



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November 29, 2015

Introduction to the Word:

This Lord's Day we begin a new message series called "The Gift Exchange". Nobody would argue that the holidays are the busiest time of the whole year. And every year it seems to get worse. It can even be hard to enjoy them, when there is so much to do, so many expectations to manage, so many demands to be met.

The Advent and Christmas seasons are all about growing in love for God, and preparing a bigger place in our hearts for our Saviour. Saying yes to God's presence and plan for our lives. *That yes is the best one we can make, the best one ever.* But it can get crowded out by all the other "yeses" we're making. How do we make our "Yes" the best. Our message series will be all about setting priorities for the season and celebrating Christmas well.



Warm-Up:

- What do you love about this time of year? What do you find difficult about this season?
- What are some of the things (the other yeses) that distract you from "the Yes" to God?

CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)

Leader: Let us be vigilant at all times for our redemption is at hand.

Lord Jesus, fulfillment of God's promise,
Christ Jesus, the "new vine" of the line of David,
Lord Jesus, our Emmanuel

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart*



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*to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

FIRST READING (Jeremiah 33:14–16)

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.” The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2)

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, as, in fact, you are doing, you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Luke 21:25–28, 34–36)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus spoke to His disciples about His return in glory. “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catching you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

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

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:



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[Your group may wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord's Day Message](#)

[At this point please use the video Message for this series – Week # 1](#)

Each year at the start of the Advent season, the tone of the readings for this Sunday catches us off guard. Instead of anticipating the hope and joy of Jesus' birth (i.e., Christmas) "*for unto us a Child is born,*" and hearing those comforting stories about people in darkness discovering a great light, our Gospel tells of people dying of fright because terrible forces are coming into the world which are shaking the heavens and the earth. And these forces will open wide like a trap to catch the unwary! What kind of way is this to start a season of hope and joy, we ask.

But if we take a step back for a moment, it makes sense because we are constantly being bombarded with moments which make this season "a ride". A time filled with lots of ups and downs, hectic moments and huge headaches. There is always a surprise, an invitation, a challenge, a task, a detail, a decision around the corner to be done or made. When was the last amusement ride (ie. roller coaster) that you went on? Well Advent is a lot like that isn't it? Yet the Season of Advent really is a gift – in fact a gift exchange. A time which the Lord calls us to wait – but not to wait in waste – but to wait while He works!

St. Paul (2nd reading) is all excited about the news he is delivering to his beloved community in Thessalonica: "*God is coming into your midst.*" This coming, says Paul, is not just an historic moment long past; it is a recurring reality *here and now*. It is a message of positive expectation, not one of fear and trembling. Paul then makes a touching and personal appeal to his faith community: "*May the Lord make you increase and **abound in love for each other** just as I abound in my love for you.*" Here Paul is reminding his people that the virtue of *love* makes us whole within ourselves. Love is the womb, the path, the vehicle and the destination. It binds us together: in pairs, in families, and in communities. In a perfect world we would all be united by its powerful forces that seek the common good, and we would see to it that no one is compelled to live in need. The disciples once asked Jesus to increase their *faith*, but Paul suggests here that a *loving* and *affirming* family and faith community may be even more important.

Being bound together reminds us first of all that we are not alone "on this ride". We are in this Season together. During this time, we are told to prepare our hearts for Christ but sometimes we struggle to discover what that means? We struggle with it because we lack a freedom to allow God to be at work. We freeze in our wait, because of all that is being demanded of us, instead of being free in our waiting. This happens because we fail to look down the road and see the presence of the Kingdom of God looming toward us with all its hope – all its promise - because we are caught up in the ride. But this is where the Gift Exchange comes in.



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If we are willing to give our wait – to freely offer it to Him – well He will work! When the traffic gets backed, the shopping lines get long, the extent of our patience gets short – well don't freeze or waste the wait with anger, frustration or dissipation, no, offer to Him that wait and allow Him to work! Say "Come, Lord Jesus."

Christ will use the wait to bless you, to encourage you, to bring you closer to Him – don't worry about the wait (all that needs to be done, all the invites, events, activities) but offer them to Him Say "Come, Lord Jesus.". He will help you select what can be done, must be done, should be done and the rest – let Him do the work.

Isn't it true that so often we get all caught up in all we need to do – all the "Yeses", that our best "Yes" time with Him goes by the wayside. But if time with Christ is first, and the rest flows from it – well – it is amazing the work Christ has done for us already. When we are overscheduled and over stretched – well we are the least free and we feel things are out of control. But when we are committed to the first "Yes" as our best – it is amazing how free we feel to tackle all the ride has in store. That is the power of the Gift Exchange!

Message this week – Are you frightened by the ride or will you freely give this Advent Season to Him and exchange let Him do the work while we wait?

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)

- What does your schedule or busyness say about your life? How is your schedule currently impacting your emotional and spiritual health?
- When in life do you feel the freest? When do you feel most enslaved?
- Read Galatians 5:13 - *For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.* Thinking about the areas of freedom in your life, do you use that time to serve anyone else or just to serve yourself?
- Read Galatians 1:10 – *Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?*
- What are some of the "best yeses" you've had in your life? How can you repeat those?

Closing Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and "outreach" to the larger community.)



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GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:

- The Red Stocking Campaign and Kindness Counts Campaign are underway – how will your group be involved?
- Our Day of Mercy (all day confessions) is on December 10th from 8:30am-8:30pm. Twelve Hours, Twelve Confessors. Consider setting aside time to join us for this evening.
- Consider viewing and sharing this [brief video on Advent](#).
- This Advent, what are a couple ways that you can prepare your heart for Christmas? How will this be different than last year?

Let us pray (together)

*God of holiness, whose promises stand through all generations,
fulfill the longings of a humanity weighed down by confusion and burdened with fear.
Raise up our heads and strengthen our hearts, so that, free from anxiety and steadfast in hope,
we may look forward to the glorious return of Christ, our judge and our Saviour, who lives and
reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favors on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray united as one,

OUR FATHER...

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