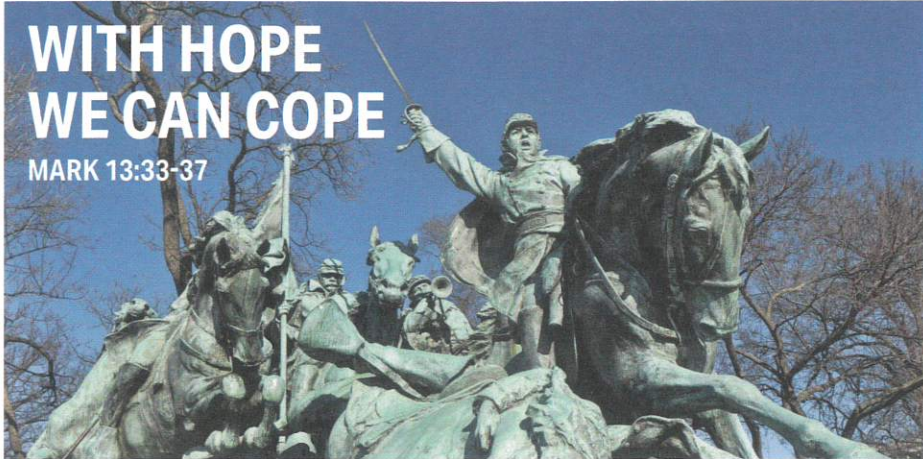


Sunday Message

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year B • 3 December 2023 • Psalter Week 1



WITH HOPE WE CAN COPE

MARK 13:33-37

He was so broke he sold wood on St Louis street corners in order to feed his young family. Everyone looked on him as a failure. He had been kicked out of the army for drunkenness, he was given a farm by his new father-in-law but couldn't make the crops grow.

In the end, his brother took pity on him and gave him a job as a clerk in his leather goods shop. He wasn't even good at that. For the proud West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran, the future looked bleak.

Then, in 1861, civil war broke out in America. As an ex-soldier, he offered to help organise local volunteer regiments on the Union side. And immediately, having been given permission to proceed, the old soldier began to shine. He displayed extraordinary strategic and leadership skills. He moulded those local Illinois regiments into a glittering, fighting army. Soon he was put in charge of entire divisions, and won battle after battle. In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln appointed him commander of the entire Union army - a force of over a million men. One year later, the terrible civil war was over, the Union army had won.

Those who knew him of old were astonished by the change in Ulysses S. Grant. In just a few years, he had gone from certified failure to victorious Lt. General of the US army, the first man to achieve that rank since George Washington. In 1868 he was elected president of United States, serving two terms, the first president to serve two full terms in more than 30 years.

In less than a decade, Grant had gone from selling firewood to living in the White House. He had gone from zero to hero, from pitiable to idol. For Grant, shame had turned to fame. He had never lost hope, and it enabled him to accomplish extraordinary things.

The need to hold onto hope is what characterises the season of Advent. We are on edge. We are seeking reassurance. We long for peace, joy, security. We await Jesus' coming. We hope.

Hope is not only a great Christian virtue, it is an essential human requirement. For without hope, we are lost. Without hope, there is no point in going on. Without hope, we die. ■

DO

Make Advent a special time for your family. Light an Advent candle and spend some time together in prayer each day.

PRAY

Advent invites us to be both people of hope and bearers of hope. Pray for a deeper appreciation of the meaning of this season.

SAY

"Come, Lord Jesus, come fully into my heart and into my life. Fill me with your hope."

LEARN

Advent is the great season of hope. It reminds us that darkness does not have the last word, because into that darkness a light has come and is coming - Jesus, God-with-us, the light of the world.

Advent reminds us that God has heard the cry of God's people, and God responded to that cry by sending his Son as one like us to save us. Hope has taken shape in Jesus. Darkness has been destroyed.

REFLECT

Hope seems in short supply at the end of this year. We're worried about the future. What kind of world, with climate change and political unrest and the frightening advances in Artificial Intelligence, are we leaving to our children? Despite all our progress in science and technology, despite how sophisticated we have become, despite the gains we have made in human rights, our world seems as broken as in the past. Racism, populism and xenophobic fear-mongering are on the rise.

The season of Advent cautions against despair. It assures us that we are not alone. It urges us forward knowing that, with God on our side, we need not be afraid. Hope will overcome.

Writer Roy Scranton gave one of his books about climate change a gloomy title. He called it *We're Doomed, Now What?* But even though his analysis of the future sounds depressing, he refuses to let go of hope. He offers a good definition of hope. He links it with faith.

"For me, hope is always connected to faith because you don't hope that you'll go to work in the morning," Scranton said in an interview. "I don't hope I'll change my daughter's diaper, I just do those things. You hope for things that you don't have any control over. I do have a faith in human resilience and the human ability to adapt to difficult situations and still find ways to lead meaningful and rich lives."

Hope is trusting in God's promises while working to build God's kingdom by putting into practice the Sermon on the Mount. Hope is about not looking away in the face of adversity, but facing it head on in the knowledge that God is with us.

That's what Advent is all about. And that's what we need to keep our focus on in the frenetic build-up to Christmas Day. Remember what we celebrate this season; remember what is far more important than decorations and presents and parties; remember why for us this isn't a mere secular feast, a handy excuse to eat and drink and max out our credit cards. This is the feast of our hope, the feast of God-with-us, and it offers a timeless template for how we must approach all life's challenges.

As Ulysses S. Grant knew, even when things seem at their bleakest, hope still beckons us on. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

To you, I lift up my soul, O my God.
In you, I have trusted; let me not be put to shame.
Nor let my enemies exult over me;
and let none who hope in you be put to shame.

COLLECT

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.
You, Lord, yourself are our Father,
'Our Redeemer' is your ancient name.
Why, Lord, leave us to stray from your ways
and harden our hearts against fearing you?
Return, for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your inheritance.
Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and
come down
– at your Presence the mountains would melt.
No ear has heard,
no eye has seen
any god but you act like this
for those who trust him.
You guide those who act with integrity
and keep your ways in mind.
You were angry when we were sinners;
we had long been rebels against you.
We were all like men unclean,
all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing.
We have all withered like leaves
and our sins blew us away like the wind.
No one invoked your name
or roused himself to catch hold of you.
For you hid your face from us
and gave us up to the power of our sins.
And yet, Lord, you are our Father;
we the clay, you the potter,
we are all the work of your hand.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 79:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Response:

God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine on us and we shall be saved.

1. O shepherd of Israel, hear us,
shine forth from your cherubim throne.
O Lord, rouse up your might,
O Lord, come to our help. (R.)
2. God of hosts, turn again, we implore,
look down from heaven and see.
Visit this vine and protect it,
the vine your right hand has planted. (R.)
3. May your hand be on the man you have chosen,
the man you have given your strength.
And we shall never forsake you again;
give us life that we may call upon your name. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians.
May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace.

I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways, especially in your teachers and preachers; the witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed; and he will keep you steady and without blame until the last day, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, because God by calling you has joined you to his Son, Jesus Christ; and God is faithful.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Let us see, O Lord, your mercy
and give us your saving help.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Mark 13:33-37

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark.
Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Accept, we pray, O Lord, these offerings we make,
gathered from among your gifts to us,
and may what you grant us to celebrate devoutly
here below
gain for us the prize of eternal redemption.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

The Lord will bestow his bounty, and our
earth shall yield its increase.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May these mysteries, O Lord,
in which we have participated
profit us, we pray,
for even now, as we walk amid passing things,
you teach us by them to love the things of
heaven
and hold fast to what endures.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Time always seems long to the child who
is waiting - for Christmas, for next summer,
for becoming a grownup: long also when he
surrenders his whole soul to each moment of a
happy day.

Dag Hammarskjöld