click on the link below

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7839856489>

To join the service on land line or mobile telephone dial the number 02030512874

When asked for the Meeting ID enter the following number Meeting ID: 783 985 6489#

In the unlikely event of the number above being busy call one of the following numbers

Or phone: 2034815237

When asked for the Meeting ID enter the following number Meeting ID: 783 985 6489#

National URC Service on line dailydevotions@urc.org.uk

Dear Friends,

This Sunday's service is the first Sunday in Advent. We're doing Advent services a little differently from the normal structure. But we hope you will find them all a refreshing departure from the norm. This one, like the remainder of Advent Sunday services, won't have a sermon. But instead a series of reflections written by Baptist minister Nick Fawcett. Hymns for this Sunday include Wesley's (Charles!) Lo He Comes With Clouds Descending, the Taizé chant Wait for the Lord, a rousing rendition of Give me oil in my lamp, and more!

Services will begin and end, during advent, with a secular song instead relevant to the theme. This week we have U2 and Stormzy.

With every blessing,

Dan Morrell

Technical Support, Daily Devotions from the URC

Toothill Church Zoom Services to Christmas Day - All services start at 10.30 am.

December Zoom services

Sunday 6th	10.30	Advent 2	Mr David Hoar
Sunday 13th	10.30	Advent 3	Mr Mark Dowling
Sunday 20th	10.30	Advent 4	Rev Rachael Wilson
Christmas Day	10.30		Mr David Hoar

January 2021 Zoom Services

Sunday 3rd	10.30	Mrs Rachel Dowling
Sunday 17th	10.30	Rev Rachael Wilson

Reading Mark 13: 24-37

The Coming of the Son of Man

24 'But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

25 and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Necessity for Watchfulness

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35 Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

Prayer

Lord God,
made known in Jesus
and present through your spirit,
this Advent tide,
we might look for you by scanning the horizon,
or watching for a visitor at the door,
or by waiting for a notification to pop up on a screen...



Alternatively,
we might notice you
already beside us as we
labour over a mountain
of Christmas cards – and rekindle
friendships and re-affirm our love.
In stretching our minds and finances
to offer suitable gifts,
might we remember that our Christmas giving
is triggered by your gift of yourself to us?



As we hear again familiar stories from far away and long ago,
may our giving and our loving be refreshed by our knowing once again that you are here for us,
then and now and forever.

Rev. Rachael's Reflections - Changing the Story <https://youtu.be/ICy5eTmwck4>

One of my favourite films is a Woody Allen film called *Midnight in Paris*. I never tire of watching it, and I particularly love the music. In fact over the weekend we were listening again to a CD we have of music from Woody Allen films and such is the power that this music has over us, it stirred again within us the longing to spend some time at some point living and working in another European country (although those thoughts are never too far away!). *Midnight in Paris* follows the story of an American writer, Gil Pender, visiting Paris with his fiancée and her well-to-do family. They are all clearly at odds from the start, and that is exacerbated by the fact Gil's romantic view of Paris is not shared by his fiancée and her parents. At midnight one night Gil is walking back to the hotel alone when a 1920s car pulls up and the passengers, all in 1920s dress, persuade him to join them. They go to a party where Gil meets figures from the music and literature of that period, like Cole Porter, Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. I'm not going to say much more as I would encourage you to watch the film if you haven't already seen it! But what I've been thinking about this week is the way that for Gil the 1920s is the perfect historical period and he would love

to live there. He feels more at home there than he does in his 21st century life. He can't understand why one of the people he meets there is dissatisfied with the 1920s and has a longing to be living in an earlier time, in the belle époque of Paris in the 1890s - and this person too gets the opportunity to change time periods, to change their story and start again in a different golden age.

Graham picked me up on something I kept saying while he was working away recently, and I'm trying to train myself to get out of the habit! I was adopting an almost fatalistic approach to life it seemed, as I kept saying, "It is what it is." In other words, accept things as they are, we can't do anything to change anything. I do know that there are some things that are beyond my power to affect and so I shouldn't waste too much mental energy on them - for example no amount of time spent thinking, worrying or complaining about this second lockdown is going to alter it, so the best thing I can do is try to live well through it. It is what it is! But actually there are lots of things that I can do something about, and in those circumstances it's only apathy, lethargy or cynicism that make me inactive. Sometimes I'm tired, sometimes I think that whatever I try will probably not make any difference, and sometimes I simply just don't care enough. Perhaps it's a situation that is slightly removed from me and I think that somebody else is probably better placed to try and make a change, or at least that becomes the excuse. Or perhaps I feel a bit overwhelmed - I might think that if I was going to make a real difference it's going to be a mammoth task and do I really have time for this? Better not to start anything that I might not be able to manage or that might prove too much.

A few days ago I was listening to the 'Thought for the Day' on Radio 4 which was being given by Bishop James Jones. He described an occasion on which he was asked by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks what were the three most important words Jesus said. He was a bit embarrassed to be asked this because he struggled to come up with an answer. I think if I had been put on the spot and asked the question I would probably have said something like "Love one another" - if we all lived by those words (and I mean the entire human race) and learned to put the other first over our own wants and needs then the world would definitely be a much better place. None of us would be saying, "It is what it is" while feeling helpless because there would be fairness and justice and well-being and love all round, and we would all naturally be looking out for each other. But however good these three words are, they're not the ones that Jonathan Sacks pointed out. He said that the three most important words Jesus said are, "But I say". It was common for Rabbis to say, "It says in the law..." and we do hear Jesus say this too. But Jesus took it further: "It says in the law..." or "you have heard it said...but I say..." If you have a quick look at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel (particularly chapter 5) you get a lot of this. "You have heard it said 'You shall not murder' and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgement' - but I say that if you're angry with a brother or sister you will be liable to judgement." Jesus takes the same approach on many of the Ten Commandments in this one chapter. Jesus is offering a new perspective, a different way of doing things, an alternative to what has always been.

To go back to the three words I might have chosen, Jesus said, "You've heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Don't just love the people it's easy to love and hate the rest. Love the ones who actively work against you and undermine you and make your life difficult. Love the ones with whom you disagree profoundly, Love the ones who can't even look at you. Love the ones you want to go out of your way to avoid in the street. Love the ones who smile to your face but twist the knife behind your back. But I say. It's as though Jesus is saying, "Forget 'it is what it is' - you don't have to live this way anymore, I'm telling you that you can choose a new and different way." You don't have to be stuck in this particular story. You can choose to be part of another story. You can discover yourself in a story that is altogether different, you can be a different person, you can choose a different response.

There might be times when the kind of story we want to choose to live in is a fantasy. It might work in our heads, but is far from possible in reality. Like the film I mentioned at the beginning - I would love to be able

to jump into a car that takes me back to the 1920s, and to meet the people who shaped the cultural life of their time. And today I could probably wear the clothes and adopt the hairstyles and listen to the music; I could turn my house into a shrine to the Art Deco movement (I would love to do that!); and I might even be able to eschew the technology we're familiar with today and spend my days in a 1920s kind of way. All of these things are possible, but they don't give me access to a real 1920s life. All I can ever achieve is an imitation or some kind of false pretence. I'll never be able to fully engage in or be part of that life.

But Jesus' call to change the story is completely opposite to this. We're not challenged to make a choice between reality as we know it and something completely fantastical and impossible, or something where it is only ever possible to stand on the edge. Jesus invites us to choose between two possible realities, both of which already exist. There is the life where we've heard it said...We've heard it said that if someone hurts you it's OK to hurt them back; we've heard it said that war and violence are acceptable solutions to problems; we've heard it said that it's most important to look out for number one; we've heard it said that we need to consume more and more in order to feed the capitalist machine without which the world will fall apart; we've heard it said that giving the right outward impression is crucial, despite what might lie beneath the facade; we've heard it said that there are some things that are the way they are and we will never change them.

And then there is the life that Jesus offers - the new story that is written just for us, and the eternal invitation to come and be part of it. We may have heard all this old stuff said over and over again; and perhaps we've become numb to it and don't realise how pernicious it really is, or perhaps we're sick of it, fed up with being told to accept it, but wondering how to step off the merry-go-round and into something new. We've heard it said...but Jesus says something different. And the thing that Jesus offers is real and accessible and already exists, right here and now. "Come and be part of my story," Jesus says. "Come and see what it's like when we learn how to love and care for one other, when we learn how to truly love and worship God not just with our mouths but with hearts and actions all focused in God's direction. Come and see what it's like to understand yourself as beloved and valued and special to God. Come and see what it's like when we accept our place in a different movement, a new regime that is characterised by love and mercy, humility and justice, gentleness and compassion. Come and see!" I know what I want my story to be. I know which story I want to inhabit, even though I don't always manage to make the right choice. So I'm thankful that every day I receive a new invitation to be part of a radically different way of living, to change the story of my life and take my place in the new story that God is writing around me and for me and with me.

Peace begins with smile from Jess – with a few Winter jokes



- What do snowmen wear on their heads? Ice caps!
- What is it called when a snowman has a temper tantrum? Meltdown!
- What do you call a snowman party? A snowball.
- What do you get from sitting on the ice too long? Polaroids!
- What do you call a snowman with a six pack? An abdominal snowman.

Toothill Church Website

