

November 29, 2020
First Sunday of Advent
"I Believe in the Sun: Hope for Tomorrow"



"Raise your voice... do not be afraid." - Isaiah 40:9

"Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you living in better conditions" -
Hafiz

"The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof." -
Barbara Kingsolver

"Hope will never be silent."

"The only thing they have to look forward to is hope. And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow, hope for a better place to come to if the pressures at home are too great. Hope that all will be all right."

"I know you can't live on hope alone; but without hope, life is not worth living. So you, and you and you: you got to give them hope; you got to give them hope." - **Excerpts and quotes from Harvey Milk - San Francisco Supervisor and first openly gay official elected to the state of CA. The anniversary of his assassination was on November 27th.**

ORDER OF WORSHIP

We Gather

GREETING/WELCOME/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning and welcome! My name is Elisa Lucozzi and I am pastor to the beloved community that is Guilford Community Church. We're so glad you have joined us this morning for our first Sunday of Advent.

I'd like to particularly welcome the good folks of West Dover Congregational Church as they join us this morning and support their pastor by giving him a much deserved and needed rest.

With the rise in cases of COVID, we continue to gather online because we love and care about our congregation and our community, because we want to maintain physical distancing in a way that helps us to feel connected but also keeps us all safe. Although it is hard to be physically distant from one another especially at this time of year, we also know that it can't keep our hearts from connecting and we know it is indeed the best way of caring for one another right now. Let us keep creating new ways of being church because we know that being church has nothing to do with a building and everything to do with loving each other. Let us gather to be the church in a new way with a welcome wide enough for all.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ken – Kenya collection

A note from the creator of the series, Marcia McFee about the metaphor of “dark” and “light”: The metaphors of “light” and “dark” are sprinkled throughout human history and in most sacred texts. It is important to be mindful that its use has, in a racist society, created a sense that light is good and dark is bad. This contributes to white supremacy when this thinking is unexamined. In all the liturgy in this series, I have endeavored to be specific when I use the term dark or darkness, making sure that I specify “to what” I am referring, a dark night, for example. I have found numerous ways to describe this need for light, for clarity, without using the term “dark” or “darkness” in many instances, (“when our view is obscured,” “the place without light”). I invite you to be mindful as well. Indeed, recognizing the dark womb as a place of holiness and rebirth can help expand this metaphor to positive images for darkness as well.

Land Acknowledgement

So, as we begin today let us acknowledge and honor this land we occupy by honoring and acknowledging those First Nation people to whom this land belongs:

We gather here on the bank of the Broad Brook
In the shadow of the great Mount Wantastiquet
In the valley of the rushing Connecticut
to worship and discern together the call of God
to the United Church of Christ for these days,

let us know that we do so on the hunting grounds
and homelands of the Mahican and Penacook people,
as well as the southernmost members of the Abenaki
Tribe.

These people used this land since time immemorial
and are still among us in the present.

We offer them our gratitude and respect,
Our repentance and hope in solidarity with them...

**It is a Holy Communion we share of life on earth,
of past and present, of pain and reconciliation,
of mystery and majesty...let us begin.**

LIGHTING OF THE CANDLES

The history of humanity is fraught with pain—especially the pain that comes accompanied by fear and leads to oppression and violence of one people against another. This is the world into which Jesus was born and through which his teachings would challenge and call for transformation.

The opening words of an anonymous Jewish poet, “I believe in the sun, even when the sun is not shining,” were scrawled on a wall during the Holocaust. This theme song for our season calls us to examine our penchant for annihilating fear by annihilating each other. The power of narrative and music will call us to a different response, transformation and reconciliation through hope, love, joy, and peace.

Since our theme for this Advent and Christmas is about filling the night with lights and music, lighting a candle as we begin worship takes on even more significance. Perhaps you might want to create a moment of prayer every evening as the sun goes down, by lighting a candle and offering up a simple prayer. You are invited to light your candle at this time.

Crossing the Threshold

This Advent, we are looking to hear words of comfort, of challenge and of good news. The prophet Isaiah and the four Gospel authors were writing in a time when people needed desperately to hear all of these as well. This first week, Isaiah, the prophet, and Mark—the Gospel writer who published first—reassure the people that good news is beginning and yet they both say, “Make yourself ready! Raise your voices, change your hearts, get ready to be transformed, because now is the time.” Let us embrace hope that we can do what needs to be done to bring more light into the world.

I believe in the sun, I believe in the sun,
even when, even when it’s not shining.

I believe in the sun, I believe in the sun,
even when, even when it’s not shining.

Reader: The place without light
All: The place without light

Reader: The depth of night
All: The depth of night
Reader: The pit of unknowing
All: The pit of unknowing

Prayer

Holy One,
we thank you for the glimpses we catch
of your gift of untiring hope.
Even in the midst of fear,
of challenge, of struggle—
even when our view is obscured
by clouds of doubt,
ignite the flame of hope within us,
**All: ... that we might glow with its brilliance
from the inside out.**
**I believe in the sun,
I believe in the sun,
even when... even when...
it's not shining.**

Pastor: Help us face this bleak night of the soul
and embrace it as a womb of rebirth.

Amen.

Pastor: You are invited to light your Advent 1 candle of Hope at this time.

OPENING HYMN: #128 “Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying” by Philipp Nicolai 1599,
harmonized by J. S. Bach 1731. *Ellen Crockett, Perrin Scott, Patty Meyer, Connie Green, Fred
Breunig, Peter Amidon, Larry Crockett, Calvin Farwell*

Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

1. Wake, a - wake, for night is fly - ing; the watch-men on the
 2. All who hear the watch-ers sing - ing, whose hearts with deep de -
 3. Now let all the heav'ns a - dore you, let saints and an - gels

heights are cry - ing, "A - wake, Je - ru - sa - lem, a - rise!"
 light are spring - ing, a - wake and rise up from your gloom.
 sing be - fore you, let harp and cym - bal now u - nite.

Mid - night hears the wel - come voic - es and at the thrill - ing
 Forth the Sav - ior comes, all glo - rious, in grace ar - rayed, in
 Of one pearl each shin - ing por - tal, where we shall join the

cry re - joic - es; Christ comes, O Church, lift - up your eyes!
 truth vic - to - rious; our Star is risen, our Light is come!
 choir im - mor - tal in prais - es round your throne of light.

Rise up, with will - ing feet go forth, the Sav - ior meet:
 Now come, O bless - ed One, God's own be - lov - ed Son,
 Our eyes be - hold the sight, our ears fill with de - light:

Al - le - lu - ia! Lo, great and small, we an - swer all;
 Al - le - lu - ia! We haste a - long, an ea - ger throng,
 Al - le - lu - ia! There - fore we sing, our hymns we bring,

we fol - low now with joy the call,
 and glad - ly join the ad - vent song.
 in praise to you our voi - ces ring.

We Proclaim

Children's Time to Shine

CHILDREN'S STORY: Little Mole Finds Hope by Glenys Nellist, Sally Garland, Illustrator

PRAYER FOR THE CHILDREN

CHILDREN'S HYMN: "Are You Ready" Andy Davis's transcription/arrangement of "Are You Ready" (from the singing of the James Cleveland and the Metro Mass Choir). *Guilford*

Community Church Choir, Patty Meyer piano, Ron Kelley alto saxophone, Stefan Amidon percussion. From the 2019 Christmas Eve 11 pm service of the Guilford Community Church UCC.

OLD TESTAMENT READING *Al Franklin*

Isaiah 40: 1-11 (CEB)

Comfort, comfort my people!
says your God.
Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended,
that her penalty has been paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins!

A voice is crying out:
"Clear the Lord's way in the desert!
Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!"

Every valley will be raised up,
and every mountain and hill will be flattened.
Uneven ground will become level,
and rough terrain a valley plain.

The Lord's glory will appear,
and all humanity will see it together;
the Lord's mouth has commanded it."

A voice was saying:
"Call out!"
And another said,
"What should I call out?"
All flesh is grass;
all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field.

The grass dries up
and the flower withers
when the Lord's breath blows on it.
Surely the people are grass.

The grass dries up;
the flower withers,
but our God's word will exist forever.

Go up on a high mountain,
messenger Zion!

Raise your voice and shout,
messenger Jerusalem!
Raise it; don't be afraid;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

Here is the Lord God,
coming with strength,
with a triumphant arm,
bringing his reward with him
and his payment before him.

Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock;
he will gather lambs in his arms
and lift them onto his lap.
He will gently guide the nursing ewes.

HYMN: #115 "Comfort, Comfort Ye My People" Words by Johann Olearius, 1671, music by Louis Bourgeois 1551. *Patrice Murray, Mary Alice Amidon, Robin Davis, Rachel Johnson, Terry Sylvester, Peter Amidon, Andy Davis, and Tom Green*

Comfort, Comfort Ye My People

115

1. Com-fort, com - fort ye my peo - ple, speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
 2. Hark, the voice of one that cri - eth in the des - ert far and near,
 3. Make ye straight what long was crook - ed, make the rough - er pla - ces plain;

com-fort those who sit in dark-ness mourn-ing 'neath their sor - rows' load.
 bid-ding all to true re-pent-ance since the reign of God is here.
 let your hearts be true and hum-ble, as be - fits this ho - ly reign.

Speak ye to Je - ru - sa - lem of the peace that waits for them;
 Oh, that warn - ing cry o - bey! Now pre-pare for God a way;
 For the glo - ry of the Lord now o'er earth is shed a - broad;

tell them that their sins I cov - er, and their war-fare now is o - ver.
 let the val - leys rise in meet-ing and the hills bow down in greet-ing.
 and all flesh shall see the to - ken that God's word is nev - er bro - ken.

GOSPEL READING *Al Franklin*

Mark 1: 1-15 (CEB)

The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

Look, I am sending my messenger before you.
He will prepare your way,
a voice shouting in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.

John the Baptist was in the wilderness, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.

At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.

After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives and trust this good news!

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: Hymn #617 "Write These Words in Our Hearts"

SERMON: "I Believe Even When: The Audacity of Hope"

Advent Haiku 2019 #1 by Loey Powell

Advent comes and still
We are waiting for the hope
While clutching the past

*I invite you to pray with me - **May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, loving and gracious God***

Advent is the journey toward Christmas, but it is not Christmas. Christmas begins when Jesus is born. It is a time of imagining something new, something new and filled with hope, like a new

born baby, imagining what could be. Advent is known as a season of “waiting” - for the Christ Child to be born anew in our hearts, for God to “create a new heaven and a new earth”, and for Christ to come again, and the reign of God to come to this world.

But the “waiting” theme can have its problems too. As Rhonda Britten describes it in her book Fearless Living, “when we passively wait, we are living in fear”. What she is referring to is that when we wait for circumstances outside of ourselves to change in order to feel hope, peace, joy or love, or to live our lives fully, we rob ourselves of the chance to have those things right now. Let me say, though, that the “waiting” in Advent cannot be a passive waiting—the kind of waiting that believes that God doesn’t need us in order to make the world a safer, better place for all people.

This first Sunday of Advent, we remember and celebrate hope. Our first reading is from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is writing to a people in exile who are suffering. In some ways we have been exiled from one another and from the rhythms of life that help us feel settled. Of course, the Gospel writers draw on Isaiah frequently when referencing Jesus as a promise fulfilled. But it is important to say that Isaiah’s context stands on its own as instructive for our time.

The text in chapter 40 is part of 2nd Isaiah and has a much more comforting tone than the first set of chapters. It reminds me of what people have been saying about how shaming people into wearing masks just doesn’t work. No matter how defiant one is, we are still deep-down scared. We are sick of the bad news but denying it doesn’t make it go away. So, comfort is where Isaiah goes. God is giving us hope for tomorrow. “Speak tenderly” - understand one another’s deep pain that comes out in strange ways that we ourselves don’t fully understand. When we begin to listen, we begin to understand. When we hear each other’s pain, we are motivated to do the right thing for each other.

Mark’s Gospel is the first to come out, and the shortest. He gets right to the action-packed narrative of Jesus’ transformative ministry. No time for birth narratives here. John the Baptist is the herald in the origin story of Christianity - making paths for new life and making way for the Baptizing of the Spirit. Make yourself ready, because God is about to do something you didn’t expect.

The prophet’s message is “Raise your voice... raise it; don’t be afraid”. The message from Mark’s gospel is “Prepare the way”! Get over your fear because God is in need of you. But you, like many in the Bible may think – “me?!” like Moses, who felt wholly unqualified to lead his people, or Zechariah who was “too old” to father a child, or John, who would in turn herald the coming of our Savior. Even Mary’s first reaction to God’s call was – “that’s impossible!” I can only imagine God’s frustration with our cynical responses to God’s call, “but... I’m not good enough” or “What can one person do?”

Again, drawing on Fearless Living: “Fear is the gatekeeper of your comfort zone.” We live in a time when we are exposed to much information that causes fear and anxiety. How can we raise our voices and counteract the pervasive messages of fear and live more deeply into hope, love, joy and peace?

Because the theme of this worship series is about filling the night with lights and music, all the documentary films which accompany this series are about music: making music, the power of music to heal, and music as resistance.

The film for this week is called “Defiant Requiem”. It was chosen because the theme song for the series, “I Believe”, is based on an anonymous poem believed to be written by a Jewish person hiding from the Nazis in the 1940’s. “Defiant Requiem” is also about that time period.

The film tells the remarkable story of Rafael Schächter, a brilliant young Czech conductor, who was arrested and sent to Concentration Camp Terezín in 1941. He demonstrated moral leadership under the most brutal circumstances, determined to sustain courage and hope for his fellow prisoners by enriching their souls through great music. His most extraordinary act was to recruit 150 prisoners and teach them Verdi’s Requiem by rote in a dank cellar using a single score, over multiple rehearsals, and after grueling days of forced labor. The Requiem was performed on 16 occasions for fellow prisoners. The last, most infamous, performance occurred on June 23, 1944, before high-ranking SS officers from Berlin and the International Red Cross, to support the charade that the prisoners were treated well and flourishing.

The documentary features some remaining survivors of Terezin, who sang under Schächter’s direction, talking about how their singing of this music not only kept them alive, but also became an act of resistance in the face of unthinkable cruelty. It lifted up the power of music in defiance and agency, when there is no other way to respond to such evil. As one survivor stated so emphatically, “It gave us strength. We were able to say it to their face what we could otherwise not say.”

One section of “Defiant Requiem”, entitled “Day of Wrath”, says:

“The day of wrath, that day
Will dissolve the world in ashes
As foretold by David and the Sibyl!
How great the tremors there will be,
when the judge comes,
investigating everything strictly! Strictly!”

The prisoners were warning the Nazi soldiers of the judgement that was coming to them and they were telling them right to their faces.

It reminds me of one of my most favorite hymns. The lyrics say: “No storm can shake my inmost calm, when to that rock I’m clinging. Since love is lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?”

In a year post 2020, my fervent hope is that “the rest of the story”, hindsight of this moment in history, is that we were transformed in important ways in the midst of the groaning. One thing is clear: we will never be the same. Nor perhaps should we be. So the question is, “How do we open heartedly invite transformation we cannot see nor perhaps imagine at this moment?”

Here's the invitation during this Advent: look for ways that you can prepare the way in your own heart, and help make a way for others who are struggling to raise their voices, even in the face of fear. And take to heart the words of so many of the angels in the Christmas story: "Do not be afraid!"

God is making us ready to be messengers of hope, flying in the face of fear, in a world that desperately needs it. This Advent, let us fill the night with music and light, and affirm and act on the reasons why we can still "believe, even when" we are discouraged. Amen.

The Witness of Music

Our worship series this Advent calls on the power of sung poetry that inspires those who hear it to a brighter tomorrow. It has been a difficult time in this pandemic for singing to be restricted. In its absence, we have been reminded just how important it is to sing together. Indeed, music has often been the soundtrack of hope. So, our astounding GCC choir has been hard at work to prepare a season of music appreciation for you, as well as reflection on the power of music. Someday, we will once again be able to join our voices in song in our Sanctuary. But for now, rather than turn away from music in sorrow, we will turn toward the story of music and deepen our appreciation of its role in healing, change, and reconciliation.

This morning, we present to you the theme anthem for this series that features the poetry of an anonymous Jewish person during the Holocaust. These words were found scrawled on a wall and have now been shared with the world, reminding us of the resilience of hope. May we never forget what can happen when evil is allowed to go unchecked and may we always use our music, our art, our poetry, even our simple acts of kindness, as inspiration to create goodness, not evil, in this world.

ANTHEM: "I Believe, Even When" By Mark A. Miller, *Sung by the virtual Guilford Community Church Virtual Choir, Cathy Hess soloist*

WE RESPOND

Prayers in the Stillness

Leader: I invite you to get in a comfortable position of rest.

I invite you to get as quiet and still as you can.

I invite you to take a deep breath and a deep listening posture—perhaps eyes closed or fixed on a candle—as we prepare for a time of prayer.

The gentle pull of God
is often lost amidst the rush
of all the obligations which lay a claim on us.

Yet just beyond the frantic pace
our restless feet have trod,
lie deep, still pools of quietness—

the dwelling place of God.

O take me to that secret place
where lost in wonder and in awe,
the moment comes and I rejoice
to be and be with God.

Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Be the air I breathe
Meet me in the stillness, Lord
Free me to receive. Amen.

Litany of Belief *Ruth Wilmot*

In times when humanity disappoints,
perhaps when even our own thoughts and behaviors disappoint,
it is an important act to call out, name and claim, the consequences of our wrongs.
And in times of distress it is a prophetic act to call out,
name and claim, our belief in the hope for tomorrow.

Leader: I believe that we have looked the other way too many times AND
All: I believe that we are capable of facing reality and working for change.

I believe that our fear of difference has robbed us of compassion AND
**I believe that we can look deeper and hold onto the things
that we have in common.**

I believe that our fear of doubt makes us stop asking tough questions AND
I believe that asking tough questions in the face of injustice is faithful.

I believe that our grief over those we have lost has consumed our hearts AND
I believe that we are trying to carry each other in that grief.

I believe that our fear of doubt makes us stop asking tough questions AND
I believe that asking tough questions in the face of injustice is faithful.

We believe, even when we are discouraged.
**We believe, that when we are discouraged,
raising our voices for justice will offer us hope!**

Now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us using whatever words help us, to embody its promise. May we bring about one small glimpse of the (kingdom) of God, a kin-dom where all are well, all are fed and free, where all are whole, where all know love, where all are beloved.

Let us pray: Our Father, (Our Father/Mother, Our Creator) who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom (kin-dom) 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 trespasses against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom (kin-dom) and the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: #278 “Hear Our Prayer, Oh Lord”

OFFERTORY

CALL TO OFFERING

Supporting the church and the mission of the church is more important than ever. You can still send in your weekly offerings to the church via US mail **38 Church Dr. Guilford, VT 05301** or consider using our online "offering plate" by going to the church's website and clicking the PayPal donation button on the home page. So now let us gather up all these offerings as well as the offering of our time and talents and dedicate them to being beacons of hope in the world.

DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Believe, with a hopeful heart! Believe, and shine your light! Believe, because the song we sing is sung for all! And now let the weak say, “I am strong;” let the poor say, “I am rich because of what our God has done for us.” Believe!

WE GO FORTH

CLOSING HYMN: #114 “O Come O Come Emmanuel” Latin 9th century text set to a French melody, and harmonized by Thomas Helmore 1954. *Sung by the Guilford Community Church Virtual Choir, Perrin Scott soloist, Patty Meyer organ.*

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Unison

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
 2. O come, thou Day - spring, come and cheer our spir - its by thine
 3. O come, thou Wis - dom from on high, and or - der all things,
 4. O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind all peo - ples in one

Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here, un -
 ad - vent here; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night, and
 far and nigh; to us the path of knowl - edge show, and
 heart and mind; bid en - vy, strife and quar - rels cease; fill

Refrain (Harmony)

til the Son of God ap - pear.
 death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
 cause us in her ways to go. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -
 the whole world with heav - en's peace.

man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

BENEDICTION

If you have a candle lit hold it high for the Benediction

We wait for justice
but we do not wait to work for change;

We wait for restored health
but we do not wait to work to heal;

We wait for wholeness
but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;

We wait for peace
but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred.

And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news
that the sun still shines even on cloudy days,
fill the night left by sadness with messages of hope.
Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep that hope alive in you
and that spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation.

Raise your voices and repeat after me...

“do not be afraid!”

“do not be afraid!”

Amen!

THREEFOLD AMEN

POSTLUDE: “Now Bless the God of Israel” Trad. English Melody, arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, words by Ruth Duck

Additional resources for prayer and reflection:

A Poem:

[Making the House Ready for the Lord by Mary Oliver](#)

[Comfort ye, Every Valley \(Handel's Messiah\) Gramophone Chorus feat. Ebenezer Antwi](#)

Family movie of the week: **A Charlie Brown Christmas** is available at the Brooks Memorial Library and will also air on PBS and PBS Kids on Sunday, December 13, 2020 at 7:30 p.m. ET / 6:30 p.m. CT. If you're already an Apple TV+ subscriber, you can start streaming A Charlie Brown Christmas on December 4, 2020.

Adult/Youth film of the week: **Defiant Requiem**

Movie trailer - <https://youtu.be/dgimWmMqav4>

For more information, check out [https:// www.defiantrequiem.org](https://www.defiantrequiem.org)

Watch the entire movie [here](#): Included with Amazon Prime video