

Online service for Sunday 13th December 2020

Advent 3

Led by Revd Mark Robinson

Welcome

Grace and blessings to you from the SWHG in Southampton and Chandler's Ford , and thank you for the invitation to share today. Today we sit at the table, not just this table, but at a table that is a wide and long and deep table. It is a table that God extends and invites us to sit and eat and share. This way of sharing online, is a good example of how God's Grace is not contained within walls or limited to one table or to one household, but is open and welcoming.

So

Let us come with our cares

our hopes

our needs

Let us come

we are invited to the table, be it a tray on the lap, a side table, a coffee table, a kitchen table, a symbolic table,

Let us come

to ask

to seek

to knock

Whoever we are

the invitation is to bring yourself

and all you are

and meet Christ here

Hymn : O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Gathering Prayer

Living God

May we be voices
that proclaim You
the bringer of hope, peace, love, joy and light

May we follow where You lead
and bring your
message of life
to the world.

We pray that we are ready
watching and waiting
for Your coming
that we make a way
for renewal, for new life and new hopes

Living God

May we be voices
that honour You
each part of each day and in every way

May we follow where you lead
and make a place
for the life and light
You bring among us

We pray that we reflect
the light, when we meet
and speak and interact

with others

Living God

May we be voices
that praise You
for Your creation
Your loving kindness
Your gift of free will
and the goodness of forgiveness

May we follow where you lead
to that place
that invites healing
and newness of life

We pray that we listen
and hear Your Word
and act in a way
that brings all that is good
to Your world. Amen

Scripture reading : John 1:6-8, 19-28

Message

There was a man sent from God, who came as a witness to testify to the light. His testimony was about who Jesus is.

This strange figure of a man was calling people away from Jerusalem into the wilderness, offering to ready them for a fresh start, readying them for what was to come.

And people were flocking into the wilderness ready for a new start. They had been waiting, and waiting for something new, they had been waiting for God to come. And with John, this man sent from God, they got a tremendous sense that yes ... at last ... something new is taking place.

John's testimony was about who Jesus is. He proclaimed the coming of the Word who would embody God's presence within the world. This presence of God is described in a Bible translation from the Aramaic language, which of course is the language Jesus spoke, and the translation states: "And the word took human form and pitched a tent among us; and we saw the glory ... the preciousness, a preciousness like that of an only beloved son of the Father, who is filled with loving kindness and justice." (1:14)

He proclaimed the coming of the Word. His testimony was about who Jesus is.

And so the Pharisees wanted to know who he was, and by what authority he was proclaiming and baptising...

Who are you? They asked. How do you identify yourself ?

And John answered them.

However, in his answer, he identified himself only in relation to who Jesus is ...

I am not the Word,

I am not the light,

I am the voice.

John identified himself in relation to who Jesus is.

Who are you? How do you identify yourself?

Have you ever identified yourself in relation to who Jesus is?

And if you did identify yourself in relation to who Jesus is, what would you say?

How do you identify yourself in relation to the people in your lives?

Who are you?

Just like John we are witness to the light of Christ. Many if not all of us have either heard, read, and experienced the presence of God in our lives in one way or the other. And all of us, if we take the time to reflect, will see something of the divine in our life's journey.

Have you ever identified yourself in relation to Christ?

I am not the word,
I am not the light,
I am the voice.

Who are you in relation to Christ.

Theologian Marcia Riggs, while speaking about John the Baptist and his calling of the people to repent and be baptised and identifying himself as the voice in relation to the light of Christ, she says that it reminds us that we have a responsibility as believers to reflect the light of Christ. She recalls the African American spiritual, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine."

Everywhere I go I'm gonna let it shine

We need to be persons who reflect the light of Christ ... who let our little light shine wherever we go and with whomever we meet ... she also says that we should live in such a way that our lives proclaim the light of Christ in the world.

One of the ways we can reflect the light of Christ in the world is by sharing together, sharing who we are ... and what better way to begin to do that than by sharing a meal, even sharing at a distance or across the airwaves. It reminds us that no matter how high, or wide or how deep or distant we may feel or our concern, the light of Christ, the love of God, the power of God in our lives and circumstances cannot be overcome. It reminds us that no matter who we are or how we identify ourselves, the invitation to God's table, the invitation to relationship with God, is open to all.

Isn't that what this season is all about?

Watching and waiting for the one who comes to bring peace, hope, joy, love, life and light to all of us no matter who we are?

Who are you?

No matter who you are ... God presence is with you.

So testify to the light. And proclaim who Jesus is. This is a way to a fresh start.

Come, come to the table and make straight the way of the Lord
Who ever you are ...

Hymn : On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

Remembering the story : Invitation to Communion and 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.
And 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.

The Peace

Breaking the bread

Prayers for our neighbours

God who has come
God who is coming
God who will come
We bring our world in prayer and longing to you

We bring our stories of concern
for the hungry, the unemployed, the anxious,
Those afflicted by the various pandemics

of COVID -19, of greed, of injustice, of sexism, of racism
and so much more

We bring our stories of concern
for those worried about their future,
those struggling with mental ill health concerns
those anxious about today and the problems of this moment
let alone the (moments to come) problems of tomorrow

God who has come
God who is coming
God who will come
We bring our world in prayer and longing to you

We bring news of vaccines,
news of community outreach
and movements to feed the hungry
and shelter those in need
We bring moments of hope and thanks

We bring news of family, friends and neighbours
Some who have not been keeping well,
Some who have been feeling alone
Some for whom this season is painful

God who has come
God who is coming
God who will come
We bring our world in prayer and longing to you

We bring our stories of concern

for those working tirelessly in health care
and all other emergency services
for decision makers, thinkers, doers, carers

Fill us all with Advent hope, faith, joy and love
Who ever we are May your love guide us hold us
and light our path. Amen

Hymn : Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Blessing

Let us go with Jesus, the light who guides us on our way.
May the light of Justice rise on all humankind.

May the God of Peace, our constant companion,
lead us along paths of solidarity and hope,
and give us the joy of being united in God's love.
Amen.

May the Grace of our
Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
And then Communion of The Holy Spirit
Be with us all evermore. Amen