

Preparing the Way



Advent 2022

Written by Wesleyan Pastors for Our
Congregations

Thursday, November 24, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 122, Daniel 9.15-19, James 4.1-10

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
(James 4.4-8)

On this day, generally reserved for gratitude (although all too often it becomes a holiday to overeat and to celebrate with avarice and gluttony) scripture points us to the meaning of practicing an Advent journey.

Advent is a time that Christians all over the world interrupt the normal procession of time to focus on the promised return of Jesus Christ, culminating with the celebration of His first advent to the world on Christmas. Advent is a time of making ready, of preparation for Christ to return to the Earth in God's glory. Yet as we look around us, the world, including our hearts, if we are honest is anything but ready for Christ to return for his Church.

James and Daniel both admonish the people of God to repent of the ways of the world and to draw near to God. Repentance is the key that unlocks the door of God's work in our hearts to make us vessels of honor. Repentance, and the work of the Holy Spirit in us, creates the temple (of our hearts) in which God can fittingly dwell.

True repentance brings submission to the will of God. Repentance and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit bring obedience and a single-minded focus on God, on God's word, and on God's will.

May this Advent season be a time for our personal and corporate confession of those ways in us that look more like the world and a time to be cleansed of double-mindedness (trying to love the world and Christ in equal measure). I pray that this Advent is a time when your personal preparation finds you hungering deeply after God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Lord, in this time of Advent, we confess we often are distracted by the season's busyness, by the stress of commitment, and even by putting our own traditions ahead of the true meaning of Christmas. We confess we also often prefer being sentimental to being sacrificial. Forgive us for all the times we have missed seeing You in our midst, for all the times we have doubted Your presence, and for all the times we have failed to hold the holidays as holy days. Pour peace into our lives and let us be bearers of Your peace to others. Remind us that this is a season of waiting and preparation for the greatest Gift of all. In the holy Name of our Savior, Jesus, we pray. Amen.
(<https://thepastorsworkshop.com/prayers-of-confession-on-advent>)

Friday, November 25, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 122; Genesis 6:1-10; Hebrews 11:1-7

By faith, Noah found favor with God...

What a profound statement. An ordinary person living in ordinary times (times which are wholly like our own) found favor with God. While everything around him was disintegrating, morally and socially, Noah found favor with God... through his faith.

We oftentimes complicate the formula for living in relationship with God and finding favor with God. We often think (or act) as if God's favor lies completely with us. What we do or don't do makes us pleasing to God. How we act and what we say, we seem to think makes us pleasing to God. Scripture turns this idea of merit on its ear. A simple and profound trust, after all, trust is what faith is, pleases God.

As we come to our Advent journey, as we prepare for Christ's second coming, it would do us well to examine our faith (trust). Faith isn't a belief – or head thing. Faith is trusting in God's grace, God's leadership, and God's provision as the sole means of life.

The Christmas Story we will be hearing about all month is filled with people whose simple faith was honored by God – those who trust are those upon whom God's favor rests. Faith may lead to an ark. Trust may lead to a manger in a cave. Trust may ultimately lead to a cross... and trust follows wherever God leads. Trust pleases God and results in God's favor.

How is your faith today?

Prayer for today

*Awaken us, O Lord God, with your grace for the future. As you graciously forgive our sins, protect and strengthen us from all danger of future sins, so that we may serve you with a clear conscience,
and joyfully receive our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes again in glory; he lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.*

Source: [*Die pommersche Kirchen-Ordnung und Agenda*](#), p. 282. Translated for *A Collection of Prayers*.

Saturday, November 26, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 122; Genesis 6:11-22; Matthew 24:1-22

Jesus's words to us, in Matthew 24, bring us to the point of Advent.

He is near the end of his earthly ministry and is preparing his disciples for what was about to come. They were wondering what the “end” would look like. The disciples wanted the inside knowledge of when the end of times would come, what things would signal that time, and how they would know. After all who doesn't like a little “inside information?”

Jesus goes on to give the disciples inside information, but not quite in the way they wanted. You see, the signs of the times, as reported in the “little apocalypse” of Matthew 24 were present in Jesus's day. In fact, the list of the “signs of the times” have been present in each generation since Jesus ascended to heaven.

What is significant about Jesus's teaching is not the signs, but the call... “But the one who endures to the end will (24.13) Jesus's call for the disciples is to live ready for his return. The call Jesus gives is to be patient, prepared, and perseverant until Jesus returns.

As we look around us, read the news and hear the reports, we know the time is right for Jesus to come again. Our invitation is to prepare the way, to make ready in our own inner life so that we may be making the world right for Jesus's soon return. There is great merit in soberly asking, “Are you ready?” If not, make ready. The day is coming soon.

Prayer for the Day

Father, just as You sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, help me to clear the path in my heart, too. Show me the distractions in my life that block me from all-out worship of You this Advent. Lord, I await Your coming! As I celebrate the first Advent—the first coming—I look toward the day where I will see You face to face. I imagine what it will be like. Give me a heart, Lord, that looks for Your coming on a daily basis. Help me to live my life where I'm constantly seeking Your presence. My offering to You today is my righteous life for I know I am only clean because of Jesus. Show me today how I need to be refined, purified, forgiven. Give me the strength to ask for forgiveness and to then change my ways.

From ~Sarah Martin, from [“The Awe & Wonder of Advent: Day 18”](#)

Monday - November 28, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 124; Genesis 8:1-19; Romans 6:1-11

In the first section of scripture to be read for today (Psalm 124), the Psalmist brings forth a question for God's people to contemplate: "*What if the Lord had not been on our side?*" In asking the question, the Psalmist also states that the people of God would have been nothing before their enemies and, indeed, been destroyed. The question is asked to remind them – that they are only who they are because of the incredible God they serve! In the final verse 8, the statement and climax is made: "*Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*" It is again a clear reminder to all of Who God is, what He has done, and what He can do.

In the second reading in Genesis 8 regarding the end of the flood and all that was involved in the climax of God's judgment of the sinful way humans were living on the earth – we see – If the Lord were not gracious and merciful – no human being would exist. He is ALL powerful God – He is ALL knowing God – He is our only hope! He is righteous and will judge sin accordingly, but He does not leave us alone to deal with our sin, leading us to our final reading for today.

In Romans 6, we see that God became flesh, was killed, and arose from the dead to defeat sin and death for us – therefore, we need to surrender completely to Him living the life He purchased for us. We are called now to live the Christian life through the resurrected power of our God in relying on the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us through the redemption of our souls. In this redemption, we are now dead to sin and alive in Christ! This is a powerful truth to contemplate this Christmas season.

Tuesday - November 29, 2022

**Daily Readings: Psalm 124; Genesis 9:1-17; Hebrews
11:32-40**

Today we are revisiting the Psalmist (124) and reflecting “*What if the Lord had not been on our side?*” As we navigate this Advent season – which is ALL about the celebration of the Lord ABSOLUTELY being on our side as He came to become one of us to deliver us – we must all STOP and thank Him for being on our side!

In our second reading (Gen 9), we see what an amazing God we serve as He is righteous in judging sin, but He is also merciful in giving us a second chance to get the relationship right with Him! He gave us a sign and symbol of His covenant not to flood the entire earth again by placing the rainbow in the sky. Each time it rains – we are reminded ‘that the Lord IS on our side!’

In our third reading today in Hebrews 11, we are given an incredible list of people who lived the faith but never had the opportunity to see the fulfillment of God’s covenant to provide a Savior! The final verse of this reading and chapter reminds us again of how blessed we are that the Lord is on our side, and WE have received the promised covenant of God in providing a Savior for us that would allow us to live in a relationship with God as His holy people! It is truly amazing that ‘The Lord is on our side!’ Rejoice and praise His name!

Wednesday – November 30, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 124; Isaiah 54:1-10; Matthew 24:23-25

We begin our reading today by revisiting our original text for the week (Psalm 124). By now, you may think of skipping the reading as you have already read it the past two days... however, when you stop and contemplate again, '*What if the Lord had not been on our side?*' How can we not stop and re-read that passage completing it with Praise to the Lord, who is our help and strength?! Where would we be today if it were not for the Lord? What would we be if the promised Savior had not come? God is good to His word, and ALL that He said will come to pass.

In the reading in Isaiah 54 for today, we are reminded that God is good to His word, merciful, and remembers His word/promises. In the readings for this week, we have been consistently reminded that God is good to His word – and thankfully – He is merciful, and His heart is all about redemption and restoration! Everything else in the world may crumble, but God's word remains.

Being reminded in our readings that God is good to His word, we consider the scripture in Matthew 24 as our final reading for today. As we read and contemplate the fact of the second Advent of Christ, we ALL must know and understand that what God says will come to pass! We only have to look into the Biblical history, and we see clearly that God is good to His word and will bring to pass what He has spoken. While we look forward to the Second Advent – we must not solely focus on it but rather understand it is coming, and in light of that, what has God asked us to do in preparing? We are to be proclaiming the message of Christ until He comes! There is no better time to share the message of Jesus with our friends and families than during the Advent season.

Thursday – December 1, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

Reading the first section of scripture in Psalm for today, we are reminded once again of God's justice and how we, as His people, are to rejoice and praise God for it. In the call to see God's justice, we are also challenged by the prayer of the Psalmist to allow him to have justice in what he does and how he lives his life... may we, as God's people, also love justice and pursue it.

Our second reading today is in Isaiah – 'A promise of restoration from God; this is a promise from God of what He will do for His people despite what may be happening at the moment. The Church of Jesus Christ today needs to see the justice of God but also the faithfulness of God in being good to His promises. As we look around us and see the chaos of the moment – remember, brothers and sisters, as you read this passage, that we serve an amazing God who is good to His word!

In the final reading for today in Acts, we see the response of Christ's followers in the 'waiting'. They had no idea when God would do what Jesus said He would do they only knew He would! So, they gathered for prayer! This is a great example of what we, the church of Jesus Christ today should be doing as we wait for the second Advent we should consistently gather for prayer.

Friday – December 2, 2022

**Daily Readings: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 30:19-26;
Acts 13:16-25**

We begin again today with the same reading in Psalm of the justice of God that we need Him to instill this same justice within us as we navigate the many things we face in life. We are also reminded once again to Praise God for all He has done in the past – knowing that this same God will be present and complete everything He has promised in the future.

This passage in Isaiah reveals the day of redemption that God’s people will experience in the future as God fulfills His promise. This reminder states, once again, despite what you may be facing at the moment there is an incredible future with our God! Church, we must remember this in our times of challenge and difficulty! God is faithful and there is an incredible future that He has promised that WILL come to pass. We are reminded of this truth as we celebrate this Advent, the first coming of the Savior! He did come – He will come.

Here on our final reading for today, we hear the Apostle Paul calling out a reminder of the amazing God we are called to serve! How He is just, how He is faithful to His word, how we need Him today, how we must embrace His incredible plan for redemption – the very thing we are celebrating this Advent season = JESUS

Saturday – December 3, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Isaiah 40:1-11; John 1:19-28

Christian brothers and sisters – as you read through the scriptures for today may I simply take a different approach and summarize all that we have been taken through in the previous days' devotionals?! God is good, God is just, God will do what He says He will do you can trust His promises. What are you doing in light of all that is going on in the world around you today? Are you sharing the truth about the Savior? Are you sharing with those you love that as we prepare for Christmas day with a hope and desire of being together - that there is another Advent coming that we want them to be a part of? Let us celebrate this Advent with enthusiasm to the God of the Bible, the Creator of the Universe – our God – He is Good!

Monday, December 5, 2022

Daily Today's: Psalm 21; Isaiah 24:1-16a; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

As we enter the second full week of Advent, it is good to remind ourselves of what we celebrate during this season. We celebrate the birth of our savior and Christ's entry into our world. We celebrate the coming of the promised one and what that means to our eternity. We celebrate God who came to dwell amongst us.

In Psalm 21, David, who was a King- rejoices! He rejoices for all that God has given him. His rejoicing is a celebration of what God has delivered. King David knows the victory is not his but is the Lord's. King David knows that every great gift he has received- victory, success, prosperity- they are all from God.

King David shifts his focus to the eternal in verses 4-6. He shares that he requested the preservation of his life, and God granted his request. God did not just spare David's life, but gave him eternal life! David says that this is an eternal blessing (which it is!), but the true joy is the joy of the Lord's presence.

As we walk through this coming week, let us celebrate and rejoice with David. Let us see that the true joy and gift is the Lord's presence and that Jesus' coming would pave the way for eternal life with Him.

As David closes Psalm 21, let us sing and celebrate God's mighty acts and rejoice in them today.

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 21; Isaiah 41:14-20; Romans 15:14-21

As we move through the week, what might we talk about in our “water cooler” talks with others? Whether we work in an office with a literal water cooler that co-workers gather about, or we are out and about in other activities, we will have “water cooler talk” moments. You know the conversations I’m referring to- the conversations where we brag on our local NFL, NBA, or NHL team and how they are doing. Or we talk about our children and the success they are having in sports or in school. How often in these conversations do we brag about God to those around us?

In Psalm 21, which we read yesterday and today, we hear David clearly brag about God and the work that the Lord has done in David’s life. David leaves no room for confusion as he declares that it is God who has won the victory, and God who has provided all things. David writes these words 10 centuries before Christ would come in the flesh.

Over a thousand years later we read Paul’s words in his letter to the church in Rome, and we can sense his excitement. Paul knows Christ who has come and has met Him. Paul says in verse 17 of Romans, Chapter 15, that he is “enthusiastic” about what Christ has done in him. But Paul understands, just like David before him, that the glory is the Lord’s. Paul says in verse 18 that he dares not boast in anything that Christ has done in him, because it is the Lord’s great work.

It would have been amazing to see and hear David and Paul boast about God in their “water cooler talks” with those around them. Today, we have the same opportunity to boast in our Lord who came to this Earth to save us. Let us look for a chance to boast in the Lord today, and share Him with others.

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

Today's Readings: Psalm 21; Genesis 15:1-18; Matthew 12:33-37

Today's readings bring a story of hope and legacy. The readings span thousands of years and help us to connect the dots of God's providential work over the generations. I was taught that Advent was the "season of preparing our hearts to celebrate Jesus coming into this world." I have often shared that with others, whether it be on a Sunday morning, or in a bible study. Today's passages, viewed together, give us a reason to have hope and a reason to celebrate Jesus' coming into the world.

In Genesis chapter 15, we see God's covenant promise with Abram. Abram, who we would later come to know as Abraham, questions God as to how he will be blessed. Abram's confusion is that God has promised a reward for Abram, yet Abram has no descendants. God promises Abram more descendants than there are stars in the sky, and Abram believed God! Sometimes it is hard to believe when we cannot see the outcome. Abram could not see what was to come, yet he believed God.

In Psalm 21, our last day in this Psalm, we see David's rejoicing in the Lord. David is a product of God's promise to Abram and is 13 generations down the line from Abram. God's blessings on David stem from the promise God made to Abram. David recognizes this and rejoices and celebrates God's work in David's life. David knows the history of his family and understands that God is the one to be celebrated.

We may wonder how the passage in Mathew, chapter 12, can relate to this. How can a tree identified by its' fruit speaks to the promises that God gave to Abram and David? Abram and David had good hearts and trusted in God. Even in their toughest times, they believed in God, and what He would do. God produced great fruit through those two men, and He is willing to do the same in us as well.

Advent, the time of preparing our hearts, is a time of leaning into belief. It is an opportunity to rejoice in Jesus and what He has done, and what He still will do in our lives. Today is a day to see hope and God's legacy come into our lives.

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Today's Readings: Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Peter 3:1-10

How is your week going? Have things been going well at work, church, or school? Has there been a time this week, or recently, when you felt like you were not included? During this wintertime, it is easy to feel "left out in the cold," whether that be physically, or in social circles. Today we begin three days looking over Psalm 146 and it may speak to us today if we are feeling neglected.

In verses 7-9, the Psalmist shares with us that God provides and protects those who are vulnerable. The Psalmist speaks of the foreigners, orphans, and widows. He also speaks of those who are oppressed. The Psalm reminds us that justice will come for those who are oppressed, even if they cannot yet see it.

Our second reading introduces us to a woman named Ruth, and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Both of these women become widows over the course of a decade. In addition, they become foreigners in the land of Moab, far from home. The women traveled back to their homeland because they believed that God would take care of them and bless them there. They had no guarantee of success or prosperity, yet that did not stop them from stepping out in faith. During that time of travel, I imagine there were many cold nights and cold shoulders from the people they met. I imagine that having hope in the midst of anguish and trial was difficult, at best. And yet, they persevered, and God blessed them immensely. They could not see what the future held, but they trusted in God and followed Him.

Today, we may not know what the future holds, but we have the option to trust in God. Advent is an opportunity to look beyond our current situation, and trust in God who made a way for us. Today, let us learn from Ruth and Naomi and look beyond our current situation, and look forward to what God is doing.

Friday, December 9, 2022

Today's Readings: Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18

Yesterday we looked at Psalm 146 and God's promise to take care of widows, orphans, and foreigners. Today we begin our readings with the same set of verses to remind us that promise is true yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Naomi and Ruth set out believing that God would provide for them and meet their needs and bless them. Today we see that blessing come alive in a baby boy named Obed!

During Advent we celebrate Christ's birth and his coming into our world, and what it means for us. Naomi and Ruth had no idea that someday God would appear as a man, and be the gateway for all to enter into Heaven. At this point in their lives, they simply knew that God had blessed them with a baby boy. This boy would carry on their lineage. They could not see what the future held. They had no idea that this boy would be the grandfather to David, whose faith would lead the Israelites to prosperity and success. They did not know that this baby would be part of the lineage that would lead to Jesus being born someday. All they knew was that God had blessed them, taken care of them, and done what He had promised.

In the book of 2nd Peter, we find Peter concluding his letter to encourage the believers to live peaceful lives that are pure and blameless. I wonder if Peter was considering the example of Naomi and Ruth and their lives. Peter's words are his last recorded words and carry much weight with them. He explains how God is patient, and this patience has given people time to turn to God. As we reflect on God's promise, Naomi and Ruth's belief, and Peter's recommendation- let us use it to spur us on to good works today.

Saturday, December 10, 2022

Today's Readings: Psalm 146:5-10; 1 Samuel 2:1-8; Luke 3:1-18

Our leading passage today is a familiar one as this is the third day we have read over Psalm 146:5-10. The Psalmist declares how the Lord goes before and protects those in need. The Lord is the protector over the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner.

Our second verse is a song of jubilation by Hannah. Hannah has been without child and has begged God to allow her to have children. The Lord heard her prayer and blessed her and her husband. They had Samuel, and they dedicated the boy to the Lord's service. Samuel's story of dedication to the Lord is incredible. He served and obeyed the Lord his entire life and was greatly respected by all those who he came in contact with. Hannah would go on to have five more children and was extremely blessed by God. It was Hannah's fervent prayer that God responded to, and God blessed them.

Our last passage introduces us to John the Baptist. Luke records how John came before Jesus to prepare the people and repent of their sins and turn to God. Crowds flocked to see John and he spoke plainly to them about the sin in their lives.

These three sets of verses are very different in scope and story. However, each one has a common theme- God goes before. As we continue to focus on God and celebrate the birth of Jesus during this Advent season, we should remember that it was Jesus who went before us.

It was Jesus who was born and lived a perfect life and then sacrificed that life for our sins. It was Jesus who went before us almost 2000 years ago to make a way for us to experience Heaven eternally.

Today, as we go about our day, let us remember these words; God goes before us. Let us remember that God desires to protect us, bless us, and save us. This message is not just for us, but for all that are able to receive it. Today, let us be encouraged that God goes before us, and let us call on Him for his direction and providential work in all areas of our lives.

Monday, 12th of December 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 42; Isaiah 29:17-24; Acts 5:12-16

“Be patient, therefore, beloved until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord, is near.” James 5:7-8

It is the third week of Advent. I am hanging on by a thread, and maybe you are at the edge of hopelessness too. Waiting is hard sometimes. It feels like a bad word. Many messiahs have come and died, and all left is hope smashed to bits. Where is the deliverance that won't break?

I presume you know what it means to wait. Some of us are better at waiting, and if you are like me, you probably create something to jumpstart the process because we are terrible at patience. I am ready for things when I feel antsy and restless. I want that promotion and increase when I feel entitled to it. I want my children to comply as soon as I say go. I want the addiction gone like yesterday. I want all my desires at microwaved dizzy speeds. Who is going to tell God to get on with it? I cannot jumpstart the hand of God, nor can I entice God into the microwave. I must wait patiently and strengthen my heart. Strength is found in prayer and bible meditations.

God is coming, though only at his own pace.

God waits too. He waits for our surrender and trust. He will come, and soon there will be streams in the desert – an implausible place.

***When the King shall come again, all his power revealing
splendor shall announce his reign life and joy and healing;
earth no longer in decay, hope no more frustrated; this is
God's redemption day longingly awaited.***

Hymn “When the King Shall Come Again

Tuesday, 13th of December 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 42; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Jude 1:17-25

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with a vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.” Isaiah 35:1-4

Where I live in Arizona, there are endless hiking trails. Our beautiful trails bring hikers from around the country. They often underestimate the difficulty of the terrain. You cannot take our hikes carelessly; the tracks can be deceptive. It would be best if you had more water and snack on a hike than you think. The air is dry, and that “little hill” is not easy. You risk dehydration and death without adequate preparation.

Now I am thinking of my life and yours as a hike. Our hope and salvation are both beautiful and terrible terrain. Our God will undoubtedly come. While we wait, let us carefully traverse the landscape with the water of godly companions who will walk with us, bringing drinks from the Word of God, snacks of laughter, shoulders to lean on, and hands that will get us back to the altar every time we wander away.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35:5-10

Wednesday, 14th of December 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 42; Zechariah 8:1-17; Matthew 8:14-17,
28-34

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living. When can I go and meet with God? Psalm 42:1-2

The imagery here is not cute or delicate. It is desperate. David knew all about hunting and wild things; he was a shepherd long before he became king. He penned this psalm while being chased by his son Absalom whose intent was to take David's kingdom by force. David ran instead of killing his son. It was a matter of life and death! A panting thirsty deer is exhausted from running and needs water to live.

Most of us know desperation and bone-deep weariness. Friend, that bleakness you feel is your soul thirsting for God. Where do you go to quench your thirst? Maybe shopping, video gaming, drinking, clubbing, meth, gym? All the ways you choose to numb will not fill this thirst. Only God will satisfy your appetite. David knew where to go for refreshing – he went to the Living Water. Jesus talking to the lady at the well, said to her, "whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water I will give that person will be like a well of water that bubbles up into eternal life" John 4:14

Hey there! All who are thirsty,
come to the water!
Are you penniless?
Come anyway—buy and eat!
Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.
Buy without money—everything's free!
Why do you spend your money on junk food,
your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?
Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,
fill yourself with only the finest.
Pay attention, come close now,
listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.

Isaiah 55:1-3a

Thursday, 15th of December 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19, 2 Samuel 7:1-17;

Galatians 3:23-29

*Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine
forth before Ephraim,
Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save
us.*

*Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may
be saved.*

Psalm 80:1-3

Before salvation is always the darkest, I have sat in darkness, and in some areas of my life, I am still in the dark. The truth is we are only sometimes sure help will come. No one can control God. We are not sure God will heal that sickness or fix whatever bind we may find ourselves in any way we want. No one can control God. All anyone has is to cry; hear us, Shepherd of Israel...make your face shine on us so that we may be saved! And surprise, surprise, we are the beloved of God. To be a shepherd is to be the one your sheep rely on for protection, guidance, and care. The writer of this Psalm knows that all he needs is in God, so he calls out. Salvation will come; it will only ever be steadfast in God.

I love the Psalms; it expresses most human emotions. Will you remember the ways God has come through in your night before morning? Trust that help will come as God desires.

Awaken your Might

We need You

We are afraid

We wait

Smile on us.

Friday, 16th of December 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 80:1-17-19; 2 Samuel 7:18-22, Galatians 4:1-7

David's Prayer

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"¹⁹ And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is for a mere human! "What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, Sovereign Lord. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant. "How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. 2 Samuel 7:18-22

What a response of gratitude! Before this response, David desired to build God a house. God responds by telling David through the prophet he needs no building of human hands, then promises to bless David's generation. Some of us would respond with 'rightly so,' but not David. He knows that any blessing he receives comes because God desires it and not because of anything David did or would ever do.

Aren't we just like that? We look past the gifts we already have to the things not yet within our reach. We subconsciously believe we deserve good things due to our good deeds. In that place, we take the goodness and kindness of God for granted. May we become like David, gratefully responding wholeheartedly to his heart.

**While you wait for clarity
And answers to prayer that have pulled me
From my sleep, I will rest with sweet assurance
That deep within
I have this hope an anchor for my soul.
You will not swim these depths alone.**

- Morgan Harper Nichols

Saturday, 17th of December 2022

Daily Readings: Psalm 80:1-17, 17-19, 2 Samuel 7:23-29; John 3:31-36

“The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” John 3:31-36

There is a promise embedded in Christmas. It is God among us reconciling us to Godself. Wow, right??! The promise, however, is only to those who believe in the Son of God. You may have already bought all the presents for Christmas gift-giving; the only gift that will matter and have an eternal impact is this “God came to earth as a person- Jesus. He came to show you what God is like so you can have a genuine relationship with him. You are a sinner and, on the way, to living forever without God. You may think you want that, but you don’t. The only thing that will fix it is surrendering your life to God.

Surrender now to receive the eternal gift of Christmas.

Those who receive him he calls children.

Monday, December 19, 2022

Daily Readings: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 17:15-22; Galatians 4:8-20

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.” Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces?

Once we know God, or as Paul says, are known by God, how can we ever want to go back to what we were before? God made a covenant with Abraham. He knew God and God knew him, yet he fell face down and laughed in disbelief. Abraham and Sarah, childless their whole marriage, had taken matters into their own hands and had a child via Sarah’s handmaid. God, however, had his own plan that went far beyond what they could imagine.

Contrast this with Mary and Joseph. When visited by angels and told Mary had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God, both Mary and Joseph had very different responses from Abraham and Sarah. One couple questioned and thought their way was correct, whereas the other couple chose to accept and embrace the will of God for their lives, despite what others would say. Mary and Joseph chose to believe God when the people in their communities no doubt thought they had slept together before marriage. They knew the truth though of what happened, and their God would make all things possible if they trusted him.

What impossible situation do you need to believe God for? Will you choose to trust God despite it not making sense, or like Abraham when hearing the news will you laugh in disbelief?

Tuesday, December 20, 2022

Daily Readings: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 21:1-21; Galatians 4:21-5:1

Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Today's readings are about the freedom we have because of Christ. The crazy thing about all of this is that our God chose to bring forth the promised Messiah in a most unconventional method. A virgin teenage girl, a child born in a manger, a child who was fully man and fully God, a rabbi, a Savior, a death on the cross, and finally a resurrection from the grave so that we would have life, and life abundant.

How often do we take this freedom from the bondage of sin and death for granted? We focus so often on the presents, the family gatherings, and the beauty of the season. A season where the world is filled with a little more joy, a little more light, and a little more love. But I wonder if we remember that Advent is a season of both preparation, but also the second coming of Christ. That we reflect on his first coming as a baby, but perhaps more importantly his triumphant return when we will have freedom not only for now but for eternity with him.

What would change if this Christmas you knew that your freedom is for all eternity? That the life we live now is a foretaste of the future when Christ returns? How can we rejoice in the moment, yet focus on the eternal? May you know Christ not only as a baby born in a manger but as a freedom maker for all eternity.

Wednesday, December 21, 2022

Daily Readings: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Genesis 37:2-11; Matthew 1:1-17

Have you ever wondered why so many genealogies are in the Bible? Yes, it is a means to show the covenantal relationships through historical succession, continuity, and legitimacy but it also shows us both the good and the bad in all families. In Jesus' genealogy, we see he did indeed come from the house of David as prophesized in the Old Testament, but we also see that his family tree includes many imperfect sinners, including an adulterer, a murderer, a prostitute, and a deceiver. But we also see in His lineage, people who strayed but continually came back to God.

Every name in a genealogy shows a generation where God's plan and purpose are put forth in the world. Since Adam and Eve, every single generation is a representation of God's grace at work in the lives of His people. With a singularity of purpose, we see a God who knows his people and places them with unique gifts and personalities "for such a time as this" to fulfill the purpose of his Kingdom. His grace and forgiveness of our sins and shortcomings are evident in these genealogies.

Seeing all the people who failed and yet are still in the lineage of Christ should encourage us. God is a god of redemption, he can take the sins of our parents and our own sins and redeem them. His grace is enough. Take time to acknowledge this grace, freely given by a God who loves us without exception.

Thursday, December 22, 2022

Daily Readings: Luke 1:46b-55; Isaiah 33:17-22; Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20

And Mary said, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."

For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us.

Humbleness. This sums up Mary. She is a reminder of living both in the present and in light of eternity. She loved God to a point where she recognized it was HIS will, not hers that mattered. But she also loved God enough to be familiar with His Word. She knew who God was and that his love for his people meant he could be trusted. God chose Mary because of all of this. Her humility enabled her to hear and receive the message the angel of God had for her because she knew foundationally that her God was in control, not her.

Life is full of the unexpected. No one wakes up and knows without a doubt what will happen on any given day. Our ability to respond to the unexpected rests in knowing we can trust Jesus. When we know his character, we are able to answer with a resounding YES that God is indeed good and can be trusted to handle the things in our lives. When our hope is in Jesus and not our talents and abilities, God is able then to mold us into His image and desire for our lives.

What is an area you need to let God handle? What about God's character helps you to give up control? If you find yourself struggling to let go, ask yourself why. God's ways are best. He knows the future and the things we cannot see. Allow yourself to be humbled, for it is humility that allows us to be vulnerable in our relationship with Jesus.

Friday, December 23, 2022

Daily Readings: Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29;
Galatians 3:6-14

“Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?”

This was David's response to the Lord when the prophet Nathan revealed to David that he had been chosen to establish his Kingdom that the coming Messiah would one day come from. Mary's response was similar to the song she sang once she was told she would be the mother of Jesus. Serving God carries with it a sense of awe that God would even see us as worthy to do so. He is a holy God. By His word and spirit, he created all that is seen and unseen. We were formed from the dirt and with a breath, we were given life. We are flawed and broken. We are stubborn and prideful, yet God gives grace to the least of us. He sees beauty where we see darkness. He calls us into his embrace and says we are the apple of his eye.

As you ponder the birth of Christ, of Emmanuel, God with Us, remember He came for you and he came for me. He became the incarnate Christ: fully God and fully man so that he might experience the weakness of all mankind and in so doing model for us a way to live that is radically different from what we could do on our own. We *can* do all things, but only through Christ Jesus.

We truly are not worthy of the immeasurable gift of our savior Jesus. The Word who became flesh, the Lamb who was slain, who rose on the third day so we could be reconciled unto him. All glory and power to our King, who came in a baby born in a manger.

Who are we, Sovereign Lord...that you have brought us this far?

Saturday, December 24 & 25, 2022: Nativity of the Lord I

Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger . "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

One of my favorite books to read during Christmas is *Cosmic Christmas*, by Max Lucado. It is the story of the nativity as seen through the eyes of Gabriel and the other angels. There is a beautiful moment when Jesus is born that says the following:

All of God was in the infant. Light encircled His face and radiated from His tiny hands. The very glory I had witnessed in the throne room now burst through his skin.... We became aware for the first time of the Father's plan to rescue those who bear His name. At once amazed and stunned, the eye of every angel went to one part of the child: the hands which would be pierced. "At the pounding of the nail," God told us, "you will not save Him. You will watch, you will yearn, but you will not rescue."

So this is He. Immanuel. "Do you know who you hold Mary? You secure the Author of grace. He who is ageless is now moments old. He who is limitless is now suckling your milk....the hands which held oceans are now an infant's fist...The Source of language will learn words from you. He has never stumbled you will carry. He who has never hungered you will fee. The King of creation is in your arms." (p. 90-96).

The juxtaposition of Christmas is there is both joy and sorrow. Life, death, redemption, and victory, all exist in the nativity. The plan to rescue us begins in a manger but hurdles through time to the cross. I often wonder how much Mary chose to remember. Knowing but yet not understanding why a “sword would pierce her heart”. So, as we revel in the birth of Christ, let us not forget to revel in why: so that we might be reconciled to God.

Immanuel – God with Us – Wonderful Counselor – Prince of Peace – Mighty God – Powerful God

Contributors

Pastor Jonny Burke co-pastors New Beginnings Wesleyan Church in Marysville, CA with his beautiful wife, Chelsea. They have 2 children, Cori (11), and James (8). When not pastoring, you can find Johnny working for the Sutter Yuba Homeless Consortium, working to provide programs and opportunities for people experiencing homeless. Depending on the season of the year, he can also be found coaching the kids in baseball, softball, soccer, volleyball, and basketball!



Pastor Dave Dahlberg has been married to Kimberly since 1983, 3 sons all married, and 4 grandchildren. Dave is the Lead Pastor of Christian Faith Fellowship (CFF), Tucson, AZ since 2005 and Co-Founder (with Kim) of Full Throttle Ministries (motorcycle ministry of CFF since 2006). David has his MDIV from Wesley Seminary and is currently completing his Doctoral Dissertation work through Regent University. Pastor Dave is currently serving his 2nd term on the District Board of Administration of the Pacific Southwest District of the Wesleyan Church. David & Kimberly enjoy riding their Harley and spending time with their animals. 4 horses, 1 Miniature Texas Longhorn, 4 chickens, and 2 dogs.



Pastor Chris Hughes is the lead pastor at Sweetwater Community Church in the San Diego area. She and her hubby Ken have been married for 37 years and together have, three children, two additional daughters through marriage and three grand babies. She loves sports of all kinds and she and Ken have season tickets to San Diego State mens basketball and football teams. She also enjoys her fur babies and is a chicken mama to 12 'ladies' who she loves to watch.



Pastor Shalom Liddick is a Nigerian born, Belizean raised and currently living in Tucson, Arizona. She assistant pastor of Christian Faith Fellowship in Tucson. She is the beloved and delight of God, they have wooed her and she is totally in love with the Trinity. My purpose is to invite everyone into real time relationship with the Trinity. "Oh taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes shelter in him!" Psalms 34:8

Pastor Art Roxby is the Pastor of Christ Center Wesleyan Church in Sedona, Arizona. Pastor Art was born in the mountains of Central Pennsylvania, near the family farm on which his great-grandmother prayed a singular prayer, "Dear Lord, give me preachers!" The Lord has answered that prayer six times over. Pastor Art's greatest desire is to see followers of Jesus Christ experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, grow in their walk with God and in the Community of faith, and live into their unique calling to be witnesses to the life-changing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Art has been married, for 34 years, to his wife Allyson. They have three adult children: Caitlin and husband Brandon, Kyle and wife Sara, and Abigail and husband Nick. They are also proud and doting grandparents to Maddie, Evie and Hagen. You can find Christ Center at www.christcentersedona.org or on Facebook, or visit us in person at 580 Brewer Rd. Sedona, AZ 86336.

