



St. Mary's Episcopal Church

November 28, 2021

Psalm 25; Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

"Onward Through the Darkness – Forward to the Light."

Message by The Rev. Michael Burke

*The end of the road's still far away
But the travelling's better by the light of day
This hour of darkness is the time to dance
Lay down your burdens—give the beat a chance...
- Bruce Cockburn, Down Here Tonight*

Good morning. Happy New Year.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the new church liturgical year.

It is a time of hopeful expectation.

It is a time of foreboding and fear

It is a time of togetherness.

It is a time of separation

Well, which is it?

As we begin this new church year, this holy season of Advent, which is it?

By a show of hands:

A time of fear and foreboding?

Or a time of miraculous expectation and hopeful anticipation?

It is both/and, isn't it?

In a world where everything is hyper-polarized, and people are either "for" something or "against" something, and people find themselves on one "side" or another.

The stock market on Friday plunged over 900 points, we saw new restrictions of international travel. 47 people died in as many shootings over the past weekend in the U.S.¹; and the latest trend is for flash mobs of dozens of people to quickly descend on a store in the middle of business hours and ransack and loot it within minutes before running out again. Wow!

¹ Source: <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/last-72-hours>

And yet in families across the nation, on Thanksgiving Day, friends and loved ones gathered to be thankful and shared one another's company in gratitude and peace. They joined their hands in prayer, and grandmothers laughed with their little ones on their laps. Some of us took to the woods on skis and a friend sent me a picture she took the other night of two red foxes on her back deck, curiously staring up at a flying squirrel on a nearby spruce tree.

This world of ours – it is frightening and beautiful, all at the same time.

Similarly, the beginning of Advent comes to us as a “both/and”.

The Gospel passage from Luke, likely written within a generation of the traumatic siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its glorious second temple by the Roman armies in the year 70, is filled with apocalyptic imagery. It borrows language and imagery from other apocalyptic books of the Hebrew scriptures such as the Book of Daniel, and to read it, it feels as though the world itself is crashing into chaos.

It speaks of distress on the earth and nations confused. “People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world,” it says. And yet, shall we flee into drunkenness and denial? Shall we squander our resources as though the world has no tomorrow? (That's the sense of the word “dissipate.” In the Gospel reading.) Shall we be overcome by worries and anxieties, crawling into our beds and never coming out again, or letting our fear turn outward into bitterness, cynicism, and contentiousness?

No, the Gospel of Luke counsels. Now when these things begin to take place, be alert, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Redemption: the making of all things right again in the fulfillment of the ages, what the scriptures speak of us as the “time of Christ's return.”

This “return” is one of the three “arrivals” we await during Advent: If you listen carefully to the words of the hymns and readings during Advent, you can hear it there. There it was in our opening hymn, “O Come O Come, Emmanuel...”:

“O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light

Amidst themes of homesickness and longing, we anticipate the birth of dawn in the midst of darkness. Christ the Light of the World, born into what is, for us, the longest night of the year.

Redemption and peace, while the world seems to be tumbling down around us.
This is the coming of Christ into our hearts and lives.

Advent is a time of paradox. When things are not always what they first seem to be.
It is not a time of either/or, but a time of both/and.

The cacophony of the world around us reminds us that we are still on the road and not home yet. “Home is physical, but also metaphorical – who is to say which is our “real” home... [But] home is something we seek and something we are called to build together.”²

And because what shall be, is not yet... ... we are homesick here:

Awaiting the restoration of all things, longing for a world which is enlivened by the Spirit of God within us,

In the words of our liturgy:

that we too may dream of the home you created, O God, —
of the lion lying down with the lamb,
of justice rolling like a mighty river,
of swords beaten into plowshares,
of prisoners set free.

May we remember this home, and then,
empowered with your Spirit,
grant us strength and courage for the work of home-making for all of creation.

This home-making is the work God have given us to do. This thing we call “ministry.” In our homes, our neighborhoods, our places of employment, in our relationships everywhere... it is the work:
Of faithfulness. Of forgiveness. Of healing. Of compassion. Of justice. Of love.

We long for that future world, that time, that home, the promise of which we hear in John the Baptist’s preaching of repentance and change of heart, in the wilderness alongside the river Jordan.,

We long for that sense of home, and we await the birth of the Christ child in the manger, born into a dangerous world of vengeful kings like Herod and the armies of empire which know no morality but sheer brute force.

And yet the signs and symbols of coming change are around us even now.

Mary seeks refuge and shelter in her cousin Elizabeth’s home, where the shame of her condition cannot follow her. Together, they laugh at the descending darkness and the child leaps for joy in her womb.

The Magi travel far from their own homes, guided by the stars in the night sky, simply to pay homage to the Christ child, and being warned in a dream, they avoid Herod by taking another way home.

These are the sacred stories of Advent. So begins the liturgical story and season anew.

And it begins... In the worst of times. In the best of times. In darkness, alive with possibility.
Every step deeper into darkness bringing us closer to the light.

² A Sanctified Art. See: <https://sanctifiedart.org/>

Ultimately, even in our homesickness, we come to discover anew that God alone is our home, our place of dwelling and being. And the mystery of this holy season, and that of Christmas to follow, is that even while we stay alert, listening to the night, watching in the gloaming hours, something is growing in our souls, as we prepare a place in our hearts in which our faith may be reborn.

This weekend, many of you may have been surprised by an unexpected gift on your doorstep, or out in the hallway of your apartment building. Thanks to more than a dozen dedicated drivers from St. Mary's, over 250 packages were delivered, each containing a helping hand bag to share with those in need, an Advent devotional booklet to guide us prayerfully through these days leading up to Christmas. And a coffee mug with a shining emblem of a starburst sun rising over the Chugach Mountains, and bearing the words "Grateful Hearts – Joyful Hope." Inside was a pledge card, an important and vital way for us all to rally, support, and strengthen the faith community that is – all of us! - the People of St. Mary's.

Despite a world around us seeming to be in tatters, engulfed by pandemic divisions, we remain steadfast in faith. Through almost twenty months, we have sacrificed our own desires to safeguard the vulnerable. We have continued to pray with the lonely, feed those with food insecurity, house those seeking shelter, and bear one another's burdens and celebrate one another's joys. Even now, your parish leaders are making plans for bringing us back together again physically for hybrid worship services in which those who choose to do so may gather together again in-person. Alleluia! Watch your newsletters. Its been a long time coming.

Here, in the worst of times, God has strengthened us to be our best selves.

St. Mary's has been battered financially over these many months, but has an underlying strength. Inflation has driven many of our costs higher than ever and we have fewer people doing more things. These are hard times, when faith really matters.

If God has made it possible, please help. This is our time of need. There are three ways you can respond in support, two by completing your 2021 pledge electronically, and one involving the good old fashioned U.S. Postal Service mail.

But we are behind this year, and time is of the essence. I invite you to prayerfully respond by completing your pledge as you are able, but please - do so in the next week.

If you didn't receive a pledge packet and gift, do not lose heart. We still have a few deliveries being completed, and we ask that you let us know at Michael@Godsview.org, or Dawn@Godsview.org, so we can make sure to include you. If your address is out of town, watch your mailbox.

We are close to home, but we are not yet there. Sometimes the last mile on the way home from a road trip seems to be the longest mile of all.

With grateful hearts and joyful hope – and with home in sight...

Onward through the darkness – forward to the Light. Amen.

Scripture Readings appointed for today:

THE COLLECT: O Gracious and Lifegiving God, in this time of a most holy and pregnant darkness, between what has been and what will be; kindle the flame within us, even as the Christ child is formed within his mother's womb. Let us always keep alert, for the arrival of Christ within us, making his home amongst us in this mortal life, and in the fulfillment of all things at the ends of the age; all this we ask through the One who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And 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.

PSALM 25¹

The St. Helena Psalter

To you, O God, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you;
let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

Let none who look to you be put to shame;
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.

Show me your ways, O God,
and teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.

Remember, O God, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.

Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, O God.

Gracious and upright are you;
therefore you teach sinners in your way.

You guide the humble in doing right
and teach your way to the lowly.

All your paths are love and faithfulness
to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.

Jesus said, "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."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch 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

To Raise The Morning Star

Rising like lightspill from this sleeping town
Like the light in a lover's eyes
Rising from the hearts of the sleepers all around
All those dreamers trying to light the sky

Burning, all night long
Burning, at the gates of dawn
Singing, near and far
Singing, to raise the morning star

Rising like lightning in the pregnant air
It's electric, I can feel its might
I can feel it crackling in my nails and hair,
Makes me feel like I'm dancing on feet of light

Burning, all night long
Burning, at the gates of dawn
Singing, near and far
Singing, to raise the morning star



Singing for the yellow and the brown and the black
For the red and the white people, too
Dovetailing strong points with the things we lack
Singing for the people like me and you

Burning, all night long
Burning, at the gates of dawn
Singing, near and far
Singing, to raise the morning star

Lyrics by Bruce Cockburn.

In the New Dark Age

*(From the album "Forrest Full of Wolves"
by Bill Mallonee*

Bring all the things....that you bought
Bring all those things...that you lost
Bring her that gold ring...bring her the
dross

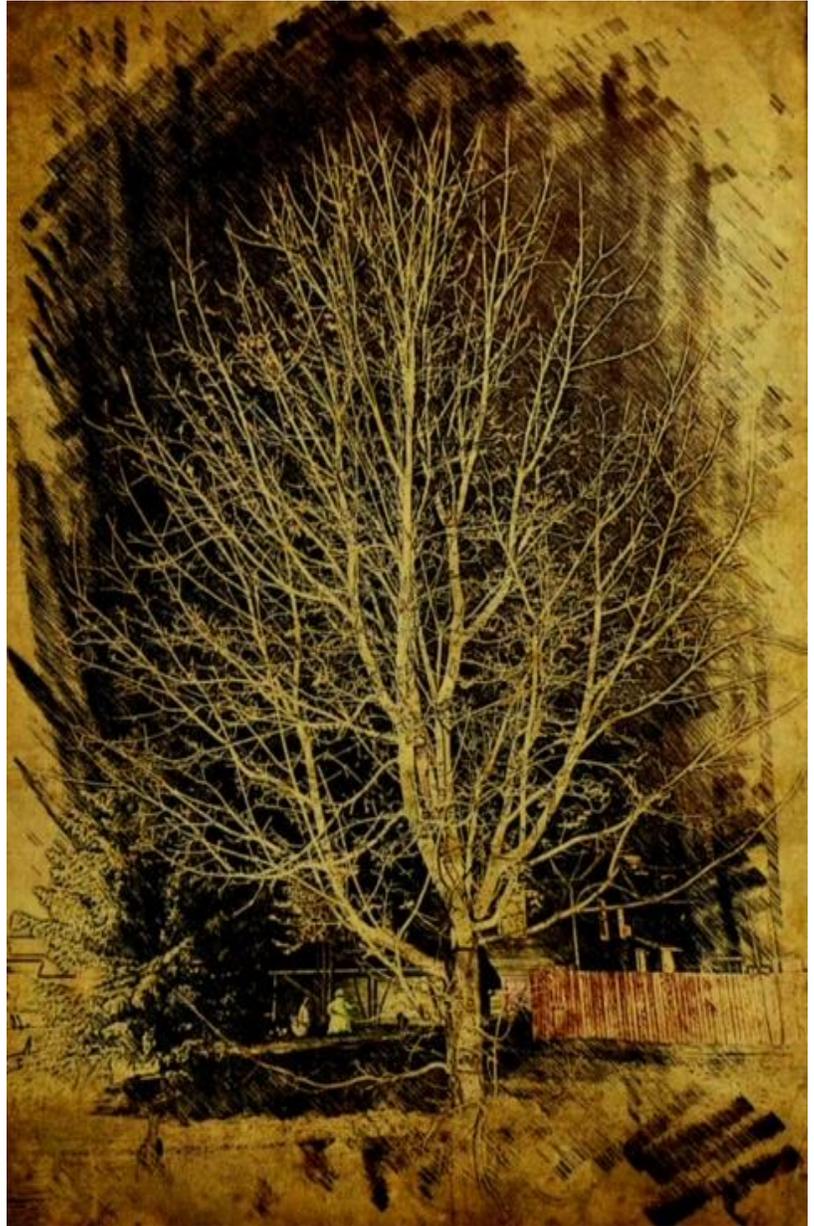
Chorus:

*In the new dark age
when you're waiting for a light from above
In the new dark age....
best thing you can do is fall in love*

Bring all of your poems
bring all of your passion
All those discarded notes and the
melodies just not happen-ing
Bring everything you'd like to forget &
those parts of you not even born yet

Bring all of those ghosts
from your empty home
Kill all of your fears;
crash all of your drones
Beat your swords into plowshares...

...and She'll take you for Her own



Graphic by M. Burke, 11-23-2021

"Lovers In A Dangerous Time"

Don't the hours grow shorter as the days go by?
You never get to stop and open your eyes
One day you're waiting for the sky to fall
The next you're dazzled by the beauty of it all
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time

These fragile bodies of touch and taste
This vibrant skin, this hair like lace
Spirits open to the thrust of grace
Never a breath you can afford to waste

When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time

When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your love's a crime
Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight
Got to kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight

When you're lovers in a dangerous time
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
When you're lovers in a dangerous time
Lovers in a dangerous time

Lyrics by Bruce Cockburn.





Creation Dream

Centred on silence
Counting on nothing
I saw you standing on the sea
And everything was
Dark except for
Sparks the wind struck from your hair
Sparks that turned to
Wings around you
Angel voices mixed with seabird cries
Fields of motion
Surging outward
Questions that contain their own replies...

You were dancing
I saw you dancing
Throwing your arms toward the sky
Fingers opening
Like flares
Stars were shooting everywhere
Lines of power
Bursting outward
Along the channels of your song
Mercury waves flashed
Under your feet
Shots of silver in the shell-pink dawn...

Lyrics by Bruce Cockburn.

You are the light

You are the light in my dark world
You are the fire that will always burn
You are the light, you are the light
You are the light in my dark world

Oh how you shine in my time of darkness
Oh how you shine when everything seems hopeless
You know how to help me when I can't stand on my own
Don't let go now

You are the light in my dark world
You are the fire that will always burn
You are the light, you are the light
You are the light in my dark world

Oh how you shine in my time of indecision
Oh how you shine, gonna give this girl some vision
You know how to let go when I can't stand on my own
Don't let go now

You are the light in my dark world
You are the fire that will always burn
You are the light, you are the light
You are the light in my dark world

You know how to let go when I can't stand on my own
Don't let go now

You are the light in my dark world
You are the fire that will always burn
You are the light, you are the light
You are the light in my dark world

You are the light in my dark world
You are the fire that will always burn
You are the light, you are the light
You are the light in my dark world

Songwriter: Marvin Etzioni

"Yahweh" – U2

Take these shoes
Click clacking down some dead end street
Take these shoes
And make them fit
Take this shirt
Polyester white trash made in nowhere
Take this shirt
And make it clean, clean
Take this soul
Stranded in some skin and bones
Take this soul
And make it sing

Yahweh, Yahweh
Always pain before a child is born
Yahweh, Yahweh
Still I'm waiting for the dawn

Take these hands
Teach them what to carry
Take these hands
Don't make a fist
Take this mouth
So quick to criticise
Take this mouth
Give it a kiss

Yahweh, Yahweh
Always pain before a child is born
Yahweh, Yahweh
Still I'm waiting for the dawn

Still waiting for the dawn, the sun is coming up
The sun is coming up on the ocean
This love is like a drop in the ocean
This love is like a drop in the ocean

Yahweh, Yahweh
Always pain before a child is born
Yahweh, tell me now
Why the dark before the dawn?

Take this city
A city should be shining on a hill
Take this city
If it be your will
What no man can own, no man can take
Take this heart
Take this heart
Take this heart
And make it break

Words and music by U2



"The Dark Before The Dawn"

Andrew Petersen, from *The Burning Edge of Dawn* LP, October 2015

I've been waiting for the sun
To come blazing up out of the night like a
bullet from a gun
Till every shadow is scattered, every dragon's
on the run
Oh, I believe, I believe that the light is gonna
come
And this is the dark, this is the dark before the
dawn

I've been waiting for some peace
To come raining down out of the heavens on
these war-torn fields
All creation is aching for the sons of God to
be revealed
Oh, I believe, I believe that the victory is
sealed
The serpent struck but it was crushed beneath
His heel

Oh, I know the wind can bring the lightning
Oh, I know the lightning brings the rain
Oh, I know the storm can be so frightening
But that same wind is gonna blow that storm
away
Blow that storm away

Lord, I'm waiting for a change
I'm waiting for the change

So I'm waiting for the King
To come galloping out of the clouds while the
angel armies sing
He's gonna gather His people in the shadow
of His wings
And I'm gonna raise my voice with the song
of the redeemed
'Cause all this darkness is a small and passing
thing

This is the storm, this is the storm
The storm before the calm
This is the pain, the pain before the balm
This is the cold, the cold

It's the cold before the warm
These are the tears, the tears before the song
This is the dark
Sometimes all I see is this darkness
Well, can't you feel the darkness
This is the dark before the dawn

I'm just waiting for a change
Change
Lord, I'm waiting for the change

I had a dream that I was waking
At the burning edge of dawn
And I could see the fields of glory
I could hear the sower's song

I had a dream that I was waking
At the burning edge of dawn
And all that rain had washed me clean
All the sorrow was gone

I had a dream that I was waking
At the burning edge of dawn
And I could finally believe
The king had loved me all along

I had a dream that I was waking
At the burning edge of dawn
I saw the sower in the silver mist
And He was calling me home



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"This grand show is eternal. It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never all dried at once; a shower is forever falling; vapor is ever rising. Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn, as the round earth rolls."

— John Muir, [John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir](#)

Bruce Cockburn

Down Here Tonight (from the album, *World of Wonders*)

Sweet wind blowing off the bay
Sweeping the heat of the day away
Making the leaves of the palm trees sway
Down here tonight everything's okay

Net's coming in and the anchor's down
Hour of darkness comes around
Stars dust the sky and the lights go on
Soon tonight will be filled with song

[Chorus]

Pans gonna play and the fire burn bright
Talking drums say everything's all right
Beating of the sea sends a message
to the far starlight

"We're doing okay down here tonight"



The end of the road's still far away
But the travelling's better by the light of day
This hour of darkness is the time to dance
Lay down your burdens—give the beat a
chance

Pans gonna play and the fire burn bright
Talking drums say everything's all right
Beating of the sea sends a message to the far
starlight
"We're doing okay down here tonight"

Endnotes:

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If I had my life to live over ...
I would take more chances, I would take more
Trips, I would scale more mountains,
I would swim more rivers, and I would
Watch more sunsets. I would eat more
Ice cream and fewer beans.
I would have more actual troubles
And fewer imaginary ones. You see ...
I was one of those people who lived
Prophylactically and sensibly and sanely,
Hour after hour and day after day
... I've been
One of those people who never went anywhere without
A thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a
Raincoat and a parachute
If I had it to do all over again,
I'd travel lighter, much lighter,
Than I have.
I would start barefoot earlier
In the spring, and I'd stay that way
Later in the fall. And I would
Ride more merry-go-rounds, and
Catch more gold rings, and greet
More people, and pick more flowers,
And dance more often. If I had it
To do all over again.
But you see,
I don't.

--Nadine Stair, 85-year-old patient of Bernie Siegel, facing death (As quoted in
*his Peace, Love and Healing: Bodymind Communication and the Path to Self-
Healing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 245-46.

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But love is risky. A lover is a risk taker. Loving children is risky, marriage is risky, loving people of other nations is risky, and loving people in church is most risky of all. The more we love the more we are likely to get hurt. Jesus took the risk of loving and was crucified. But what is not acceptable is for us to hide our talent for loving in the ground and refuse to take the risk of loving.

—Robert Brow, “Gold to invest,” November 17, 1996, Christ Church, brow.on.ca.



*To laugh ...
is to risk appearing the fool.*

*To weep ...
is to risk appearing sentimental.*

*To reach out for another ...
is to risk involvement.*

*To expose feelings ...
is to risk exposing our true self.*

*To place your ideas and dreams before
the crowd ... is to risk loss.*

*To love ...
is to risk not being loved in return.*

To live ... is to risk dying.

To hope ... is to risk despair.

To try at all ... is to risk failure.

*But, to risk, we must, because the
greatest hazard in life ...
is to risk nothing.*

—Leo Buscaglia



The Gloaming, written by: Anne G³ @TheInkTru

*In the gloaming
I did sit
unperceived
absorbed
in thought*

*Dusk's
descending
misty veil
creatures stir
life prevails*

*Throughout
the ink-stained
shadowy night
tortured images
rise and fall*

*Betwixt between
the undergrowth
hoots and howls
the wild
calls*

Unfinished...

³ From: <https://spillwords.com/the-gloaming/>
