

Faith Lutheran Church

Sunday, November 29, 2020

First Sunday of Advent



Welcome

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose forgiveness is sure
and whose steadfast love endures forever.

Amen.

Together let us honestly and humbly confess
that we have not lived as God desires.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Loving and forgiving God,

we confess that we are held captive by sin.

In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger;

we have not loved our neighbor;

we have not been Christ to one another.

Restore us, O God.

Wake us up and turn us from our sin.

Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.

People of God, hear this glad news:

by God's endless grace

your sins are forgiven, and you are free—

free from all that holds you back

and free to live in the peaceable realm of God.

May you be strengthened in God's love,

☩ comforted by Christ's peace,

and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Opening Prayer

Please join me in the Prayer of the Day:

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection awaken us to the

threatening dangers of our sins, and keep us blameless until the coming of your new day,

for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Readings and Psalm

- Isaiah 64:1-9
- Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
- 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Prayer that God would come with power and compassion

Let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

Gifts of grace sustain those who wait for the end

The Holy Gospel according to Mark 13:24-37

Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.

[Jesus said:] ²⁴“In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then 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.

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. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It 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. ³⁵Therefore, 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, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God our father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Today is the first Sunday of the new church year. Our Gospel text for today, Mark chapter 13, focuses on Jesus’ teachings about the “last days.” However, Jesus also warns us to “stay awake” because no one knows the day, the hour, or the year, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, nor anyone on earth or in heaven. Only the Father in heaven, our Lord, knows the time. It is not revealed to anyone except our Father in heaven. Therefore, Jesus asks us to “stay awake” and watchful, four times in today’s Gospel.

It is an important thing for all of us to pay attention to Jesus’ words today. You might ask me, “Pastor, how can I stay awake? How do I pay attention and know whether I am awake or not?” These are good questions to challenge ourselves with today. Let’s go back and remind ourselves about the Ten Commandments, which we probably learned during our confirmation classes. The first and foremost commandment is to love your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Have we followed God’s commandment by loving our God with all our hearts, minds, and strength? The second important commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Have we tried to love our neighbor? Have we made an effort to call or text our neighbor, friends, or church members to find out how they are doing in this time of crisis? If not, I would encourage you to do it; find time to stay connected especially during this time of pandemic.

When we start to practice the first commandment, we feel God's presence, joy, and connectedness to God, community, and neighbor, as well as to ourselves. By practicing this, we not only encourage one another but also become a blessing to each other. The first commandment is one key to "staying awake."

We accomplish good works in our communities, neighborhoods and the world by means of the Holy Gospel, as well as by our actions. We as Christians must live out the Gospel, so that our neighbor can witness the love and peace of Christ. The objective of our witness to Christ and our good works is the Glory of God and staying awake. The goodness comes from the grace of God. We glorify God by our good deeds towards our neighbor and become true witnesses of Christ. The never ending grace of the Cross always guides us.

A rich woman from a country in the middle east wanted to hire a driver to drive her big expensive car. So, she put an advertisement in the daily newspaper, and many applicants poured in. The rich lady was very happy to receive so many responses. As each applicant came to be interviewed, she had each of them drive her along a narrow road. Most of the applicants in an effort to impress her drove by showing their driving skills, by driving close to the edge of the road. Finally, one applicant drove differently; he drove the car as far away from the edge as he could - carefully, watchfully - while following the traffic rules. This particular applicant did not bother to show his driving skills; rather he was careful, watchful and also followed the traffic commands. So, the rich woman hired the man who drove differently from the others because she did not want a daring skillful driver, but one who drove safely and watchfully by staying awake.

This story is helpful to understand watchfulness in Christian lives. The Bible urges all Christians to "stay awake" regardless of their situation in life. And I believe it is necessary for our healthy spiritual life to do so. Watchfulness, alertness, and anticipation are common words often heard in the Advent season in preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas.

As soon as we enter into the Advent season, we notice that Christmas is near. We start preparing for Christmas; we plan for shopping, parties, get-togethers, gifts etc. Probably, this year, Christmas will look different, but its meaning of "Hope for tomorrow" remains the same. We might practice Christmas differently this year from what we have been practicing in the past by watchfully staying awake through following the CDC guidelines.

We have a new and loving relationship with God, neighbor and with the creation. Jesus continues to guide us at the Baptismal Font, Communion Table, at the Altar and outside the four walls of the church.

As we read in our Gospel text for today, "Stay awake" and "watchfulness" are close companions, if not two sides of the same coin; for both sides of the coin are illustrated with the words "Awake." Our good works should not be limited to ourselves or to certain people; they should reach out to the world.

The Good news for today is that Jesus is with us always to keep us watchful and to help us to stay awake. God desires to bless all humankind, to give them the Holy Spirit, and to enable them to perform good works in community. Today, we live in great confusion about the things happening all over the world. Modern humans wonder whether there really is a God whose ears hear their prayers and who knows human anguish, whose heart bears love for them and whose mouth speaks a word to them. However, we as Christians believe that by ourselves we are not able to do anything due to our limitations and our mortality; God became human and came in search of us, and through the Holy Spirit, we become people of God in faith, Hope, and love.

Many times we do not understand that the Holy Spirit guides us throughout our lives and gives us courage to do what we have been called to do in life. I came to this country in 2014. I did not think that I would be able to gather enough courage to come so far away to pursue my studies at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. My son was in third grade at the time, and he could barely understand what was going on in our lives. It was a very hard decision, as well, for my parents, and it was my first time traveling internationally. I came with a half tuition scholarship, and succeeded only with the help of God. God made everything possible for me because God was holding my hand and walking with me in this journey and still is. This same God, with His everlasting and never ending Love, is guiding you and me to stay awake, to be watchful for His “coming.”

Finally, I will close with a small story, which I found during my sermon research. It is a conversation between a woman and her husband who is reading his newspaper.

Wife: I think it will be warm today.

Husband: Good!

Wife: The children will be able to play out in the sunshine.

Husband: Fine!

When the Wife realizes her husband is not really listening, she says something inappropriate to hear her husband’s response.

Wife: And now I believe I will go and kill myself.

Husband: Great! What time will you be back?

The husband heard that his wife had spoken, but he didn’t really listen to her words. He was physically awake but mentally not present. Therefore, Jesus warns us “*Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. And I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.*”

(Mark 13: 33 & 37).

Amen.

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

God of power and might, tear open the heavens and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need. *A brief silence.*

We pray for the ministry we share in Christ's name. Open our hearts to your call for justice, peace, and healing. Attune us to the needs of the world as you draw near.

We pray for this planet in need of restoration: for devastated habitats, polluted waters, thawing ice, blazing fires, swelling floods, and long-lasting droughts. Renew the face of the earth and our relationship to it.

We pray for all people who care for others in our community and around the world. Fill them with compassion and the power to respond with justice for those who are oppressed, with welcome for those who are excluded, and with relief for those who suffer.

We pray for people who are in crisis as the seasons change: for those without homes facing severe weather, for those who are unemployed or underemployed, and for those in poverty or facing food insecurity. Relieve their burdens, sustain their bodies, and ease their minds.

We pray for the people in our families and congregation who live with depression, anxiety, chronic pain, addiction, and other invisible illnesses (*especially*). Ease their suffering and support them when they struggle.

We give thanks for the lives and witness of those who died while waiting for justice, peace, or healing, those whose names we know and those whose names are known only to you. Sustain all who still yearn for the completion of your redeeming work. Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

**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;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen**

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer (*please join in prayer*)

Generous God, you have created all that is, and you provide for us in every season. Bless all that we offer, that through these gifts the world will receive your blessing. In the name of Jesus, Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.

Benediction

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting, the long-expected Savior fill you with love, the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, ✠ now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sources:

Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License # SAS103560.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

❖ Pastor Rita is currently available for phone calls and email! ❖

Following quarantine guidelines, Pastor Rita is not available for face-to-face meetings, but she is available via phone and email if you need to get a hold of her.

Her phone number is (312) 478-6212 and her email is critawilliam@gmail.com

WELCOME PASTOR RITA!!!

We will be posting a special Thanksgiving Day video to our Facebook and website, Thursday afternoon. So please check it out and share it with your friends and family!
www.facebook.com/FaithLC1966 or <https://www.faithlutheransaultstemarie.org>

❖ In-person Worship Services at Faith are suspended through December 8th. ❖

At the November 17th Council Meeting, it was decided to keep in-person worship services suspended through the 8th of December, staying in line with the current plan for area schools. Closer to that date, we will have a better idea if longer suspension is a possibility or not, Church Council and CCR members will help keep everyone informed of the decisions made. Until we are able to gather together again, you can always watch our livestream on our Facebook page and soon a YouTube channel.

❖ Watch Faith's Worship Service Live on Sundays at our Facebook page! - You can catch our Service at 10:20am every Sunday at www.facebook.com/FaithLC1966 . You can also find us online by searching for **FaithLC1966** in any browser. If you have any questions or comments, please call the church office at (906) 632-7246.

❖ Community Thanksgiving Project 2020 – Thanks to you, Faith Lutheran managed to raise \$245.00 for this amazing cause. That comes out to helping cover the cost of almost 25 turkeys. This event will provide more than 300 families & individuals with shelf stable food, in-season fruits/vegetables and a turkey. Thank you to everyone who helped in any way to make this happen!



❖ Youth Wreath Fundraiser – Christmas Wreaths are available to order by contacting Sean in the church office at 906-632-7246.

The cost is \$25.00/wreath and orders need to be in by November 29th, (that's just one more week!). Wreaths will be available for socially-distanced **pick up on December 6th & 7th from Noon—2PM.**

Proceeds from this fundraiser will support Faith Lutheran's youth.

ORDER YOUR
Poinsettias

If you would like to purchase a poinsettia in honor or memory of loved ones to adorn our sanctuary on Christmas eve, contact Sean in the office at 632-7246. The cost per poinsettia will be \$8.00. **The last day for orders will be December 4th.** Poinsettias will be available for socially-distanced pick up the following Monday.