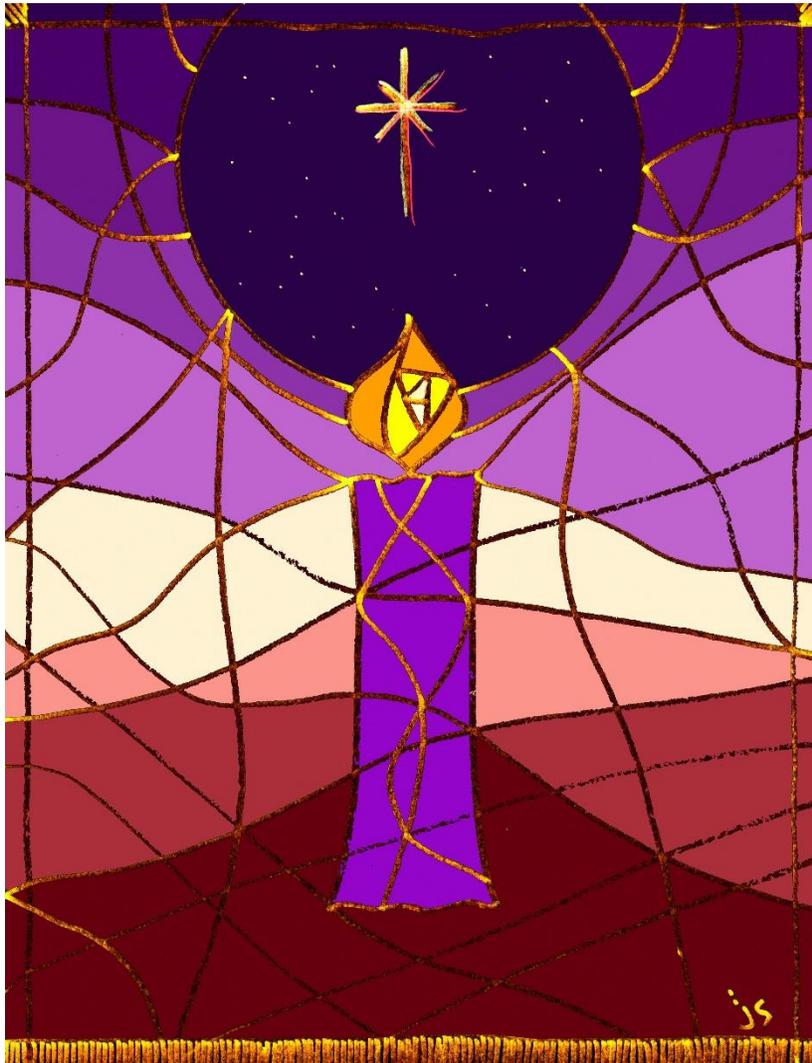


*First Presbyterian Church of Monroe
First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2020*



“Hope is the opposite of desperation—it’s not as comfortable as certainty, and it’s much more certain than longing. It is always accompanied by the imagination, the will to see what our physical environment seems to deem impossible. Only the creative mind can make use of hope. Only a creative people can wield it.”

Jericho Brown, Poet

First Sunday of Adventⁱ

"I Believe in the Sun: Hope for Tomorrow"

WE GATHER

Prelude

Welcome

Diane Adams

This Advent, we are looking to hear words of comfort, of challenge and of good news. The prophet Isaiah and the four Gospel authors were writing in a time when people needed desperately to hear all of these as well. This first week, Isaiah, the prophet, and Mark—the Gospel writer who published first—reassure the people that good news is beginning and yet they both say, “Make yourself ready! Raise your voices, change your hearts, get ready to be transformed, because now is the time.” Let us embrace hope that we can do what needs to be done to bring more light into the world

Threshold Music

“I Believe”

verse 1

Prayer

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of untiring hope.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when our view is obscured
by clouds of doubt,
ignite the flame of hope within us,
**People: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**

Congregation joins in singing

**I believe in the sun,
I believe in the sun,
even when... even when...
it's not shining.**

Pastor: Help us face this bleak night of the soul
and embrace it as a womb of rebirth.

People: **Amen.**

Pastor: You are invited to light the first Advent candle, the candle of Hope.

Opening Hymn*“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”*

GTG 82

- 1 *Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee. Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art; dear desire of every nation, joy of ever longing heart.*
- 2 *Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit raise us to thy glorious throne.*

Call to Confession

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

Prayer of Confessionⁱⁱ

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

O God, we confess our passivity, our lack of vigilance in discerning the possibilities that you open up for us to participate in your healing, restoring work in our world and in our own lives. We are paralyzed by our fears. We ignore and resist the prodding of your Spirit. Your Spirit nudges us out of self-absorption and inertia; yet we resist your nudge. By the power of your Nudging Spirit transform us in your peculiar people. Make us attentive, discerning and ready partners in restoring our world...our Earth. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness**Passing the Peace**

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

WE PROCLAIM**Children’s Time to Shine***“This Little Light of Mine”*

Ann Lux

Isaiah Reading*Isaiah 40: 1-11 (CEB)*

Diane Adams

Comfort, comfort my people!
says your God.
Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended,
that her penalty has been paid,
that she has received from the Lord’s hand
double for all her sins!

A voice is crying out:
“Clear the Lord’s way in the desert!
Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!

Every valley will be raised up,
and every mountain and hill will be flattened.

Uneven ground will become level,
and rough terrain a valley plain.

The Lord's glory will appear,
and all humanity will see it together;
the Lord's mouth has commanded it."

A voice was saying:
"Call out!"
And another said,
"What should I call out?"
All flesh is grass;
all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field.

The grass dries up
and the flower withers
when the Lord's breath blows on it.
Surely the people are grass.

The grass dries up;
the flower withers,
but our God's word will exist forever.

Go up on a high mountain,
messenger Zion!
Raise your voice and shout,
messenger Jerusalem!
Raise it; don't be afraid;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

Here is the Lord God,
coming with strength,
with a triumphant arm,
bringing his reward with him
and his payment before him.

Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock;
he will gather lambs in his arms
and lift them onto his lap.
He will gently guide the nursing ewes.

The Witness of Music

Diane Adams

Our worship series this Advent calls on the power of sung poetry that inspires those who hear it to a brighter tomorrow. It has been a difficult time in this pandemic for singing to be restricted. In its absence, we have been reminded just how important it is to sing together. Indeed, music has often been the soundtrack of hope. During this Advent season we will reflect on the power of music. The time will come when we will once again be able to join our voices in song in our sanctuary. This Advent we will turn toward the story of music and deepen our appreciation of its role in healing, change, and reconciliation.

Ann Orwin and our pastor, Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler are planning the Film Series Zoom meetings; and Ann will facilitate the discussions of the powerful documentary film, *Defiant Requiem*, in which Jewish prisoners turned to music as a way of surviving their despair and also naming the evil perpetrated against them. Information about this Film Festival Mid-Week Series, which begins on Dec 2 at 7:00 p.m. was emailed on Wednesday, November 25. If you are not on our church email list and would like to participate in this series, please send an email to info@monroefirst.org and ask for the information regarding the December 2 meeting and request that your name be added to our email list.

This morning, we present to you the theme anthem for this series that features the poetry of an anonymous Jewish person during the Holocaust. The words, found scrawled on a wall, remind us of the resilience of hope in the human heart and spirit. Music, art, poetry, simple acts of kindness inspire goodness and a means to extinguish evil, in our world.

Music

“I Believe, Even When”

Mark A. Miller

Gospel Reading

Mark 1: 1-15 (CEB)

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God’s Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

Look, I am sending my messenger before you.

He will prepare your way,

a voice shouting in the wilderness:

*“Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.”*

John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I’m not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

Sermon

Rev. Dr. Doris Chandler

WE RESPOND

Litany of Belief

Diane Adams

In times when humanity disappoints,
when even our thoughts and behaviors disappoint,
it is important to call out, name and own, the consequences of our wrongs.
In times of distress it is a prophetic act to call out,
name and own, our belief in our hope for tomorrow.

Leader: I believe that we have looked the other way too many times AND

***People:* I believe that we are capable of facing reality and working for change.**

Leader: I believe that our fear of difference has robbed us of compassion AND

***People:* I believe that we can look deeper and hold onto the things that we have in common.**

Leader: I believe that our fear of doubt makes us stop asking tough questions AND

***People:* I believe that asking tough questions in the face of injustice is faithful.**

Leader: We believe, even when we are discouraged.

***People:* We believe, that when we are discouraged, raising our voices for justice will offer us hope!**

Prayers in the Stillness

Pastor: I invite you to get in a comfortable position of rest.

I invite you to get as quiet and still as you can.

I invite you to a deep breath and a deep listening posture—perhaps eyes closed or fixed on a candle—as we prepare for a time of prayer.

Music**“Stillness”**

Mark Miller and Lindy Thompson

The gentle pull of God
is often lost amidst the rush
of all the obligations which lay a claim on us.

Yet just beyond the frantic pace
our restless feet have trod
lie deep still pools of quietness—
the dwelling place of God.

Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive

O take me to that secret place
where lost in wonder and in awe,
the moment comes and I rejoice
to be and be with God.

Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive

The Prayers of the People
The Lord’s Prayer

Sung Coda: Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive, to receive.

Offering Announcement and Opportunities to “Fill the Night” with Hope

Doxology *to the tune of “Give Thanks” GTG 647*

Believe, with a hopeful heart!
Believe, and shine your light!
Believe, because the song we sing is sung for all!

And now let the weak say, “I am strong;”
let the poor say, “I am rich
because of what our God has done for us.”
Believe!

WE GO FORTH

Carol of Resistance *"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"*

- 1 I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat, of peace on earth, good will to men.
- 3 And in despair I bowed my head: "There is no peace on earth," I said, "For hate is strong, and mocks the song, of peace on earth, good will to men"
- 4 Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth good will to men."
- 5 Till, ringing, singing on its way, the world revolved from night to day a voice, a chime, a chant sublime, of peace on earth, good will to men.

Benediction

Pastor: You are invited to pick up this week's candle and prepare to take it to reside in the wreath. Hold it high for the Benediction:

We wait for justice
but we do not wait to work for change;

We wait for restored health
but we do not wait to work to heal;

We wait for wholeness
but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;

We wait for peace
but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred.

And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news
that the sun still shines even on cloudy days,
fill the night left by sadness with messages of hope.
Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that hope alive in you
and that spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation.
Raise your voices and repeat after me...
"do not be afraid!"

People: "do not be afraid!" Amen!

Handbell Benediction

Postlude

ⁱ Worship series design © Worship Design Studio by Marcia McFee. Used, adapted, and live-streamed with permission. www.worshipdesignstudio.com

ⁱⁱ Prayer of Confession adapted from liturgy by Jill Duffield, Presbyterian Outlook

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Diane Adams, Liturgist
Ann Lux, Children's Time
Dean Tartaglia, Guest Soloist
Isaac Fankhauser, Sound Team
Josh McMann, Sound Team
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