



## Guidelines for World AIDS Day Worship Service

Compiled and Distributed by CABSA

Sunday 2 December 2018

Focus text: Luke 21:25-36

### The Kingdom of God is Near

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#### Background and Preparation

The 1<sup>st</sup> of December is World AIDS Day. Throughout the world this day is used to increase awareness about HIV and AIDS and to encourage people to be part of the solution. This year is the 30<sup>th</sup> year since World AIDS Day was initiated. The theme is “Know your status” and CABSA would like to encourage churches and faith communities to use this day to communicate the following key messages:

- It is important to know your status, get tested. Make sure congregants know where to get tested and what to expect. You could even consider arranging test opportunities on your church premises and/or after the church service as part of your World AIDS Day events.
- Make sure congregants know that your church is a safe space where HIV positive people are welcomed, accepted, supported and loved. Even though you as a church may not have all the answers, in being there for one another, we could be a lifeline for people in crisis. (See the link to Quintin Jonck’s testimony and arrange to include this in your church service).

It is our recommendation to use this 4 minute testimony.

It can be **viewed** here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttk7hRI8Onk>

It can be **downloaded** here:

[https://drive.google.com/open?id=11b1bVOldH\\_ItyS91o9m-v9jaeF9Bppi5](https://drive.google.com/open?id=11b1bVOldH_ItyS91o9m-v9jaeF9Bppi5)

The full 30 minute testimony can be viewed in six chapters here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f78DruT6Pgc&list=PLyYDTYpGq9IV4NuLXy4XpYm-TnTKGqecV>

- Our hope is in Christ who became human and who sacrificed his life for us. As we live each day in hope, we also work towards making God’s kingdom a reality here and now, for ourselves, but also for others. Our lives and testimonies are making God’s kingdom real and bringing it closer to our daily lives and challenges.
- Although the prevalence and impact of HIV vary hugely in different regions, countries, communities and churches, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31 help us understand that we cannot be blinded or silenced by only our own context. As churches we need to deliberately choose to identify with the HIV positive body of Christ:

*“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ (12) ... Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many (14) ... But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (18). ... As it is, there are many parts, but one body (20). ... The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” (21) ... On the contrary, ... (22) ... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it (26).”*

According to UNAIDS an estimated **36,9 million** people across the world are living with HIV, of which an estimated of **7,2 million** people live in South Africa.

If we think of the parents, partners, children, families, friends, carers and colleagues of each of these individuals, it is clear that the impact of HIV cuts much deeper through our communities.

- The latest UNAIDS Fact statistics fact sheet can be downloaded at:  
[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/UNAIDS\\_FactSheet\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf)
- Country specific statistics can be downloaded at:  
[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/unaid-data-2018\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/unaid-data-2018_en.pdf)
- HSRC summary report focusing specifically on South Africa:  
[http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/9234/SABSSMV\\_Impact\\_Assessment\\_Summary\\_ZA\\_ADS\\_cleared\\_PDFA4.pdf](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/uploads/pageContent/9234/SABSSMV_Impact_Assessment_Summary_ZA_ADS_cleared_PDFA4.pdf)

The scale of the HIV epidemic urges us to introduce focused interventions in our churches to prevent new infections and address the challenges of the epidemic on a continuous base. However, on the Sunday before or after the 1<sup>st</sup> of December we ask you as a congregation to make the issue of HIV visible in a very practical way. As church we need to identify with the HIV epidemic and be willing to be part of a community that responds to it with compassion and responsibility.

The following liturgy or parts of it, is offered to assist you in preparing your church service.

# Liturgy

## Welcome

To God our Father, who loved the world so much that He gave his only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who became human and was born in a humble stable, and God the Spirit, who lives in us and turns our hearts towards You and who reminds us of the true living hope through Christ's death on the cross. To Your name be the praise, the honour and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen

## Blessing:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit (those who know how dependent they are on God), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Mat 5:3

## Praise and Worship

*(Choose one or more songs dedicated to the glory of God.)*

*Suggestions:*

- Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty
- Majesty
- Alleluia, Alleluia.

## Prayer and Candle Ceremony

### Lighting of the first Advent candle:

*(Preparation: Before the service, place a white candle, large enough to be visible to the congregation in a prominent place. Ensure that matches are available as well as a red ribbon.)*

**Leader:** Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Even though most shops have been reminding us of Christmas for a few weeks already, Advent is the time when we as church begin to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

This is why we light the first Advent candle today – and this candle burns as a symbol of HOPE. This candle burns today to remind us that our hope is anchored in the living and Holy God, Christ Jesus, who became human and lived amongst us, Immanuel, God with us.

*(Light the candle, or invite a congregation member to do this. You could arrange ahead of the service that someone does this.)*

**Leader:** The beginning of Advent also coincides with World AIDS Day that is commemorated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December every year. This year will be the 30<sup>th</sup> year since it was introduced in order to raise awareness about the HIV epidemic. This reminds us of the harsh realities of the world we live in and the many millions of lives touched by the HIV pandemic.

Here in church we also need to remind one another of the presence of the epidemic in our society and in our faith community. There is also comfort today in knowing that the candle of hope is a witness to the hope in Christ for every household and family whose lives are touched by the realities of HIV or AIDS.

The candle also reminds us that we as church can be a place of consolation, support and hope for HIV positive people and their families.

*(Tie a red ribbon around the Candle of Hope, or arrange in advance that a congregation member does this.)*

**Ask the congregation to join by praying the following prayer together:**

**Litany for World AIDS Day**

By Rev Scott Hill First Presbyterian Church, Columbus.

*Edited by Emily Rose Proctor*

Leader: God of Wholeness and Healing, you created this world to be a place of shalom:

**People: Where individuals and communities find and foster health, well-being, justice and peace.**

Leader: In Christ, you have taken on our condition,

**People: Entering our suffering, our brokenness, and our loss to heal and transform.**

Leader: As the Body of Christ, we are one with Christians near and far,

**People: Weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice.**

Leader: On this World AIDS Day, we raise our voices in thanksgiving and intercession

**People: For the healing of bodies, relationships and the social fabric.**

Leader: For those with HIV and AIDS,

**People: O Healer, bring comfort and strength.**

Leader: For spouses and partners, children, parents, and others who bear this burden with them,

**People: O Healer, bring comfort and strength.**

Leader: For those orphaned or grieving,

**People: O Healer, bring comfort and strength.**

Leader: For entire communities and nations reeling from the HIV pandemic,

**People: O Healer, lead the way to new life.**

Leader: For grandmothers, uncles, neighbours and other caretakers,

**People: We give you thanks. Refresh and uphold them, God!**

Leader: For churches and clinics, schools and other institutions providing education or care,

**People: We pray for the compassion and all the fruits of your Spirit needed**

**for them to be communities of acceptance and love.**

Leader: For those seeking new drugs and treatments,

**People: We pray for insight, imagination and persistence.**

Leader: For advocates and activists,

**People: We ask for courage and creativity to challenge the powers and motivate the masses.**

Leader: For those who make policy decisions that affect those living with HIV or at risk for infection,

**People: We ask for wisdom, compassion and a sense of your justice.**

**All: In this world, God, that belongs to you and that is destined for wholeness, we pray with confident hope for a world committed to health, for the day of no more HIV infections, and for shalom for all!**

**Scripture Reading 1:**

Psalm 25:1-10

**Testimony**

This time could be an opportunity for someone from your congregation or community to share something about how HIV has impacted on his or her life or family.

You could also use the 4 minute testimony of Quintin Jonck sharing about his devastation when he discovered that he was HIV positive and be encouraged by his message of hope.

## Prayer

After the testimonies, please pray for Quintin and/or the people who shared their stories, who trusted you with their personal stories.

## Song(s) of Praise

## Scripture Reading 2

Focus Text: Luke 21: 25-36

The kingdom of God is NEAR

## Sermon guidelines<sup>1</sup>

### 1. *We are still waiting for the return of Jesus*

We are first of all reminded that the impressive, majestic second coming which we read about in verse 27 has not taken place yet. When Luke wrote this gospel (85-90AC), he used the gospel of Mark, which was written twenty years earlier, as source. Luke tries to make sense of the fact that it is twenty years later and Jesus had not returned yet.

And today, two thousand years later, the question is even more relevant, because we are still living in expectation of the return of Jesus. This can bring us to ask – **how should we wait on the return of Christ?**

### 2. *It may even feel as if God is absent today.*

In verse 25-26 we read of alarming signs in nature which spread fear, terror and desperation amongst the people of the world:

*“People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” (v 26)*

If we think about the realities of our context, we can also say that the challenges we face make us feel that God and His kingdom are very far from our everyday world.

We humans face a variety of crises. We are aware of regular natural catastrophes; just think of the damaging effect of recent local fires in and abroad in California, the ongoing drought in the Western Cape, flooding chaos earlier this year, landslides and the effect of climate change. There is also the economic recession, alarming levels of unemployment, political instability in the Middle East and other parts of the world. And then we have not even touched on poverty and the fact that more than 36 million people worldwide are living with HIV and AIDS.

We could indeed ask “where is God then?” Are we waiting in vain for Jesus to return?

### 3. *See the signs, lift up your head!*

But what does Luke say? He challenges us to LIVE from the hope we have in Jesus, when he says in verse 28 “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

We are reminded that our hope is anchored in the living Christ. These things will pass, but we dream of a new Jerusalem! We are reminded, even more, we are called not to lose courage, but to stand up straight.

Luke goes even further, saying: “Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.” (v 31)

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<sup>1</sup> Extracts from 2 December 2012, First Sunday in Advent, Sermon Study Luke 21:25-38 in *Woord en Fees*. Bible Media.

Why? Because these things are signs:

- Like a tree which begins to bud is a sign that summer is near,
- Like the bright decorations in the shops are a sign that Christmas is near,
- Like Christmas is a sign, a reminder, of God's gift of love to us,
- Like the birth of Jesus is a sign of the redemption which God brought about for us ...

In this way the signs that threaten to frighten and overwhelm us, are signs that the kingdom of God is near.

#### 4. *But what about this in-between time?*

How can the kingdom of God be near when it feels so far? When we are surrounded by so much pain and suffering?

The troubles of the world have the ability to drag us down. The fact that they too will pass, is not enough consolation for our daily existence. The reality is that we know that this life will come to an end, but while the new beginning has not happened, how do we live NOW?

Do we wait for the kingdom to arrive from heaven – or do we bring the kingdom of God to our current context? Or is it rather a matter of us seeing God's kingdom in ourselves and around us?

The person confronted with an HIV positive diagnosis today, will definitely not find immediate consolation in the fact that everyone will die someday. After all, the only life each of us knows is this one, the one we are living now. And if we are totally honest, very few of us actually want to die today! We have dreams and plans and people here in our earthly existence. And while we are here, we are certainly trying to give meaning to our lives. Therefore it is certainly logical that those of us living with HIV also still dream of a meaningful life, of seeing our children grow up and of growing old with our loved ones.

After all, God created this earth. And if our life on this earth was so inconsequential, would He have been so concerned to reconcile us to Him? Why do we not all pass on to the ideal life in heaven?

Dr Ronell Bezuidenhout writes:

"When life is upside down, you look for an escape ... people in this situation cling to hope. This of course compels us, when things are going well with us, to support those with whom it is not going well! Those whose heads are hanging, whose troubles are pulling their shoulders down. We need to also lift the veil for them .... because the one thing we have to remember is that we only have the 'now' to live in ... this time is not 'near' because it has not happened yet, but nearby ... next to ... close by ... around ... so close to us, because the time has in fact already dawned!"

Jesus already brought about our reconciliation with God. This is why we live now and why each of us can hold on to God's presence in our "today".

And if the kingdom of God is near, maybe we should think of the word "near" not only as indicating time. The word "near" after all also refers to position. The "the kingdom of God is near" therefore also means that it is close, close to MY body and close to MY reality.

Whether I am HIV positive or not. Whether HIV directly touched my household or not. Whether I have lost loved ones to an AIDS related death or not ... whether I secretly worry about my own HIV status ... or live with the guilt that I am not always faithful to my partner ... the one thing we all have in common, is this – today we all have TODAY before us.

Denise M. Ackerman reflects on hope in *Surprised by the Man on the borrowed donkey*<sup>2</sup>:

"To have faith is to have hope. Yet this statement is often taken to mean hoping for the end times when all will be made new. Hope, however, is a lived reality in the life of faith, here and now."

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<sup>2</sup> Ackerman, Denise M. *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey, Ordinary Blessings*. Cape Town: Lux Verbi, 2014.

"I learnt that to hope is never to surrender our power to imagine a better world, that present unjust arrangements are provisional and precarious and do not require our acceptance."

Ackerman reminds us that "hope is to be lived". "The way I hope should be the way I live. To live out my hope is to try to make that which I hope for come about – sooner rather than later."

Too often our hope is focused only on the future. And indeed we do hope for a different future, but we need to realise that hope is concerned with both present and future. What we hope for in the future is where we should direct our thoughts, energy and actions to in our present. We need to work towards that future we believe in.

Ackerman warns against blind optimism and calls for "active hope":

"To inhabit hope despite woeful circumstances is to offer a counter-story that dares us to become involved in making that which we hope for come about."

We don't know about tomorrow. We don't know when Jesus will return in glory on the clouds, but what we do have is today. Today is near. Today is real. How can we live today to make the kingdom of God real and visible around me, near me.

The waiting referred to in the text is not passive ...we read: "*Stand up and lift up your heads (v 28)... Be careful, (v 34) ... Be always on the watch, and pray (v 36)*".

*The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"  
And let the one who hears say, "Come!"  
Let the one who is thirsty come;  
and let the one who wishes take  
the free gift of the water of life.*

Rev 22:17

Because "*Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*"  
Luke 2:11

### **Invitation to the Congregation:**

**Preacher:** Dear Congregation, while we are waiting, while we are praying, the candle of hope is burning today for each of us and reminds us that hope is not only for "one day". We live today in the wonderful knowledge that God is already present in and concerned with our lives. We also know that through our presence we bring God's presence to each other's lives. Let us therefore make our compassion visible for one another and for each one whose life is touched and impacted by HIV and AIDS.

*(Choose any of the following invitations to the congregation: )*

*Option 1 Lighting of small candles*

**Preacher:** If you would like to commit yourself, your partner, a child, a brother or sister, a friend, a colleague or employer who is living with HIV to the Lord, please come to the front and light a candle for them.

*(A song or soft music can be played in the background while congregants have the opportunity to come to the front.*

*Prepare enough small candles in baskets. The first few people can light their candles at the candle of hope. Thereafter they can also light their candles from each other.)*

*Option 2 Move to the front of church*

**Preacher:** If you would like to commit yourself, your partner, a child, a brother or sister, a friend, a colleague or employer who is living with HIV to the Lord, please come to the front so that we can pray together.

*Option 3 Stand in solidarity where you are*

**Preacher:** If you would like to commit yourself, your partner, a child, a brother or sister, a friend, a colleague or employer who is living with HIV to the Lord, please stand just where you are. When we stand, we declare our solidarity with each other and we admit that the body of Christ is living with HIV.

Give enough time for the congregation to think about this and then pray the following prayer:

**PRAYER**

Prayer of Scott McKnight is read as a litany by a reader with a response by the congregation:

*Reader: Because we love God, we say:*

**Congregation: Our Father who art in heaven,**

*Reader: Because loving God means that we yearn for God to make his glory known, we say:*

**Congregation: Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

*Reader: Because loving God means we love others as God loves others, we long for all to have the necessities of life, and we say:*

**Congregation: Give us this day our daily bread.**

*Reader: Because we love others, we seek to unleash God's grace of forgiveness and say:*

**Congregation: Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

*Reader: Because we love others, we long that they will love and live God's will, so we say:*

**Congregation: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

*Reader: Because we love God, and because we love others, we lift our hearts to God and say:*

**Congregation: For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.**

*Reader: We say this today because we love God and love others.*

**Hymn**

(Choose a song or hymn referring to the coming of the kingdom of God):

**Blessing:** Let us go from here committed to be carriers of hope, with our heads held high in the knowledge that God and His kingdom is indeed near.

## Provided by CABSA

Prepared by Aneleh Fourie le Roux

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