

Advent in a time of AIDS

Keep the Promise

*Worship for the First Sunday in Advent following World AIDS Day
Ecumenical Prayer Cycle ~ Liberia, Sierra Leone*

This service puts together the Advent texts in the common lectionary, Year C, with the theme, "Keep the Promise." This follows the campaigns of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) and the World AIDS Campaign and the theme of accountability for World AIDS Day 2006. The EAA's focus for World AIDS Day is gaining access to treatment for the millions who have HIV but no access to the drugs that would prolong their lives. According to UNAIDS/WHO there are an estimated 6 million people who are living with HIV who have no possibility of getting the medicine which could mean the difference between hope and death. In Africa, many of the estimated 12 million AIDS orphans (both their mother and father have died of AIDS-related diseases) are themselves infected with HIV. The First Sunday of Advent is an appropriate time to consider the effects of this disease, apocalyptic in its scope, and how we Christians become part of God's promises in its midst. Ideas for continuing the theme throughout Advent are also included below.

In 2006, World AIDS Day (1 December) falls on a Friday. This liturgy is based on the text for the first Sunday of Advent (3 December), but churches may also choose to commemorate World AIDS Day a week earlier (Christ the King- 26 November) or on 1 December.

This ecumenical service has been prepared by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and is available in English, French and Spanish. Please feel free to use this service in whole or in part, and to adapt it as necessary to your local situation. When you use this service, please give appropriate acknowledgment to the service: Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance www.e-alliance.ch

Special thanks to Rev. Terry MacArthur for preparing this liturgy.

Musical Preparation

Greeting

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise
Come, Emmanuel, come.

A righteous Branch shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.
Come, Emmanuel, come.

My people will be saved and they will live in safety.
Come, Emmanuel, come. Fulfill your promise.

adapted from Jeremiah 33:14-16

Hymn

Suggestions: Come, thou long-expected Jesus, *Charles Wesley*
Savior of the nations, come, *St. Ambrose*
Watcher, tell us of the night, *John Bowring*

A person brings in a basket of empty pill boxes. Or this could be one person with a basket of pill boxes and several others empty handed. This might be accompanied by a flute or other instrument playing the first part of "O come, O come, Emmanuel".

Lament

The reader lifts up an empty pill box.

God of hope,
when are the days coming
in which everyone living with HIV
will have access to the treatment, care and support they need to live a productive life?

If there can be a second reader, he or she lifts up another empty pill box. If there is only one reader that person takes another empty pill box.

When are the days coming in which no newborn will enter the world already infected because the mother couldn't get the anti-retroviral drugs, which prevent transmission of HIV from mother to fetus?

If there can be a third reader, he or she lifts up another empty pill box. If there is only one reader that person takes another empty pill box

When are the days coming in which children don't have to watch their father die because there was no nurse to administer his medication?

Reader 1 When will governments keep the promise?
Reader 2 When will leaders keep the promise?
Reader 3 When will I keep the promise of loving my neighbor as I love myself?
Reader 1 When will you keep your promise, God, for justice and righteousness?

The basket of pill boxes is dumped unto the altar table.

**Sung Response O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.**

Reader 2 Do you hear the lonely, mourning in exile,
the cries of a young girl who will never know her father's hand,
the plea of a teenager forced to raise his sisters and brothers,
the desperation of a grandmother with 10 grandchildren to feed
for whom there is only loss, only grief, only empty promises?

Reader 1 When will drug companies keep the promise?
Reader 2 When will doctors and nurses keep the promise?
Reader 3 When will donors keep the promise?
Reader 1 When will you keep your promises, God, that your people will be saved?

The reader picks up a couple of pill boxes and hurls them angrily in a safe direction.

**Sung Response O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy shades of night
and death's dark shadows put to flight**

Reader 3 Can you see the dark shadows of death,
those daughters selling themselves to buy food,
those worrying about what will happen to their children,
those weeping in the night waiting for redemption?

Reader 1 When will the pastors and priests keep the promise?
Reader 2 When will churches keep the promise?

Reader 3 When will I keep the promise?

Reader 1 When will you keep your promises, God, that your people will live in safety?

The reader sweeps some of the pill boxes from the altar table unto the floor.

Sung Response **O come, thou Staff of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny.
From depths of hell thy people save
and give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!**

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Psalm 25 (slightly adapted)

To you, O Lord,
I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame;
do not let me be put to shame;

do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.

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

The reader waits at this point for a couple of moments and then continues.

for you I wait all day long.
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord,
your mercy
and of your steadfast love,
your steadfast love
for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore God instructs sinners in the way.

God leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble God's way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep God's covenant and decrees.

Epistle Reading: 1 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.

Sung Alleluia

Gospel Reading: Luke 21:25-36

“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.”

Sermon

Hymn

Suggestions: Lo he comes with clouds descending
My Lord, what a mourning? (In some translations: ‘My Lord, what a morning’)

During the hymn the empty pill boxes are passed throughout the congregation. If pill boxes are easily obtained, maybe there is one pill box given to every one in the congregation.

Confession and Forgiveness

Call to Confession

“People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world,” says Jesus. But instead of standing up, raising our heads and pointing toward the redemption that is drawing near, we often let fear overtake us, and succumb to the worries of this life. We fail to notice the nearness of God’s realm and let our hearts get weighed down. We become empty of the spirit of God, empty of God’s word. With an empty pill box, we keep silence, letting God speak to whatever emptiness, whatever fear, whatever sin holds on to us.

Silence

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God,
*we confess to you that we are trapped by sin and cannot free ourselves.
We have failed to abound in love for one another.
We have failed to abound in love for those living with HIV or AIDS.
We have failed to keep our promises to you.
Forgive us and free us to be alert to your will.
Fill us with your Spirit,
so that our world can see that your redemption draws near
through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Sung Response

Suggestions: Lord have mercy
Oh, Lord hear our prayer

Words of Forgiveness

God's promise is not empty.
God reaches towards the longing heart with redemption.
From of old we proclaim that Christ Jesus came to save sinners.
In him we are given new life,
filled up, overflowing, free.
Heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will not pass away. We have his promise. He will lead us to life everlasting. Amen.

Passing the Peace

Affirmation of Faith

Prayers of Intercession

As a people of the promise of God, we pray for our world and for all in any need:

Righteous God,
do not let those who trust in you be put to shame,
even if they are wondering and worrying if they are HIV positive or not,
even if they are afraid to face the truth,
even if they want to hide from their HIV status.

Do not let them be put to shame
who are gathering the courage to speak the truth,
who are struggling with their anger and fear,
who are finding their way back to you.

Comfort those who mourn,
uphold the weak
bring healing to those for whom medicine will not become available,
and wholeness to those whose have pills to keep viruses and bacteria at bay.
Do not let any of your people be put to shame.

For those churches following the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, they might include the following portion of a prayer written by Sahr Kemoore Salia for a worship service the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone held in observance of the International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21st September 2004.

Lord Jesus, you came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly.
We need your countless mercies for peace.
Without food on the table and money to send the kids to school or pay the medical bills,
peace flies through the window.
HIV, AIDS and all manner of illness and unemployment can destroy our peace as well.

When justice is perverted and corruption enriches a few at the expense of the masses,
peace slips through the fingers of those who govern.
We pray therefore, dear Lord, that you endow all in positions of trust, power and authority
with wisdom that comes from you
to the end that the manner
in which they govern family, community, institution and state
will make us experience your peace and grace.
Then the whole nation will hear you say to them, "I am the Lord that giveth peace."

Other prayers for local concerns and people may be added.

Offering

If there is a special offering for an AIDS-related project being taken this day there should be an explanation about it. If people have empty pill boxes, they might be invited to put their offering for the project in the pill box. (For other options concerning the pill boxes see below)

Offertory

Prayer of Thanksgiving over the gifts

God of promise,
you have not left anyone outside your love
nor willed anyone to destruction.
You raise up branches of righteousness to bring healing to your people
and prophets of justice to proclaim your salvation.
Take the gifts we offer you and bless them
so that your redemption draws near
to all those in need of your care,
to all those in need of our care.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn

Suggestions: I, the Lord of sea and sky
Thuma mina

Sending Forth (particularly if pill boxes are being sent home with the people for use throughout Advent.
See some of the ideas below.)

God of abundance,
God of life
In your righteousness you make us part of your promise.
In your justice you call us to witness that your day of redemption is near.
As we fill these pill boxes with gifts (or whatever people are asked to do)
make us signs of love coming near to those who need medicine,
to those for whom pills would be a deliverance,
deliverance to work on a job,
deliverance to dream of a future,
deliverance to bring up ones children,
deliverance to embrace, to kiss, to touch,
deliverance to love, deliverance to live.
We pray in the name of our redeemer, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Benediction

Hymn

Vem, Jesus nossa esperança (Come to be our hope, oh Jesus) Jaci Maraschin: Brazil
O Come, O Come Emmanuel (sung this time as a hymn.)

Some ideas for continuing the use of the pill box during Advent.

One option would be to send the pill boxes home with the people to be returned later in Advent or on Christmas with an Advent/Christmas offering inside for an AIDS-related project.

Instead of an offering, the pill boxes might be returned with prayers for those living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. However, **BIG CAUTION**, it must be very clear that no one should be named in these prayers without their express consent. Everyone has the right to tell their story with HIV in their own time and at their own choosing.

The pill boxes that are sent home might be decorated and later brought back to become part of the Christmas decorations for the church, or put on the Christmas tree. These might be put in place with prayers for people living with HIV.

The pill box could be put alongside the Advent wreath or Advent candles in the home and serve as a centre for prayer during Advent.

Each pill box could represent a certain amount collected for a project connected with HIV and AIDS, and as this amount is received the pill boxes are put in a shape of a Christmas tree. When the Christmas tree is formed the goal has been reached.

For Advent 2 the theme might be connected to preparing the way of the Lord, in a time of AIDS. What practical things might each local congregation be doing to receive the coming Christ? Who are already encouraging us to go into the desert and do God's will?

For Advent 3 we might ask what John the Baptist would tell us we need to do in a time of AIDS to bear the fruits of repentance. So often persons with HIV are berated that they need to repent for supposed past sins. But would John the Baptist also have messages for drug companies, for government and church leaders, for those of us, who are ordinary Christians trying to live faithful lives? There could be an offering of post cards to those in positions of authority, or letters to newspapers which bring John the Baptist's voice to those who do not follow through on the promises made.

For Advent 4 with the greeting of Mary and Elizabeth, both of whom are pregnant, it would be a good time to wrestle with ways that local churches could assist HIV-positive mothers from transmitting the virus to their yet to be born children. Scientists have found the way to block transmission. But we have not found the means nor the will to keep these children from having the virus from the moment of their first cry.