



**December 6, 2020**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**

**Introduction**

**Invitation**

**Prelude**

**Call to Worship:**

In worship, we grow in God's grace so that we can minister to others. Whether we are in the sanctuary or in our own homes, God is with us, and we are connected in Jesus Christ. Let us worship together!

**Lighting the Advent Wreath: Preparation**

**Hymn:** "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

**Reading the Word:** Isaiah 40:1-11

**Ministry of Music:** Bevan Bloemendaal

**Message:** "Preparation"

**Prayer:** (from Ministry Matters)

God of tenderness and love, breathe your grace into our lives. Forgive our wandering ways, and guide us along your paths of peace. When we lose our way, and forget the reason and purpose of this season, carry us back to you. Lead us up to that high mountain of faith and hope, so that we might truly proclaim: "Here is our God!" In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

**Words of Assurance:** "Comfort, O comfort my people," says our God. You have served your term. Your penalty is paid. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer:**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

**A Service of Holy Communion**

**Hymn:** "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"

**Blessing**

## God's People Are Comforted

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.



**SERMON TRANSCRIPT  
GIVEN BY  
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson**

## **Message “Preparation”**

### **Rev. Dr. Debra Hanson**

Being taken into exile and held there against your will has to be difficult to say the least. The Israelites who were in Babylon struggled with who they were and how - or even if - to trust that God even cared about them. And then along comes Isaiah who offers them hope and a reminder that they were part of the hope. Their work was to trust in God's promises and prepare the way, by announcing, “Here is your God!”

The One who is coming will change everything and make everything new: “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them.” When we prepare the way for Emmanuel, God-with-us, to enter our world, we trust in God's arrival, in God keeping the promises, and recognize that there is a new and better way ahead of us.

When people are exiled, they experience a type of imprisonment. Many create their own prison walls, whether it is being incarcerated, becoming addicted to something, and other types of cutting themselves off from others. Some may feel like they are exiled during the spread of COVID-19; others may feel isolated for other reasons, such as being in a nursing facility with few visitors. All of us know the feeling of being alone and lonely at some time in our lives.

Advent reminds us again to look for God to act, seek God's presence even in the midst of any kind of isolation or self-built prison walls, and then pave the way for God to act. This week, Gary Melville from the United Methodist Foundation sent an Advent reflection that talks about digging deep within to find our spiritual center, to connect with God and each other, even when that doesn't seem possible. I would like to share part of that reflection with you. It is written by a man named Phil, an inmate in prison.

He titles it: “An Advent - Christmas Reflection from Behind the Walls 2020”

Let's face it, these are tumultuous times for all of us. Time in which I find myself often gazing from my cell window and wondering, what it might be that you yourself are seeing from your window? For me, I see a co-mingling of sorrow and joy. The leaves are changing and so are we. Colder weather is moving in, and the ways in which we now interact with one another are dramatically altered. So much suffering abounds, often it is difficult to know how best to help. Many have become cynical, fearful, disillusioned, and the stress and anxiety and frustration can get overwhelming. I get it, I have my moments too. However, the longer I gaze out my window, the more deeply I feel drawn to go deeper within myself.

From this vantage point, the window of my heart, my Advent journey is beginning. I can see that many of us have grown older, more infirm, are struggling to make ends meet, and are wrestling with the innumerable uncertainties life now challenges us with. Many more of us are also grieving the losses of both loved ones and the way life used to be. In the windows of my own nostalgic moments, I fondly recall your face and the many memories we share . . . It is the memory of your face, like a shining star to me, that brings me both solace and hope. Comfort knowing that we may be separated, but we are far from being apart.

For a few moments I wished I could turn back the hands of time. Then a realization struck me, Advent calls us forward, not backwards. We have grown since last we met, and each of us is on a journey now to transcend who we are at this moment. Like the Wise folk of old who took a risk, . . . and dared to follow that bright shining star into an uncertain future, so too are we called to do the same, to step out in faith. Advent journeys are about learning to trust, and about learning to see through the darkness and into the light. Often one baby step at a time. Advent feeds us the nutrients we most need to birth new life in us. Christmas dispels the dark, transcends the fear, in the humble gathering where we meet once again at the manger of Christ and together are fed. May we be stars for others along the way to the celebration. See you at the manger of Love! Phil

As we remember the hope that Phil has and the hope that helped the Israelites prepare to leave Babylon, may we remember our own call to offer hope, to prepare the way for Christ in our world. We live in difficult times, but we can trust that at the end of this long pandemic tunnel, political divisions, and tensions in our world, we will find renewal, healing, and wholeness.

In the meantime, we can prepare the way by offering our love and support to others who struggle, supporting those who have lost loved ones, and caring for the lonely, lost, and alone. As the Church of Jesus Christ, we can make a difference. Let us be prepared, let us offer hope, and let us share the joy. Amen.



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# PRAYER LIST

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Bill and Gayle Gardei

Erin

Evelyn New & Family

Erika

Earl

Amy

Jim

Juliann

Jayne Griffin & Family

Robert (Babe) Williams and Family

Jim Slater

Charles Gilman

Fickenscher Family

Amelia and Michelle

Barbara Glidden

Gil & Marilyn Stebbins

Danny Westbrook

Dan Strange

Bobbie Noble

Pixie & Wayne Balt

Brandon

Fred

Durgin Pines Residents & Workers

Riverside Rest Home Residents & Workers

Those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19

Those in nursing and assisted living care

Our Denomination

Our Church Family



# WHO WE ARE

## FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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