

Advent 2020: “A Cry of Hope”

29 November 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome

Advent Candle Lighting: Karen Morgan & Ramon Mayorga

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 299 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Carole Speer

Reading: 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Matthew 1:18-23

Sermon:

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

I. Hope Shattered: The Reality of Exile

Life is presently difficult and our Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted this spectacularly. The virus attacks our bodies, our immune response is limited or overactive and we get sick. Covid 19 has driven us all apart; we are unable to get close, visit each other, congregate in numbers, and even sing and shout in celebration. To use a biblical term, it has driven us into exile. We are separated, lonely and vulnerable.

Covid is not the only reality that separates us. A husband and wife disagree, say harsh words, hate each other and they separate - they are exiled. A child disobeys their parents, refuses to follow the rules, and the relationship is distant, separate - they become exiled from their parents. A team member doesn't turn up to training, refuses to follow the plan for the game, gives up trying, they get distanced from their team and manager and eventually drift away from the team into exile. A citizen breaks the rules of the land, they get caught and punished with exile in prison. A town council refuses to fix the sewage system and pours toxic sludge into the sea and eventually the swimmers cannot use the water - they are exiled from using it.

Expulsion, banishment, prolonged separation is a consequence of wrong attitudes, wrong actions, neglect, viruses and disease. We can see and understand that such exile is not good and we long for better: relationship, closeness, peace. That is our hope.

Humanity's story has sadly been one of exile from God. From the very beginning, we turned our backs on God, didn't listen to Him, disobeyed His instructions and in His righteousness we were banished. Our relationship with Him was broken and we were separated from Him. He is Holy, we are sinful. The *exile* condition affects everyone, as illustrated by the story of Adam and Eve exiled from the garden of Eden and God's presence, the tribes of Israel disobeying God and exiled from their land, initially in Egypt and then in Assyria, Babylon and Persia. Their sin and disobedience (as promised in God's covenant with them) brought God's righteous judgement and consequently, they were exiled in misery, oppression, and captivity. As the hymn says, *“Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here”*.

Exile from God and each other is a warning, a reminder of the consequence of sin. It is a foretaste of the ultimate exile of death, a reality of permanence that the Bible calls hell, both as a state and a place. Hope is shattered and permanent exile is real!

It was Jesus who brilliantly captured the idea of exile and its accompanying sadness, loneliness, and destruction of our lives in His story (parable) of the lost sons. They had been given the opportunity of relationship with their father (God), a wealthy landowner. However, they both lived lives that were distant from him - one by deliberate disobedience and the other by religious observance - both without love for their father. They ended up estranged, far away from the father. And yet, hope is found by the one who recognised his sin and its consequences. He literally mourned, wept, and was sorry for the sad mess of his life and saw that hope lay in going back to his father. Our hymn says, *“that mourns in lonely exile here.”* To cry to God in hope, we must first recognise the problem of sin and its consequences - exile or separation from God and impending judgement. Hope shattered: the reality of exile. Yet hope comes when we mourn that reality.

II. Hope Spoken: The Prophets' Cry

When our lives are in trouble, we look for help. If sick, we look to the doctor; as a nation, we look to political leadership; if a soldier, to a commanding officer; if a child, to parents; in sport, to a coach. Indeed, we lose hope when there is a failure of leadership, when those who hold power have no intention or ability exercise it wisely or change. We long for better leadership in all aspects of life: government, industry, church, sport, and family. The Bible is clear: hope in our sin and its consequences of exile from God was to be found in a leader, a king, the promised Messiah. The prophets spoke often about such a Messiah. They called the people to wait for him; they told the people what he would be like.

Israel's most celebrated leader was a king called David. He was victorious in many battles, expanded their boundaries as a nation, and was a man to be proud of . . . well, mostly that is. He also made some huge moral and political errors! But at heart, he loved God and his people, and was quick to acknowledge his sin and ask for forgiveness. David was a great leader, but he wasn't the Messiah.

David was promised that the Messiah would come from him, that is, be his descendant. David was told this by the prophet Nathan, recorded in 2nd Samuel 7:12: *“I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*

Naturally, we think this was his son, Solomon, but alas no. He was brilliant, but also sinfully flawed; he was eventually ruined by unhealthy marriage relationships. Following him, the nation sadly had a succession of poor kings. They turned their backs on God and made alliances with the surrounding nations, followed their gods and, though warned, found themselves in EXILE. They recognised they were in deep trouble. God had brought judgement upon them, He had carried out His word as expressed in the promise He made with them. They began to cry out for the Messiah; they looked again to God for their hope. The prophets led that cry and they made lots of statements about the hope of Israel concerning the Messiah.

Emmanuel, God with us (Isaiah 7:14).

He will reign on David's throne (Isaiah 9:7).

The spirit of God will be upon him (Isaiah 11:2).

There was hope in the one the prophets had spoken of, the one whom God promised would one day come. A leader, a king, David's son, God's son, a warrior who would reign with righteousness and justice, who would bring peace.

O come, O come, Emmanuel . . . Emmanuel shall come to thee.

Their hope lay in the answering of that prayer - the prophets' cry. Their cry was for God to come by sending the Messiah.

III. Hope Shows in the Lord Jesus

No human leader was able to fulfil the criteria of the Messiah, to be the leader that was needed with all the qualifications to lead us out of exile from God. That was, until an unexpected and dramatic intervention by God when an angel delivered a message to a young poor woman in an out-of-the-way place called Nazareth.

As the angel said, "Do not be afraid Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give to Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, His kingdom will never end."

Jesus was the promised Messiah. He was descended from the line of David. He was God's Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, through the virgin birth; God was his Father. He was anointed at baptism with the Holy Spirit. His life was lived without sin; His character and words were flawless. He was a wise and powerful leader; He established a Kingdom with initially 12 followers and proved His Kingdom lasts forever when He rose from the dead to live forever. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah. He is our promised hope.

But what was he to do to secure that hope? The prayer of the song is, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel." He came to pay the price necessary for our release from captivity to sin and Satan, to bring us out of exile and restore our relationship with God. What was the price? God always accepted the death of another through sacrifice as payment for sin, displayed most clearly in the daily sacrifice of animals (as a holding measure).

Jesus clearly understood He was to be the ransom. When questioned, He said, "*The son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*" *Mark 10:45* In His death, He paid the price for our freedom from the captivity of sin and Satan, so that we could then be brought into a relationship with God through faith in His work on the cross. The consequence of our sin - God's punishment of separation and death - is taken by Jesus. The separation from God is removed, the door to eternal life is opened by this beautiful act of Jesus being a ransom for us upon a cross outside Jerusalem. Hope shows in Jesus.

Our present circumstances with this pandemic and its consequences are a picture, a very real picture of the effect of sin in the world, and after suffering its effects for 9 months, we just want rid of it. Surely we need to freshly consider and appreciate the story the Bible has told from Genesis to Revelation. Sin separates, exiles us from God, and puts us in captivity

to destruction and death. But our hope is Jesus, who paid by His death the price for our forgiveness, and has therefore opened for us the hope of life and peace with God forever.

You are captive Israel, your hope is to mourn the reality of your sin. The hope is that Emmanuel shall come to you. Because we live after His first coming, he has come to us before and will return. Therefore, our hope in Jesus does not end. It is the beginning of a life that leads beyond death, life into eternity. Therefore, let us cry, "Come, Lord Jesus."

We say again, **Amen, Come Lord Jesus.** This is our cry of hope.

Reflection: O Come, Emmanuel

Prayers for Others: Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Announcements

Advent Prayer meeting: The elders are calling ARPC to prayer during Advent on Sunday evenings from 7-8 pm via Zoom. We see the present circumstances of Covid as an opportunity to cry out to God and ask Him to lead us, bringing about profound and significant change.

Closing Hymn: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Discussion & Application:

Think of a hopeless situation in our lives, church or society . . .

. . . consider how Jesus would bring hope . . .

. . . and ask that Jesus would come.