

THEME – Being Alert**Welcome and call to worship:** Andy Dunsmore, Elm Hall Drive

Hello everyone and welcome to our Online Service for the Liverpool South Circuit as we come into the season of Advent.

I think we can all agree that this has been a year like no other. By this time of the year I think it's fair to say that plans for the Christmas period are usually pretty much developed. Usually plans may well have been made with friends and family for how we'll spend Christmas day, and preparations for our Christmas Services are likely to be well advanced. In many churches there could be a moment of panic as we try and remember where the church tree decorations are kept. Advent is very much a time of preparation.

I've prepared this introduction in advance of the government advice on how the rules will look after the current lockdown comes to an end, so I'm not sure whether I'll attend a live service over Christmas or spend Christmas day with the wider family who I haven't seen since the summer.

However, whatever the rules say, we can be encouraged in the news of the development of vaccines and the change that this will bring to our lives in the New Year.

So in the season of expectation and preparation we look forward to the dawn of a new and better time. It's the celebration of the ADVENT of a new era. God broke into time and space and entered our world. Let's pray;

Heavenly father, in this time of uncertainty we ask that you will help us focus our minds on you during this act of worship. Help us prepare for birth of Jesus and understand again what this means for us. Amen

Song: Come, thou long-expected Jesus

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set your people free!
from our fears and sins release us,
Christ in whom our rest shall be.

Israel's strength and consolation,
born salvation to impart;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born your people to deliver,
born a child, and yet a king;
born to reign in us for ever,
now your gracious kingdom bring:

By your own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by your all-sufficient merit
raise us to your glorious throne.

Charles Wesley CCL. No. 59335

Prayers of Adoration and Confession – including The Lord's Prayer: Obeth Thevanesan, Elm Hall Drive

Our Father and our God, as always we come in your Son Jesus' name with a confidence that we can come in your name because we have received your Son and our Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

We come with a confidence that we have received new life and have received a sense of direction and purpose. We also come as children with a renewed eternal identity. We humble ourselves and bow in your presence this day, and we thank you Lord for your faithfulness.

Holy and mighty God, as we continue to be in your presence, help us to remember you are always in our midst and help us to be sensitive to your gentle voice to be heard within us, while we pray, sing and listen to your written Word.

Help us to bring glory to thy name by preparing ourselves to receive your strength day by day that will make us eligible for your eternity. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Dear Lord, we thank you for being powerful enough to be even closer than our own breath and able to forgive us for the sins we have committed in our thoughts, actions, intentions and attitudes.

Lord forgive us for the times we have neglected to do the right things while knowing what we ought to do in your sight. Forgive us Lord for the opportunities we have missed to honour you and glorify you by loving & showing your kindness to others who live in our neighbouring areas, work places and whoever we came across on a daily basis.

Lord forgive us for the times we took your grace and mercy for granted by neglecting to pray, worship, listen to your word and spend more time in sharing your good news with others.

Lord have mercy upon us and forgive us for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord ever since this pandemic broke out there was anxiety, uncertainty, chaos and confusion. But Lord day by day, week by week you have led us, to this day you have sustained us by encouraging each one of us in the midst of the hardships, trauma, and loss of lives.

We also Lord think of the grace you have given us to move forward steadily, and thank you for granting us your strength to help others alongside.

We thank you for your providence & sustainability in and through our jobs by teaching us that although the channels may change, you are the one and only source in whom we depend on. We ask these prayers in the matchless name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer (traditional)

Our Father who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever

Amen

Reading – Mark 13:24-37: Paddy Harvey, Elm Hall Drive

24 'But in those days, following that distress,

“the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

25 the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

26 'At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

28 'Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: as soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it[b] is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The day and hour unknown

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert[c]! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

35 'Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: "Watch!"'

Song: Light of the World

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

You stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes let me see.
Beauty that made
this heart adore You,
Hope of a life spent with You.

So here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that
You're my God

And You're all together lovely
All together worthy
All together wonderful to me.

King of all days
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly You came
To the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

So here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that
You're my God

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross,
I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

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A prayer: Andy Dunsmore Elm Hall Drive

Dear God we know that often so many thoughts are competing in our minds and that we often struggle to make time to listen. We ask that you will still our hearts and minds that may focus on you.
Amen.

Sermon for Advent Sunday: Mark 13:24 - 37– Rev Peter Hughes

Jesus says **"Be on guard! Be alert!"** (verse 33)

In recent months we have all been encouraged to "be alert" in several ways. We need to be alert to the dangers of Corona Virus, ensuring we protect ourselves where possible. In October we were told that the threat of a terrorist attack in the UK became more likely and that we needed to be alert. Today in our Gospel Reading Jesus tells us to be alert to the signs of his coming.

The word alert has a range of meanings – watchful, aware, observant, awake.

The call to be alert is one of the themes of advent – especially Advent Sunday. We need to be aware, observant, awake to what God is doing, or about to do. We need to be watching and waiting as well as working and preparing.

What is God about to do? God is coming to us – another Advent theme. God has always come to human beings – He came to walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He came to make promises to Abraham Isaac and Jacob. God came and led his people across the Red Sea. At certain points God came particularly close to individual people – as the mysterious priest who brought gifts to Abraham, speaking with Moses on the mountain as he gave the law, passing near to Elijah speaking in a still small voice of calm.

The Old Testament Prophets proclaimed that God would soon be coming in a new way, the Messiah, a descendant of King David but so much more. The words of judgment which the prophets often spoke were a preparation for God to do a new thing. God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way when the time had come. During Advent we recall the many promises that led to the coming of Jesus as a baby. As promised, God came in person; in the birth of his Son who had existed before time began. Jesus promised that after he had died, risen and ascended he would one day come again in glory. The call to be alert is the call to be ready to welcome Jesus as judge and King.

Have the events of this last year caused us to be alert – not just to corona virus and terrorism but to the coming Lord Jesus? Maybe God wants to use the difficult events of the last few months to alert us to our deepest need, our greatest hope. Even on that wonderful day when we can leave our homes, our bubbles and our social distancing - there will be more to hope for. It's not just the end of Corona Virus for which we long – it's the coming of Jesus! May this Advent season awaken us once again to Jesus – God coming to us.

The reading from Mark's Gospel was part of a longer conversation between Jesus and the disciples. Looking at the magnificent Jerusalem Temple, Jesus warns his followers that these seemingly permanent fixtures won't last for ever. One day they will come tumbling down – and they did, less than 40 years after Jesus spoke these words. But Jesus goes on to talk about events even further into the future – events that will lead to His return in glory. We can see there is a change of perspective as Jesus says “in those days, following that distress”. Jesus uses dramatic language:

**“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”** (verses 24 & 25)

This shows that the coming of Jesus is a cosmic event – far more important even than the destruction of sacred temple buildings. The return of Jesus will lead to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

The return of Jesus will be even better than the end of Covid 19.

As Christians we also have an ultimate hope beyond all the things that threaten life on earth. Jesus shows us what that hope is:

At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (verse 26).

The hope is in a person – Jesus. Wonderfully, we have a part in that coming glory: **“he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens”** (verse 27).

Advent encourages us to think about how we can prepare for these events. Jesus gave his disciples the guidance which they and we need.

Many Christians have become preoccupied with the signs of the second coming. Plotting events in world history, the changes in fortune and geography of the Jewish nation, or in the movement of stars, asteroids or other heavenly bodies, they have pointed to a particular time or date. Jesus is clear when he tells the disciples: **“about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”** (verse 32).

Being alert does not mean spending time combining different parts of the Bible and coming up with a date. If, for example, someone worked out that Jesus was returning on 25th January 2025 that would imply that for the next couple of years we wouldn't need to be quite so watchful and alert. I believe that throughout history and to this day there are signs that the end is near. We don't know the date. It could be tomorrow or it could be in another 1,000 years' time. Because we don't know when Jesus will return, we **always** have to be alert. It is part of the Christian way of life for all times. Jesus shows how we can be ready:

1. Being faithful to our calling:

“it's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task” (verse 34).

Jesus has entrusted his mission to us – he's left us in charge for now. Each one of us in our different ways have a calling within the community, our family, the Church. Jesus challenges us to be faithful and responsible in these things. The best way of being ready is to be faithful to our calling.

That calling will be different for each of us. Jesus talks specifically the calling of the person placed on the door to keep watch. Ministers and leaders in the Church are particularly called to keep watch, looking out for dangers and challenges – awakening the Church when it is getting sleepy.

2. Being attentive to each other:

“What I say to you, I say to everyone” (verse 37)

Jesus's teaching about these things is not whispered in the ears of a chosen few. He wasn't setting up a cult so that those who knew the secrets could head for the hills, waiting for salvation while everyone gets left behind. Jesus says he is telling the disciples and everyone else as well. No one has a monopoly on the truth. Sharing in fellowship, listening to and encouraging each other is an important way of being ready. Although we have to do this in a different way at the moment, we must not give up the habit of meeting together for spiritual conversation and prayer. We need to remind each other of important things, asking each other how we are doing in our spiritual lives.

3. Being awake to God's word:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (verse 31)

As we regularly read, hear, study and meditate on God's word that we are made ready to meet Jesus. Soaking ourselves in Scripture opens our spiritual ears to what God wants to say to us each day. We receive amazing encouragement from the Bible, even those parts that are heavy going. Every part of the Bible has things to teach us. I heard something recently which took me aback. A Christian teacher said that in heaven we won't need the Bible! That made me feel sad, because I love the Bible. As I thought about it more, I realised the person was correct. In heaven we will be able to hear God speaking directly to us – face to face, so we won't need to look in a book. However, the truth of this text remains – the words of Jesus will never pass away – it will just be the method of hearing them that will change. In heaven we will sit at Jesus's feet, just as the disciples did during his ministry.

In the frightening and challenging changes of life on earth, it is wonderful to know that the words of Jesus remain true, reliable and constant. The application of the Bible does change, but in every age we can rely on God's word which we find there.

When I was at teacher training college – in what is now Hope University – I was in a tutor group which focused on teaching practice. Our tutor used to ask us every week "are you poised, are you ready". He wanted to be sure that we had our lesson plans, resources, strategies in place for the next time we would stand in front of a class of children. I have to confess that despite my preparation, I sometimes felt far from ready! We have the Holy Spirit to help us to be ready for the return of Jesus. I ask you as I ask myself: "are you poised, are you ready". May the Spirit bless us as we strive to be watchful, aware, observant, awake this Advent. Jesus says **"Be on guard! Be alert!" Amen**

Prayers for Others: Alan Kershaw, Elm Hall Drive

Prayers about the outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you taught us to love our neighbour,
and to care for those in need
as if we were caring for you.
In this time of anxiety, give us strength
to comfort the fearful, to tend the sick,
and to assure the isolated
of our love, and your love,
for your name's sake.
Amen.

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
In their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Merciful God,
we entrust to your tender care
those who are ill or in pain,
knowing that whenever danger threatens
your everlasting arms are there to hold them safe.

Comfort and heal them,
and restore them to health and strength;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Gracious God,
give skill, sympathy and resilience
to all who are caring for the sick,
and your wisdom to those searching for a cure.
Strengthen them with your Spirit,
that through their work many will be restored to health;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

As a Christian community;
We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.
We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.
We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.
We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs
For as long as it takes
wherever you call us.
Amen

Song: Awake, Awake O Zion

1. AWAKE, AWAKE O ZION,
And clothe yourself with strength,
Shake off your dust
And fix your eyes on Him.
For you have been redeemed by
The precious blood of Jesus,
And now you sit enthroned with Him.

2. Our God reigns,
He is King of all the earth,
Our God reigns,
And He's seated on the throne.
Lift your voice,
And sing a song of praise,
Our God reigns,
The awesome Lord most high.

3. How beautiful the feet are
Of those who bring good news,
For they proclaim the peace that comes from God.
Rise up you holy nation,
Proclaim the great salvation,
And say to Zion "Your God reigns".

4. Our God reigns,
He is King of all the earth,
Our God reigns,
And He's seated on the throne.
Lift your voice,
And sing a song of praise,
Our God reigns,
The awesome Lord most high.

5. Emmanuel, Emmanuel,
Our God is with us now.
(Repeat)

6. Our God reigns,
He is King of all the earth,
Our God reigns,
And He's seated on the throne.
Lift your voice,
And sing a song of praise,
Our God reigns,
The awesome Lord most high.

7. The watchmen lift their voices,
And raise a shout of joy,
For He will come again.
Then all eyes will see the
Salvation of our God,
For He has redeemed Jerusalem.

8. Our God reigns,
He is King of all the earth,
Our God reigns,
And He's seated on the throne.
Lift your voice,
And sing a song of praise,
Our God reigns,
The awesome Lord most high.

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Blessing: Andy Dunsmore, Elm Hall Drive

Thank you for joining us and thanks again to the team who put their skills to great use each week.

The service next week, on the 6th December, will be one to really look forward to in that we will have a number of our young people will be sharing a Nativity story - It begins in Bethlehem.

You may be aware that the Methodist church has a Christmas Campaign for 2020 labelled God Is With Us, This seeks to share the good news through twenty four stories of individuals and their experiences of this extraordinary year. If you are able please take a look on the website.

Please also do have a look at the "The Way!", our circuit's new YouTube channel for children and young people.

I do hope that you have a good week. Let's finish this service with a prayer for Advent;

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the centre, the focus of our lives
always, and particularly this Advent time