



HOMILY

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 2: 1-5; MATTHEW 24: 36-44
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, November 27, 2022, First Sunday of Advent
The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

Isaiah 2: 1-5

2:1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2:2 In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. 2:3 Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that God may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 2:4 God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 2:5 O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Matthew 24: 36-44

24:36 "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 24:37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 24:38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 24:39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 24:40 Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 24:41 Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 24:42 Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 24:43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 24:44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

The Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

Advent begins with a **PROMISE**.

And promise is the mother of expectation. Promise is the seed of hope.
Advent is about practice and preparation—based on the promises Divine Love has made.

The prophet Isaiah spoke the promises of God into a weary, war-torn world. The first chapter of Isaiah is a bleak picture of a world on the edge. Of wars and destruction. Of greed and violence. Bodies ravaged by corruption and abuse of power.

That sobering first chapter of Isaiah is followed by the words we heard at the lighting of the candle of promise today—these elevating words, these words that call us to look up from the desolation, from the destruction, from the despair and imagine a world where all nations are in right relationship with Divine Love.

Where the tools of war are crafted into tools of community and nourishment and provision. This is not vision disconnected from the pain of the world as it is. This is a vision fed by the longing for things to change that humans feel in the midst of the pain.

Advent begins with the promise of right relationship that goes beyond one particular group. It is an elevating word—a word to keep a weary people holding on to a promise that things can and will get better for all people.

How does it feel after these last several days in America to be asked to look up? To be told to trust a promise that things can get better?

These last several days that have included the mass shooting at Club Q in Colorado on the Transgender Day of Remembrance by a shooter who identifies as non-binary themselves, who had struggled to find family and to find safe spaces to be themselves. Five people were killed on that day of remembrance in a gathering place for LGBTQIA+ people, where Trans, Gender Expansive and Queer people could be themselves, could be respected and celebrated, could enjoy life together. Eighteen were injured. And the trauma ripples out into the lives of more people than we can count.

And then another mass shooting in Virginia while Wal-Mart workers prepared for the night shift. And one of their own co-workers who many had been concerned about in terms of his past behavior. Six people were killed before the shooter killed himself.

And these are just the shootings that made national news in the last several days.

Just in November in the US there have been 37 mass shootings. That's just in November. Seven of those shootings resulted in 3 or more fatalities.¹

The world can seem so far from the promises Divine Love has made. We live in a country that long ago became a battlefield, a war zone.

The land that we call home cries out with the blood spilled in the genocide of indigenous people, in the genocide of enslaved Africans, in the mass killings and the quiet exterminations of people who somehow or another did not conform to brutal demands of white male heterosexual capitalist culture.

I left one word out of that cultural description, and that's the layer of our culture that anointed this bloody project with the white male god's seal of approval: Christianity.

We need to admit that Christianity has been and continues to be a powerful driver in the violence that has traumatized generations in this country. And we need to acknowledge that Christianity has especially been and continues to be a key player in fomenting and justifying violence against trans, queer, and gender expanding people.

Some Christians have even spoken publicly since the shooting in Colorado with horrific statements. I am not going to repeat those horrific statements because the words themselves are violent. And hearing those words can also let churches like GCPC off the hook. We listen to their cruelty and their murderous talk and we can tell ourselves that we have no connection to them. But that is not true, is it?

It is OUR faith tradition that has been weaponized to dehumanize and demonize, our faith tradition that has been used to justify violence and abuse.

GCPC has made promises about who we are and who we aspire to be. One of them is that we are a More Light Congregation of the PCUSA. That means we are saying we are a affirming and safe place for LGBTQIA+ people

We don't know the day or hour—if Jesus walked in here today, what would we regret about what we have done or what we have not done to live into that promise we have made?

It is important for us to be honest with ourselves about our regrets—about the places where our actions did not align with our stated values. That's how we can feel the kind of discomfort that leads to change. If we don't let ourselves regret when we didn't live up to

¹ <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/reports/mass-shooting>

our promises, then we can't be clear with how we want to do things differently now and in the future.

GCPC is an amazing community. And we can do better. We are not ready for Jesus to come back yet when it comes to a lot of things—and our practices around being a LGBTQIA+ affirming congregation is one of them. We must not neglect our need to practice more.

Just one example is that I regret that we have not done more work together on the importance of pronouns—because we harm people when we don't take care with pronouns. We harm people who have already been harmed over and over again by churches. We can do better!

Using pronouns is one way we can practice honoring each person's identity. This is one way we can practice being a place that doesn't assume everyone fits into the constriction of the gender binary—the gender binary is a tool of violence in our culture.

Using pronouns is one way we can beat our swords into plowshares that cultivate a true welcome, a true respect for all people by respecting each person.

If you are confused about pronouns, I hope this video can provide some support.

Play Video: True Colors United Video: <https://youtu.be/r-al4liNLBU>

In the new year we are going to do more work together on this practice.

There have been and continue to be pronoun stickers on the nametag cart that you can put on your name tag. You'll notice that staff have our pronouns on our email signatures. We're going to add those to the website as well. Consider adding pronouns to your email signature. And using them when you introduce yourselves (let's practice that now: Hi! I'm Marcia, my pronouns are she, her, hers)

In the Matthew text, people are so blinded by the necessities of daily life, the habits that lull us into thinking we don't have time or space to get prepared for Jesus, that they are not ready.

This passage is about the second coming of Jesus—which we don't often talk about in Presbyterian circles. But that's what Advent is really about!

We are not really preparing for a baby's arrival—that already happened over 2000 years ago. We are preparing for the grown, self-actualized, fully consecrated and emancipated Jesus—who has seen what's on the other side and knows what we need to be to get there. No more parables, no more leading questions. We've had time. We have had opportunity to practice. When Jesus comes back, we are supposed to be ready!

Every Sunday of Advent we will gather at the Communion table. Communion is both preparation and realization.

When the world tries to convince us the promises of Divine Love are not real or are not worth trusting or that they just set us up for disappointment, we come to the table.

We practice, practice, practice our devotion to a world that some day will wake up to ourselves. Someday we will sit at a feast where our joy will be complete.

We will eat food prepared from gardens tilled by tools crafted from the guns that used to terrify and destroy us.

We will drink from a cup overflowing with the fruit from the vineyards tended by communities who have come home from the battlefields of our murderous violence. Those battlefields will become the ground that feeds us and gives us safe haven.

Communion is our way of saying that we believe that tomorrow will be different. And that because we dream of a better world, our today is going to be different, too.

That's a practice and that's a promise.

Thanks be to God.