



CABSA



Guidelines for World AIDS Day Worship Service

“Hope in Waiting: Signs of Hope in the Midst of Struggle”

First Advent Sunday 1 December 2024

Lectionary Texts: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36

Focus text: Jeremiah 33:14-16 and Luke 21:25-36

Background and Preparation

1 December 2024, World AIDS Day (WAD), is a day of awareness and action in the continued struggle to address the HIV pandemic.

We must continue to be sacred activists against a deadly epidemic that in 2023 still infected 1,3 million people worldwide and claimed 630 000 lives. Currently about 39 million people worldwide are living with HIV. UNAIDS estimates that 7,7 million people have HIV, whereas SA’s Department of Health estimates it closer to 8 million people

In 2023 there was an estimated 150 000 new HIV infections in South Africa – **this means on average 410 people are being infected with HIV every day.**

For more on Global HIV statistics or the country you reside in, click here

https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf

Public concern about HIV and AIDS has dropped significantly, as did the funding to sustain HIV related services. Many NGOs working on grassroot levels to provide training, advocacy and support to people living with HIV and communities affected by HIV, are struggling to continue to offer their services.

In this light, it is significant to commemorate World Aids Day during Advent, as this is a time for the Christian faith community to reflect on our own response to eradicate AIDS, in other words to keep people from falling seriously ill with AIDS, while also scaling prevention efforts to ensure fewer and fewer people will get infected, and advocate for quality care and the dignity of all people with HIV.

The Advent themes are Waiting, Hope, Peace, Love, Joy. These are all relevant when addressing the HIV epidemic in our own communities. As people of faith, we wait for the coming of God’s kingdom—for a time when there are no tears, no poverty, no HIV—but we do not wait passively. Instead, we strive to live holy and godly lives and to work for justice and peace, that “thy will be done ON EARTH as it is in heaven.” As people of faith, we live in hope in the midst of HIV.

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, our God, 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:

"You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways." Isaiah 64:5

Opening Song:

Amazing Grace

Call to Worship:

Leader: In the darkness of uncertainty and the struggle for justice, we come together on this World AIDS Day to remember, to hope, and to seek God's face.

People: We gather in hope, trusting in the promises of God.

Leader: We gather in anticipation, remembering a world awaiting redemption.

People: Come, Lord Jesus, our hope and our deliverer.

Leader: Today, we bring our pain, our sorrow, and our longing for healing.

People: Come, Lord Jesus, bring us hope in our waiting and wholeness in our suffering.

Leader: The days are coming, declares the Lord, when righteousness and justice will spring forth, and healing will be made known.

People: We stand in faith, believing in the God of new beginnings.

Leader: In the face of HIV and AIDS, we remember those we have lost, those who courageously live with HIV, and those who labor for healing and justice.

People: We hold onto the hope of healing, strength, and a future filled with God's peace. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Leader:

Compassionate God, Merciful God, we come before you this Advent season, recognizing both our hope and our pain. We await your coming, knowing that only you can bring the healing our world so desperately needs. Today, we remember everyone whose lives are affected by HIV and AIDS, praying that you will bring comfort, healing, and hope to the afflicted. May we, as a community, live in active anticipation of your Kingdom where health, peace, and love reign. Amen.

Song of own choice

Prayer of Confession

Leader: In the presence of our God, let us confess our sins.

God of compassion, forgive us for times we have turned a blind eye to suffering, for when we have fallen short in our care for one another. Forgive us for losing hope when the world around us seems bleak. Restore in us a spirit of anticipation, that we may look with hope toward your second coming, your promised Kingdom.

People: Lord, hear our prayer and have mercy upon us. Renew our hope and empower us to be your hands of healing and love in the world. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Leader: Hear the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.” In Christ, all promises find their “yes” and “amen.” Know that you are forgiven and loved by God.

Lighting of the Advent Candle (Hope)

Reader: Today, as we light the candle of hope, we remember God’s promise of a Savior who will bring healing and wholeness. We light this candle for all who seek hope in the face of adversity, particularly those affected by HIV and AIDS. May its light be a symbol of hope for us all.

First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Reader:

"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.'"

Second Reading: Luke 21:25-36

Reader:

"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."

Sermon: "Signs of Hope in the Midst of Struggle"

Introduction:

In today’s Advent scripture, we confront the realities of waiting in the face of suffering. Jeremiah’s words speak of a coming day when God will fulfill His promise, while Jesus in Luke describes signs of cosmic upheaval pointing to the Second Coming. On World AIDS Day, we are reminded of the many who wait for healing, for justice, and for a world transformed. These two passages resonate with our longing for God’s intervention and for the day when sorrow and suffering will cease.

On this World AIDS Day, we are reminded of the global struggle against HIV and AIDS—a struggle that includes not just the battle for treatment and a cure but also the struggle against stigma, inequality, and injustice. The readings from Jeremiah and Luke call us to look for hope, even in the midst of challenges and struggle. Both passages reflect the tension between suffering and hope, between fear and faith.

1. The Promise of Restoration (Jeremiah 33:14-16):

In the midst of great despair and destruction, Jeremiah delivers a message of hope. The people of Judah were facing exile and devastation, but God promises that a day of righteousness and justice is coming. A "righteous Branch" will spring forth, bringing safety and salvation.

This message resonates with us today as we confront the ongoing challenges of HIV and AIDS. For decades, this epidemic has brought pain, loss, and suffering to millions of people around the world. Yet, like the people of Judah, we are called to trust in God's promise of justice and restoration. We may not see the full realization of this promise yet, but we are assured that God is working to bring healing and wholeness to a broken world.

As we reflect on this passage, we are called to be people of hope. Our response to the HIV pandemic requires resilience, patience, and an unwavering belief in the promise of healing. We are also called to be agents of God's justice in the world—advocating for those affected, supporting medical advancements, and breaking down the walls of stigma and discrimination that very often still surround people who are living with HIV.

2. Hope Amidst Uncertainty (Luke 21:25-36):

Jesus speaks of signs in the heavens and distress among nations, painting a picture of chaos and fear. Yet, in the midst of this turmoil, Jesus offers a word of hope: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Waiting is not passive. Jesus urges us to "stand up and raise our heads because our redemption is drawing near." We are called to be signs of His Kingdom in the world, especially where there is need. We are reminded to advocate, to care, and to remain faithful. On this day, as we think of those affected by AIDS, let us also recognize that God's promise includes them, calling us to bear witness to God's compassion.

This passage challenges us to find hope in the midst of uncertainty and fear. The struggle against HIV and AIDS can often feel overwhelming—whether it's the ongoing fight for access to treatment, the social and economic inequalities that exacerbate the epidemic, or the personal toll it takes on individuals and families. But Jesus' words remind us that even in the midst of chaos, redemption is near.

We are therefore invited to stand up and raise our heads in hope. We look for signs of redemption in the tireless work of healthcare providers, in the advances in medical research, and in the growing awareness and support for those affected by HIV and AIDS. Even when the path seems uncertain, we trust that God's healing and justice are breaking into our world.

Conclusion:

Jeremiah reminds us that God's promise of justice and restoration is sure, even in the darkest times. Luke challenges us to look for hope in the midst of uncertainty, trusting that redemption is near. On this World AIDS Day, as we remember those affected by HIV and AIDS, we are called to be people of hope—working for justice, offering compassion, and trusting in God's ultimate plan for healing and wholeness.

Advent calls us to live with hope in the tension of "already and not yet." God's Kingdom has come in Christ, and it will come in fullness. As we remember World AIDS Day, let us renew our commitment to God's promise of a new world—a world where, through us, His love reaches everyone. God is faithful, and our hope is secure in Him.

Prayer of commitment:

Leader: Let us pray for the world, for those affected by HIV and AIDS, and for God's healing presence among us.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who live with HIV, that they may experience healing, strength, and hope,

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For caregivers, advocates, and healthcare workers, that they may be sustained in their work,

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For an end to stigma and discrimination against those living with HIV.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For the global community, that we may act with justice and compassion in response to the HIV epidemic,

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Leader: For those who have died from AIDS, that they may rest in your peace, and for those who mourn, that they may be comforted.

People: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Closing Song:

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Benediction:

Go forth in hope, trusting in God's promise of healing and justice. As we stand against the pain and suffering caused by HIV and AIDS, may we be agents of God's healing, love, and peace in the world. Amen.

Call to Action: Please consider a donation or church collection to support CABSA's HIV offerings to faith and marginalised communities.

Provided and distributed by CABSA and Diaconia AIDS Task Group

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To read more about CABSA's services, program and projects read our latest annual report

<https://cabsa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CABSA-2023-Annual-Report-1.pdf>

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