

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

November 27, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 2: 1-5

Responsive Reading; Psalm 122

Epistle Reading; Romans 13: 11-14

Gospel Reading; Matthew 24: 36-44

Sermon Title: **I'll Leave the Light On**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; When all things are the darkest is when we need hope to shine the brightest.

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that
mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear. O
come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine Own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save And give them victory o'er
the grave. O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer Our spirits
by Thine advent here; And drive a-way the shades of night, and
pierce the clouds and bring us light! O come, thou key of David,
come, and open wide our heavenly home; Make safe the way
that leads on high, and close the path to misery. Rejoice!
Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel!

The apostle John said, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

OK. Here we are again. The first Sunday of Advent.

The definition of Advent is, “the arrival of a notable thing or event”. Now some things are less notable than others. The advent of television or the advent of the automobile pale in comparison to what we think of when we say the word “advent”. To us the word advent refers to a coming that turned the whole world upside down.

When the world was waiting for the coming of the Messiah it was in serious trouble.

Actually, the world had been in some kind of serious trouble every year since Adam and Eve exited the garden, but the time referred to in the New Testament was especially rough. Israel and Judah were occupied by the Roman Empire and were slaves in their own homes.

The Israelis were outnumbered and out-gunned by their Roman oppressors. There was no way short of divine intervention that they could even imagine being free.

The one and only thing that they had going for them was their history. They had been outgunned before. Moses was outgunned by Pharaoh. David was outgunned by Goliath. Elijah

was outgunned by the prophets of Baal and Gideon was outgunned by everybody.

They also had another thing going for them and that is the key word of this first Sunday of advent. HOPE.

Look back at our Old Testament lesson. Isaiah was a prophet during the exile into Babylon. Even when the people of Israel were taken away from their homes to their captors' land Isaiah saw a light at the end of the tunnel. Isaiah predicted that the day was coming when all nations would turn to the Lord's mountain to learn God's ways and walk in God's paths. At that time there would be no more war and nations would ditch their weapons of war for tools of life, and the house of Jacob would walk in the light of the Lord. Isaiah's message was a message of hope. That message was a light shining in a very dark time.

Then in our Psalm, the Psalmist says that we would sing for joy in the city that was built to house the temple of the Lord. Jerusalem [or maybe the New Jerusalem] this is where we should pray for peace in the city and in so doing, prosper because of the House of our Lord is there.

Next, in Romans, Paul tells us that the time we wait for, is closer now than it was when Jesus first clued us in on its unspecified arrival time. This is the time to awake out of sleep for the day is at hand. Walk in the light of the Lord and seek joy in the Lord rather than in those temporary things of our

present lives. When we feel the joy of being close to Jesus even bad days become better so we can't lose. We either bask in the light of Jesus in our world or in His Kingdom. Win, Win.

The phrase, I'll leave the light on for you, has always been a reassurance that you are always welcome. It is proof that someone loves you enough to brighten your path back to them. It is proof that you will never be forgotten or abandoned. It is so welcoming that Motel 6 used it for years to make their motels more attractive for travelers.

What can be more inviting when you feel lost or lonely than to see a welcoming light put right there for you. That light may have been put there for you by your parents, or by your spouse, or maybe by someone you don't even know because they too know what it means to a weary traveler.

Now isn't it wonderful that God gave us His son to be our light?

Also, isn't it wonderful that this light came to us the first time as a beautiful baby born on a beautiful star-filled night in a modest setting that does not intimidate us as somewhere where we could never fit. This happened in a barn. I was brought up on a dairy farm. I am completely at home in a stable heated by the body heat of animals created by God. There is no dress code in a barn and no pedigree check to see if you are good enough to enter.

Isn't it wonderful that God does not want to intimidate us? I mean, how can anybody be intimidated by a baby? A baby personifies HOPE. When we first see a new born baby something just goes through us. It consumes us in a good way and especially if it is our baby. You know a funny thing, that baby Jesus is our baby. Oh, He was born of Mary but He was born to and for all of us. When He was a helpless baby, He was our baby and when He became a man, He was our brother and when He said from the cross, "It is finished." He became our savior, a light to be lit in heaven to welcome us home.

Oh, we do not know the day or the hour, but we do know where He is and we know the way and we know the light is on for us.

Every year things are dark. We went through wars and hard times. We went through COVID and we are going through a time of distrust and confusion. Politics is combative instead of productive and Christ is not welcomed in many circles. Things are bad, but they have been worse and when things are darkest, that is when we need our HOPE to shine brightest.

This is when we must plant the seed of HOPE in our hearts and echo Isaiah in looking forward to that day when, "Many people will say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths' ". It's close. Hallelujah and Amen!