

Second Sunday in Advent



*The Lihu'e Evangelical Lutheran
Church of Hawai'i*

Ka Hale Pule 'O Na Lahui Āpau . . .

Church Of All Peoples . . .

. . . Hele Pu Makou me Iesu Kristo

. . . Walking Together With Christ

December 5, 2021

The Lihu'e Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hawai'i

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Rhonda Pabo, Organist Clyde Miller, Lector

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Welcome to Our Guests

It is always a joy to share our faith and worship with people visiting from around the world.

Please know your presence and participation in our service is most appreciated. At Lihue Lutheran we celebrate Holy Communion at every service. You are certainly welcome in joining us as our Lord comes to us in this holy meal.

Prayer Concerns

Please remember these people in your prayers during the week: The family of Amanda Thayer , Bob & Joann Clash, Sally Rasay, Linda Garrett, Stan Weeks, Ronnie Pacheco, Pagatpatan ohana, Villanueva ohana, Geronimo ohana, David Gragg, Joe Morgan, Zosimo and Virginia Austria, Karen Kinoshita, Jake Whisenhunt, Rick Rentz, Norman Dibble, Kazue Zaima, Virginia Hines-Aflague, John Mattek, Girald II (Bobby Girald's son), Kristie Schmid (Tony's sister), Lolli Hagen, Abraham Torres, Sr., Kristy Kahananui, Sonny Koerte, Uncle Joe, Mallory Rodriguez, Steve Schantz, Peter Alisna, Tirzah Pope, Pastor Matthew Weber, Joyce Anglemyer, Stephen Shioi, Peggy Hood, Jason Shimono, Richard Rasay, Nancy Nelson (formely Mandell), Karen & Patrick Pavao, Edward Rasay, Karen Richards (friend of Nancy Mandell), Marcos Larson (Liedeke's son), Dora Jane Rowell, Franklin Parraga, Penny Parraga, Leticia Ancog (Kurt Javinar's sister), Yvonne Shinseki, Al Dressler (Larry's Father), Shirley Hallman (Denese Alcott's Mother), Mercy Ballesteros, Mike LaBerge, Anna Marie & Phil Croghan, Judy Carlson, Caroline Johnson, Sheila Belarmino, Ray Roderick, The Church Council, and leaders in the ELCA. If you have additional prayer requests, please let the church office know. "Ask it in my name . . ." Mahalo for your love.

Remembering Our Military

As we gather for worship, please remember those serving us in the military, and the families of our Hawai'i National Guard. These names have been given by loved ones and family members: Navy – TJ, Javinar, Kristian Matsumoto, Coast Guard - Brian Rodriguez, Navy - Kiana Alisna, Coast Guard - Ke'ale Renta Army - Jason Lumacad, Levi Fajardo: Air Force - Steven Javinar, Ikaika Fajardo, Army - Brandon Perkinson, Drew Cox, Tony Garton: National Guard - Benji MacKenzie, Eddie Resinto, Fred Casticimo, Philip Kamakea, Anthony Y. Torres, Master Sgt. If you know of someone you would like added to our prayer list, please advise the church office.

Lihue Lutheran Spotlight

Hau'oli Lā Hānau to Norman Saale (12.2), Angelo Valenciana (12.4), Jeanne Childs (12.7) Happy Anniversary to Kurt and Noreen Javinar (11.26.1988)!!



Introduction

Forerunners and messengers advance the advent of our God. While John the baptizer's voice in the wilderness may be the principal focus of the day, Malachi's prophecy could as easily herald the coming Christ as forerunner of the LORD of hosts. Finally all the baptized are called to participate in the sharing of the gospel. In so doing we prepare the way for the coming of Jesus and assist all people in capturing a vision of the "salvation of God."

Overview

Your Kingdom Come on Earth

Luke sets the preaching of John the Baptist clearly in the midst of the political and religious environment of his day. We are told the names of the emperor, governor, and other political rulers of the day. They are the ones who are supposed to care for the welfare of the citizens of their territories. Although John gave his message while he was in the wilderness, it was intended to have its impact in the farms, villages, and cities where the ordinary and the powerful live out their daily lives. John is not satisfied with the way things are, and his words help prepare us for the coming of one who will turn the world upside down. John's words tell us to examine our own lives and the world around us. We should not be complacent in the face of injustice, but instead seek forgiveness and strive for lives that bear fruit according to God's vision for the world.

We all have the potential to "over-spiritualize" the Bible and our faith, so that they become disconnected from the real needs of the world around us. This potential can be even greater in the days around Christmas, as we may seek to justify over-spending on gifts, excessive eating and drinking, or simply desire to escape from the difficulties of ordinary life for a time. John provides a warning about ignoring the truth about our sinfulness and the brokenness in the world. But John also repeats the promise that God ultimately will not settle for the way things are in the world, and that God's salvation will be made known in the one who is to come: Jesus.

Theological Reflection

In Luke 3:3 John the baptizer is situated in the area around the Jordan River. In 3:4, the reference from Isaiah speaks of God's messenger calling in the wilderness. Consider how this imagery connects with the reality of life. For example, the wilderness brings to mind places that are untamed and, at times, inhospitable. Similarly, a river is not necessarily tame, but water does evoke a sense of life and is a reminder of baptism. Invite hearers to reflect on the wilderness places in their lives and in their community. Where is God in those places? How do the promises made by God in baptism change how we view those places of wilderness?

Announcements and Weekly Events!

Welcome, Check-In, and Announcements

In the Facebook chatbox share something good God is doing in your life.

Announcements

- ◊ Congregational Meeting TODAY—**December 5** @ 10:15am

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88536720828>

Weekly Events

- ◊ Youth Group
 - Sunday, Dec 5**, Practice Christmas skit, 5:30-7pm in the fellowship hall
- ◊ Ghetto Sweet Tarts
 - Monday, Dec 6**, 5:30-7pm in the fellowship hall (Taco Bell)
- ◊ BOBS Bible Study—The Christmas We Didn't Expect (3-week study)
 - Tuesday, Dec 7**, @ 5:30-8pm in the fellowship hall
- ◊ Centering Prayer with Liedeke Bulder
 - Saturday, Dec 11**, @ 9-10am via zoom <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/9079773456>

Christmas Wish List (opportunities to give)

- ◊ Nintendo Switch for the youth group
- ◊ (2) New stoves for the kitchen, the ones we have are from the 1980's

First Sunday of Advent

Order for Worship

**Confession and Forgiveness*

P Blessed be the Holy Trinity, [☩] one God, who alone does wonders, who lifts up the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things.

C Amen.

P Let us confess our sin, trusting in the tender mercy of our God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P God for whom we wait,

C in the presence of one another, we confess our sin before you. We fail in believing that your good news is for us. We falter in our call to tend your creation. We find our sense of self in material wealth. We fear those different from ourselves. We forget we are your children and turn away from your love. Forgive us, Blessed One, and assure us again of your saving grace. Amen.

P God, in Christ Jesus, has looked with favor upon you! Through the power of the Holy Spirit, [☩] your sins are forgiven. You are children of the Most High, inheritors of the eternal promise, and recipients of divine mercy. God strengthens you anew to follow the way of peace.

C Amen.



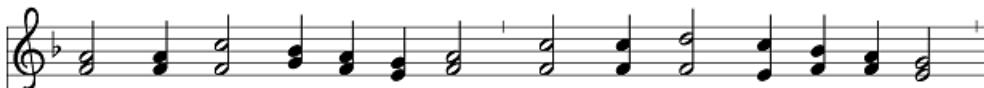
**Gathering Song*

Comfort, Comfort Now

1 "Com - fort, com-fort now my peo - ple; tell of peace!" So says our God.
 2 For the her-ald's voice is cry - ing in the des - ert far and near,
 3 Straight shall be what long was crook - ed, and the rough - er plac - es plain.



Com-fort those who sit in dark - ness mourn-ing un - der sor - row's load.
call - ing us to true re - pen - tance, since the reign of God is here.
Let your hearts be true and hum - ble, as be - fits God's ho - ly reign.



To God's peo - ple now pro-claim that God's par - don waits for them!
Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way.
For the glo - ry of the Lord now on earth is shed a - broad,



Tell them that their war is o - ver; God will reign in peace for-ev - er.
Val - leys, rise to greet the Sav - ior; hills, bow down in hum - ble fa - vor.
and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.



**The Apostolic Greeting*

- P The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
C And also with you.

**Kyrie*

Cantor Kahaku e', aho nuimai, Cristoe', aho nuimai,
 Kahaku e', aho nuimai, Kahaku e', aho nuimaila.

arr. David Haas, Rob Glover

Descant verse 3 only

Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son, Chri - ste, e -
 1. & 3. O__ Lord, have mer- cy; O__ Christ, have
 8
 le - i - son; Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son;
 mer - cy; O__ Lord, have mer - cy on us;
 13
 Ky - ri - e, e - le - i - son.
 O__ Lord, have mer - cy on us
 19
 2. Ka-ha-ku e', a - ho nu - i - mai, Cris-to - e', a - ho
 nu - i - mai, Ka-ha - ku e', a - ho nu - i - mai,
 26
 Ka-ha - ku - e', a - ho nu - i - mai - la.
 31

*The Lighting of the Advent Wreath

P Blessed are you, God of our salvation; you promised to raise up a righteous branch, One who would bring justice and righteousness to the land, so that we might live in safety. As we light this candle, kindle in us the fire of your justice and righteousness, and make us blameless before you at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints; let your face shine on us and bless us that we may be saved.

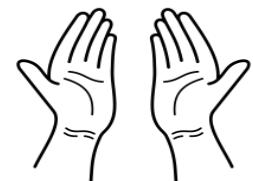
C Amen.



*Prayer of the Day

P Let us pray. Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all the people of the world knowledge of your salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.



First Reading

Malachi 3:1-4

God announces a covenant with Israel. A messenger like Malachi (his name means “my messenger”) will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord by purifying and refining God’s people, as silver and gold are refined.

¹See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; ³he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

A The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Luke 1:68-79

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us. (*Lk. 1:78*)

⁶⁸Blessed are you, Lord, the God of Israel,
you have come to your people and set them
free.

⁶⁹**You have raised up for us a mighty Savior,
born of the house of your servant David.**

⁷⁰Through your holy prophets, you promised of
old to save us from our enemies,

⁷¹from the hands of all who hate us,
⁷²**to show mercy to our forebears,
and to remember your holy covenant.**

⁷³This was the oath you swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

free to worship you without fear,

⁷⁵**holy and righteous before you, all the
days of our life.**

⁷⁶And you, child, shall be called the prophet of
the Most High, for you will go before the Lord
to prepare the way,

⁷⁷**to give God's people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.**

⁷⁸In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

⁷⁹**to shine on those who dwell in darkness
and in the shadow of death, and to guide our
feet into the way of peace.**

Second Reading

The apostle Paul was the pastor of many new churches. He writes in this letter about his joy to be in partnership with the Christians of Philippi. Listen to how tender-hearted Paul, sometimes a stern preacher, is with his friends as he encourages them to grow in love and knowledge.

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation

of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

A The Word of the Lord

C Thanks be to God.

*Gospel Acclamation

Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and
 mer - ci - ful, slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in
 steady - fast love, and a - bound - ing in steady - fast love.

Holy Gospel

Luke 3:1-6

God will fulfill God's purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God's people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God's promised redemption.

P The Holy Gospel according to
 Saint Luke, the twenty-first
 chapter.

Glo - ry to you, O Lord.

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight.
⁵Every valley shall be filled,
 and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
 and the crooked shall be made straight,
 and the rough ways made smooth;
⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

P The Gospel of the Lord.



Keiki Sermon

Sermon

**Hymn of the Day*

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

Musical score for the hymn 'On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry'. The score includes three staves of music in G major (two treble clefs) and one bass clef staff. The lyrics are written below the staves.

1 On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry an - nounc - es
 2 Then cleansed be ev - 'ry life from sin; make straight the
 3 We hail you as our Sav - ior, Lord, our ref - uge
 4 Stretch forth your hand, our health re - store, and make us
 5 All praise to you, e - ter - nal Son, whose ad - vent

that the Lord is nigh; a - wake and heark - en,
 way for God with - in, and let us all our
 and our great re - ward; with - out your grace we
 rise to fall no more; oh, let your face up -
 has our free - dom won, whom with the Fa - ther

for he brings glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
hearts pre - pare for Christ to come and en - ter there.
waste a - way like flow'rs that with - er and de - cay.
on us shine and fill the world with love di - vine.
we a - dore, and Ho - ly Spir - it, ev - er - more.

*Apostles' Creed

- P Let us join together in reciting the Apostles' Creed
- C I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.



*The Prayers of the Church

- P In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.
- A You send messengers into the world to proclaim the day of your coming. Make our bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay preachers confident in their preaching, that their words and our lives witness to your grace. Hear us, O God.
- C your mercy is great.**
- A Send your Spirit to all living creatures that are endangered. Provide them with shelter and care, and bring us into right relationship with the earth that you create and call good. Hear us, O God.
- C your mercy is great.**

A Send leaders to our nations, cities, schools, and businesses to work on behalf of those who have lost parents, spouses, and loved ones; immigrants; the imprisoned; those living in poverty; and all who are oppressed. Make them bold in their commitments to justice and reconciliation. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

A Send your servants to care for those who suffer. Use our ministries and our lives to reach out with compassion to those who are hungry, oppressed, lonely, or ill (*especially*). Grant them healing and wholeness. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

A Send prophets to speak difficult truths, even when they are poorly received. Embolden those who ask hard questions and challenge accepted ways. Instill in youth and elders alike a passion for pointing to Jesus in all things. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

A We remember your saints, both those publicly celebrated and those more humbly remembered. Confident that your work will be completed, we live in faith until the day of your coming. Hear us, O God.

C your mercy is great.

P God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus.

C Amen

*The Queen's Prayer

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the piano, indicated by a brace and the word "Piano". The bottom staff is also for the piano, indicated by a brace and the word "Pno". The music is in common time (indicated by a '4'). The lyrics are written below the notes in both English and Hawaiian. The first section of lyrics is:

O kou a - lo - ha no A i - a i ka La - ni, A
No - lai - la e ka - Haku Ma - la - lo kou e - he - u, Ko

The second section of lyrics is:

o kou oi - a i - o, He he - mo - le - le hoi
ma-kou ma - lu - hi - a, A mau loa a - ku no. A - me - ne.

English Translation

1. O Lord thy Loving Mercy,
Is high as the Heavens.
It tells us of thy truth.
And 'tis filled with holiness

3. For thy grace I beseech thee.
Bring us 'neath thy protection.
And peace will be thy portion
Now and forever more. Amen

*The Sharing of the Peace*

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C And also with you.

P Let us share the peace of the Lord with those here locally and those joining us online via Facebook live! As the ushers come forward, take a minute to share "Aloha" with those joining us online!

Offertory Word

We invite you partner with us in ministry through the pandemic with a one-time gift, tithe, or offering. Ministry is never done alone, but in collaboration with the community gathered so that we can be the community sent. If God puts it on your heart to give, donations can be given here today, mailed in, or given online our website [here](#) or you can copy and paste the weblink below @



https://www.eservicepayments.com/cgi-bin/Vanco_ver3.vps?a=pver3=tYgT1GfNxRUIimjHMvORYXmm3bazY6GfrmTtVDZydskSODEa-Up5lt373GHnco2evTpo0mld6BrVzd2nG0p8xSFKZ9u6c4AzLo4CjNx7k=&ver=3

*Offertory Response**O Come O Come Emmanuel*

1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
 2 O come, O Wis - dom from on high, em - brac - ing all things

Is far - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex come - ile here
 and nigh: in strength and beau - ty come and stay;

Refrain

un - til the Son of God
teach us your will and guide our way.
Re-joice!
Re-joice!

Em - man - u - el shall come to you, O Is - ra - el.

*Offertory Prayer

P Let us pray. God of our waiting and watching ,we offer the gifts of our hearts and our lives to the service of all your people. Prepare the way before us as we meet you in this simple meal, through Christ Jesus, our pathway and our peace.

C Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Come to Christ's banquet. Feast on God's gift of grace.

*The Words of Institution

(All are welcome to share in this meal with us. The sacraments are provided in accordance to synodical guidelines in collaboration with CDC, state, and local precautions. If you do not have sacraments, please raise your hand and an usher will bring them to you.)

*The Lord's Prayer

P Let us pray the prayer our Lord taught us to pray...
 C **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 for
 give 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, and the power,
 and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**



**The Post-Communion Blessing*

- P May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in His grace.
 C Amen.

**The Prayer After Communion*

- P Most High God, You have come among us at this table. By the Spirit's power, form us to be bearers of Your Word, sharing gifts of mercy and grace with all, through Christ Jesus, our host and our guest.
 C Amen.

**The Blessing*

- P The God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, through Christ Jesus for whom we wait.
 C Amen.

**The Sending Song*

Soon and Very Soon



- 1 Soon and ver - y soon
 2 No more cry - in' there,
 3 No more dy - in' there, we are goin' to see the King,
 4 Soon and ver - y soon



- soon and ver - y soon
 no more cry - in' there,
 no more dy - in' there, we are goin' to see the King,
 soon and ver - y soon



soon and ver - y soon
no more cry - in' there,
no more dy - in' there,
soon and ver - y soon

we are goin' to see the King.

[1, 2, 3]



Hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah, we're goin' to see the King!

Coda after stanza 4



Hal - le - lu - - jah, hal - le - lu - -



jah, hal - le - lu - - jah, hal - le - lu - - jah.

Dismissal

P Go in peace, Christ is near.

C **Thanks be to God.**



The Good AND the Bad

I really struggled with the lectionary this Advent. I struggled because I couldn't help but notice the "fire and brimstone" that weaved through the lectionary texts. It's hard to preach on realities of God's justice because they have been so weaponized in the past to foment fear or force people into faith. So, I am wary of preaching on this. But, it's a part of our faith. Even in Lutheran terms, we preach and teach on law AND gospel. It's not just rainbows and butterflies.

In this season of Advent, we have to come to terms with the reality of Jesus' coming. *Why* is Jesus coming? We can sugar coat it, because it's that time of year and everything is candy-glazed, but if we honestly answer the question, the season of Advent takes on a slightly different hue. It's not all rainbows and butterflies. Christ came because we have issues. The Virgin Birth embodies the reality that we were unable to produce our own salvation. God had to do what we could not do for ourselves.

This is murky water, though, isn't it? Because, to get to Jesus lying in a manger, we have to come. And we don't just come to get stuff, we come to give stuff. Specifically, we come to give God our worst so that God can give us His best. However, sin is a real obstacle to a lot of us. We don't want to talk about or acknowledge our sin. We don't think we really need saving. I think most of think we are "good" people. We're "not like those other sinners" whom God came to save. Therefore, owning, acknowledging, and accepting our own sin is really difficult. When we are confronted with our sin we shut down and experience shame, as we should. Sin is not a good thing. Shame is the response to sin.

The Good News is that Jesus came to take away our sin and take away our shame. BUT Jesus can ONLY DO THIS IF WE COME TO HIM. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sin". This means we have to acknowledge, own, not sugar-coat, and accept the fact that we've blown it and we can't fix what we've done. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says, "Godly sorrow leads to repentance that leads to salvation, worldly sorrow produces death." We should be affected by our sin. It should make us feel uncomfortable. But what it shouldn't do is drive away from Christ, it should drive us toward Christ so that we can confess our sin and receive forgiveness, and this Great Joy in the season of Advent.

Being a Christian paves a path of confession and repentance that few are willing to follow. To get to Bethlehem, to get to the manger, to behold and worship and adore Jesus, it is a path we have to be willing to take. For here there is unimaginable joy!

For Further Reflection

Denominational Resource

The [ELCA Good Gifts](#) program is often lifted up as an alternative gift-giving option during the Advent season. It is also a program that brings life-giving resources to people around the world living in poverty. Whether or not your congregation has taken part in the Good Gifts program before, consider learning about one or more of the eighty ministries that can be supported through Good Gifts. How is the reign of God made known through those ministries? What might those who are served by these ministries hope for or eagerly await in their lives?

Sensory Idea

Today's gospel reading is filled with words related to the sense of sight. Those with unhindered vision have a tendency to rely on this sense and may not think twice about hearing the word "see" and "look" more than once. However, this text provides an invitation to explore how one might recognize the "coming of the Son of Man" and Christ's redemption if the sense of sight was not involved. Consider asking someone who is legally blind how they experience God in their life. How do they visualize "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints," as it says in the reading from Thessalonians? Alternatively, invite the congregation to listen to the gospel reading with their eyes closed. What is that experience like for them? What stood out to them as they listened?

Let The Children Come

Kids have significant expertise to share about the varied emotions we experience around expectation and anticipation. When something is supposed to be, going to be, wait-for-it-wait-for-it on its way in the future, kids feel what we all feel—excitement, anxiety, disappointment, longing, sadness—heightened by their developing understanding of time and understandably fraught relationship with control. Kids know that waiting is hard, and many of them will have strategies to share for what they do while they wait. While "the days are surely coming" (Jer. 33:14) suggests themes of waiting and anticipation, the lesson of the fig tree in today's gospel shows Jesus teaching the disciples to pay attention to today. What do the children in your context notice about the natural world around them today, and what does it tell them?

Connections with Creation

Portrayal of the end times includes frightening predictions of social breakdown and cosmic turmoil. These images resonate with our own day as we confront the rising seas, floods, droughts, wildfires, and social dislocation and suffering caused by a rapidly heating climate. Should Christians settle for a helpless shrug of the shoulders as we consider the climate crisis? Today Jesus summons us not to faint from fear and foreboding, nor to let our love grow cold, but rather to stay alert for the small but telling signs that God is in our midst, bringing forth something new. Just as the branch of a fig tree sprouts its first, soft leaves, assuring us that summer's abundance is near, so Jesus urges us to trust that even in the midst of chaos, violence, and endings, God's kingdom is drawing near. What next steps can we take to live sustainably and to welcome God's kingdom?

Worship Reflection

What biblical texts stood out to me and why?

What do I feel God is trying to say to me in and through this sermon?

Is the Holy Spirit prompting me to change something in my heart or life? If yes, what is it? What is one step I can take to make a positive change in my life this week?

Where did I see/hear God in the sermon?
