

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2022



Faith Lutheran Church
8208 18th Ave NE, Seattle, WA



Advent & Christmas

At Faith Lutheran Church

HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER

The Faith Website has a link to a service from Holden and music so you can sing along if you wish.
Use these resources to enhance your Advent Season anytime.

www.faithseattle.org
(go to the events page)

ADVENT PAGEANT

Sunday, December 11

During 9:45a Worship

Followed by cupcakes and “Happy Birthday” to Jesus

A LAUTENWERCK CHRISTMAS

Strangely Familiar Music for the Holidays

Sunday, December 18 at 3:00 p.m.

In Person & Via Zoom

David Buice, Lautenwerck (lute-harpsichord)

Part I: The Story of Christmas;

Part II: The Christmas of Story (Liz Story)

Free-will offering accepted to benefit the Pipe Organ Fund.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

1:00p In Person ONLY

4:00p In Person and via zoom

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE

9:45a In Person and via zoom

Advent Greeting,

Who's Moment are You Living In?

As I think about Advent I get an overwhelming sense of needing to slow down and wait. Wait for what I am not always sure. Maybe we try to imagine what waiting was like for our ancestors in faith. Maybe we are waiting for our own lives to change. Maybe we are waiting for love or a new job or maybe we are waiting for things to return to 'normal'.

I was inspired by Henri Nouwen's reflections on waiting in his book "Eternal Seasons". It reminded me that waiting is not only about looking for something, it is also about being present in the moment.

"A waiting person is a patient person. The word 'patience' means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the fullest in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us. Impatient people are always expecting the real thing to happen somewhere else and therefore want to go elsewhere. The moment is empty. But patient people dare to stay where they are. Patient living means to live actively in the present and wait there. Waiting, nurtures the child that is growing in her womb."

My prayer for you this Advent is that you will experience patience; that you are willing to sit in the present; and that the reflections of this devotional will inspire your moments.

Misi French

Thank you to all who contributed to this devotional.
Your insights and wisdom are a blessing.

Karla Petersen
Misi French
Pam Russell
Paul Hoffman
Barb Robertson
Cyndi Musar
Lynn Krog
Ellen Aagaard
Pastor Shannyn Fuerst

Sandi Dexter
Donna Shy
Rick Friedhoff
Estelle Morley
Todd Wagner
Heidi Renz
Julie Pierce
Mary Jo Hershly
Rebecca Keith

First Sunday of Advent

Sunday, November 27

Karla Petersen; Faith Lutheran Church

Isaiah 2:2-5

²In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!



I am writing this in the evening after a student was shot and killed at one of my children's high school. I am not alone in being rattled, here in my neighborhood, in my city, or anywhere. Fear and anger are so prevalent everywhere that it starts to seem "normal." That is pure grief and the companion to that grief is pure longing to be at peace -- to live without the fear and anger and violence.

Let us, then, come to our Lord and put our trust in God's promises.
Peace. Love. Light. Grace.

In these promises, then, we are the voices and the hands and the feet of our God here on earth.

*God of Light,
Be with us, all of us and each of us, as we live faithful lives, walking in
Your promises and Your grace. And in our journeys, help us to bring
the Light of Your Love to each corner of the earth.
In Your Mercy, hear our prayer*

Monday, November 28

Misi French; The Heart's Way Home

Psalm 122

¹I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." ²Now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. ³Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself; ⁴to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, the assembly of Israel, to praise the name of the LORD. ⁵For there are the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. ⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. ⁷Peace be within your walls and quietness within your towers. ⁸For the sake of my kindred and companions, I pray for your prosperity. ⁹Because of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek to do you good."



In this psalm God's people are coming home after being in exile for a hundred years. And now they find themselves "Standing within your gates, O Jerusalem."

Jerusalem's past was far from peaceful, it was corrupt and full of injustice. This song is a prayer for a better Jerusalem where peace, justice and security reign. But it takes more than rebuilding structures, you have to rebuild the community; find a new normal, new traditions and new passions.

In some way we can connect with what they're going through. Many of us had the distinct feeling of being in exile during COVID. Not meeting as a worshipping community except for online. Not visiting friends and family except through a glass door. Not going to work and feeling productive. Not traveling, going to concerts or simply inviting friends into your home. We were missing all these things, only to 'come out' and find that everything is changed. We cannot go back to what once was.

There is grief that needs attention. The change can be difficult and our world will never look the way we remember it. We often hold up the past on a pedestal, wanting only to get back to where we were, but that is not realistic and can make our life experience stale. There is comfort in knowing that we are not alone and that our prayers for peace and security will be heard.

Some of the changes have been for the better. Those who felt isolated before COVID, who could not attend worship or Bible study, can now connect to people even if it is online. We may never have had hybrid services without quarantine pushing us to do so. We have been creative and intentional in how we connect with each other, in how we work and how we serve.

Advent is a time of hope for a renewed future. Let us embrace that truth and embrace the promises of Christ who came to us as a child, innocent and vulnerable, into a cold and harsh world. The promise is for a future with hope, with justice, peace and security.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.*

Tuesday, November 29

Pam Russell; Faith Lutheran Church

Romans 13:11-14

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.



Advent words!

Paul has presented the whole of his faith and belief, his understanding, of the Gospel, in his essay to the Romans. He has given his argument for the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans—all the peoples of the world, essentially—who believe Jesus is the Christ, to lay aside their differences in custom and opinion, move beyond the history that divides them, and be reconciled together as believers.

Now is the moment. Wake from sleep. Salvation is near. Let us live in the light of our faith and God's grace. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I write this, we are entering into a climactic week of a really horrible, terrible, awful election period. The divisions—*hostilities!*—are sharp between people of faith! Now, however, we look forward to not only the outcome of the election, but also to Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas—times of rejoicing, times of peace, times of gathering together with friends and family—those very same people who may see the world quite differently than we do.

Now is the time, also, of being intentional, deliberate, and generous, in making sure the food bank has food, that the community services organizations receive our stewardship, and that our church family, too, is whole and well through our offerings. Our work is God's work! Our gifts do God's work.

May Paul's prayer for the Roman church be our prayer! Christ is coming, here, among us, the light in our midst, the good news in our lives. Salvation is so very near to us. Can you taste it? The day is near!

Wednesday, November 30

Paul Hoffman; ELCA Retired Clergy

Matthew 24:36-44

[Jesus said to the disciples,] ³⁶“About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”



It's not unusual to hear Christians who follow the church year say, “I just love Advent. Every year I look forward to it.” You can count me in with that crowd.

But texts such as today's are actually quite terrifying and ought to make that first candle on our freshly made wreaths flicker, at least a bit. I mean –

all swept away in the flood,
one will be taken, one will be left,
thieves in the night,
houses broken into...

These are not warm, fuzzy images that meant to comfort us like the aroma of Christmas cookies baking in the oven. They are meant to wake us up and have us prepare for the essence of Christ's coming among us in ways that take his coming seriously and soberly.

I've always been quite curious about the “one will be taken and one will be left” illustrations planted deep within this passage. Which is the faithful one – the one taken or that one that is left? We might at first imagine that the one “taken,” if they are taken up to be with God forever at that day and hour about which no one knows. But following the example of Noah, what if the one who is taken up is one “swept away?”

Since Advent is a time of preparation for Christ to come and live among us, I suspect that the faithful one is the one who, like Noah, did that work that God called them to do. Just so, our Advent preparation is a time for us, like the one “left,” to prepare to do the work that God calls us to do – alongside him, and here on earth.

Where is God calling each of us – here and now – to partnership in the Gospel? Where is the work of peace-making or justice-seeking, relationship-building or compassionate partnership needed most? That is likely the place that God is calling each of us. It may not be as monumental as building an ark, but it is work that is worthy of our thought and preparation. And its magnitude might indeed make that first Advent candle on our wreaths flicker just a bit with both awe at our calling and agitation at the scope of God's work yet to be done.

Thursday, December 1

Barb Robertson; Former Missionary to Tanzania

Isaiah 11:1-5

- ¹A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.



‘A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.’

As I read these words, remembrances of a trip to Ethiopia came to mind. Many villages have large tracts of land that have been planted with eucalyptus trees. They serve as a community wood lot. The trees are periodically cut down for building material or firewood. But when the tree is cut, about a three foot stump is left. In time, a shoot will grow and eventually produce another tree.

One reason these eucalyptus come back is because they are rooted deep into the ground. They can endure being cut down and it doesn't kill them.

Can we say the same of our faith life? Are we well rooted in Christ? Can we endure when we are figuratively cut down? Can we be confident in our faith and know that we shall come back again, growing anew?

When we take stock of our lives, reflect back and find times when we have been cut down. An unexpected death of a loved one; a divorce; financial setback; a broken relationship with a child; a job lost; a harsh word from a trusted colleague; a painful childhood experience that continues to fester. Have we been able to come back from it? Or have we been so devastated from the incident that we don't grow again? Is our spiritually and emotionally life to be stunted forever as a result?

Or shall we sink our roots ever deeper into the stump of Jesse, the source of wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord?

Let us not be cut down once and for all. Let us be filled with the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead and may new life be ours, now and forever.

Loving God, you call us to grow deep in faith. Foster our spiritual roots to find those sources of life which you alone hold. When we face events which cut us down, nourish us, strengthen us, encourage us, heal us - that you may be glorified by new growth and new life within us. Amen

Friday, December 2

Cyndi Musar; Faith Lutheran Church

Isaiah 11: 6-10

⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.



This passage is so visual. We see unlikely allies working together peacefully. We see predators resting beside traditional prey without danger. I've always enjoyed photos of unlikely animal kingdom allies, especially cross-species adoptions, in which a mother animal cares for her own brood alongside the orphan from another species. God's work, her paws!

Meanwhile, it's not hard to wonder what has gone wrong with humanity, even within our own country, when families don't dare discuss their political differences, and other families justify purchasing handguns so they will feel safer, not from some specific predator but from a generalized sense of danger. We don't always feel safe with each other. We don't lie down with our "enemies"; we clam up and arm up.

Years ago, retired Pastor and Faith member, Don Smith, challenged us that "sometimes we need to pray for faith, not for safety". I've thought of this often. Don went on to share that concerns for safety turn us inward and separate us from the world at large. By contrast, faith brings us to faith in action. Faith in action doesn't hide and doesn't fear. The scary world is the world that needs us. It's not easy, but we use Faith as the antidote to fear and we act, we help, we serve. Recently, an author I enjoy said, "Community is the sum of our decisions" and I immediately thought of Faith Lutheran Church.

May the God of Peace be our guide in His world as ambassadors of peace, love, and comfort to others.

Saturday, December 3

Lynn Krog; Faith Lutheran Church

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

- ¹Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to the king's son;
²that he may rule your people righteously
and the poor with justice;
³that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
⁴Let him defend the needy among the people,
rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.
⁵May he live as long as the sun and moon endure,
from one generation to another.
⁶Let him come down like rain upon the mown field,
like showers that water the earth.
⁷In his time may the righteous flourish;
and let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.
¹⁸Blessed are you, LORD God, the God of Israel;
you alone do wondrous deeds!
¹⁹And blessed be your glorious name forever,
and may all the earth be filled with your glory. Amen.



I'm writing this reflection on Election Day. Aren't we all crying out for a leader who will bring peace, prosperity, rescue the poor and crush the oppressor? And oh how we long for the righteous to flourish. Or at least our definition of righteous.

But the psalmist declares that God alone does wondrous deeds. What to make of this? I'm thinking of a favorite book, A Prayer for Owen Meany. The book ends with a very wondrous deed. Performed by a very mortal human. Many years later my father returned it to me along with this inscription: "Aren't we all possibly God's instruments?"

It is natural to wonder why God, the great doer of wondrous things, doesn't get busy fixing the world. Try Googling that and you will get a multitude of responses about evil, sin, divine justice, the devil, bad people who haven't met Jesus, mysterious ways, among many others. I'm sure we have all pondered this.

Another favorite author, C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity, "Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having." We are tasked with seeking to embody goodness, spread love and bring joy.

Let us pray for guidance and inspiration as we seek to be God's instruments. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 4

Ellen Aagaard; Faith Lutheran Church

Romans 15:4-6

⁴Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.



I consider myself a positive person, but in the past few years I have felt my belief in the power of good, and the possibility of good outcomes, slipping away. I worry that my parents will catch COVID, or even worse, that they could catch it from us. I worry that today's third graders will never catch up from two years of disrupted reading and writing and math instruction. I worry that the nuclear nightmares I worried about in college could actually become a reality. And I worry about little things that I never worried about before: driving over the pass in snow; getting lost on a faint hiking trail; biking in the rain.

In the midst of all these worries, hope seems a tenuous thing. Necessary, in order to visit, and teach, and live in spite of fear. But not a given. Almost as if I now need to hope for hope.

This passage reminds me that hope is something that happens because we work for it—that our *steadfastness*--our firm and unwavering action--actually creates hope. As one of my students explained, "Well, to learn to read we practice. We read a little bit, then a little bit more, then a little bit more, and then we are better at it." Hope is like that, I think. A practice of action, of the cumulative little steps that lead us to our destinations.

This passage also reminds me that we are not alone in working towards hope—that we will find *encouragement*--motivation and support--because our God is also steadfast and encouraging. God knows how to walk beside us as we work towards hope, whether we are trudging or running, tiptoeing or skipping. And, in God's usual way, that steadfast encouragement is also embodied in human connection—in the harmony of shared work toward hopeful ends, and in all the ways we uplift one another.

God, thank you for your model of steadfast encouragement. In this Advent season, may we give and receive daily these gifts of hope: phone calls and prayers, thank you notes and texts, words of appreciation and offers of help.

Monday, December 5

Misi French; The Heart's Way Home

Romans 15:7-13

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name”;

¹⁰and again he says,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

¹¹and again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him”;

¹²and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



When I first arrived at Faith, Pastor Chris often referred to the passage on “Welcoming the Stranger.” It was important enough to her to want it posted somewhere in the church. Do you know where to find it? (Hint: check out the Narthex).

I think it would be fair to say that Faith has a long history of being welcoming.

Being welcoming or receiving – as a congregation or as an individual - the way that Paul is talking about isn't easy. It isn't about welcoming the important, or the popular, or those people who think like you, or look like you. It's about welcoming the people who seem different than you. Those you disagree with, or who may not seem to be important.

It means to welcome people in a way that Jesus would. It isn't a matter of searching for the best people to be around; it is a matter of bringing out the best in the people God has brought to you. Jesus loves and meets people where they are in life and so should we.

This idea of welcoming is helpful right now as Faith continues to reach out to our community in so many ways: space for AA groups, Blood Drives, Winter Shelter, open support of the homeless, immigrants and the LGBTQ community to name a few. Following Christ's example of welcoming lets people new to our church or Christian community know that this is a place where they can find acceptance, caring and God's love through his people.

Lord in your infinite wisdom, open our eyes to where the stranger crosses our path and move us to open our hearts to their needs. Amen.

Tuesday, December 6

Pam Russell; Faith Lutheran Church

Matthew 3:1-12

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”



John the Baptist appears in the wilderness, and begins to speak a prophetic word. The wilderness—he’s alone out there, and vulnerable. He’s telling the truth about what’s happening in the world—it is quite possible he was driven into the wilderness by the dangers of giving prophetic witness in the synagogue or in Jerusalem. He appears alone, but somehow, in the wilderness, other people begin to appear! These are wilderness people, also, who take John’s preaching and teaching to heart. And he baptizes them—a baptism of change, a baptism of repentance, a baptism of deliberately, intentionally choosing the difficult path of the prophet. John baptizes them—he brings them into a community of common purpose. A community of believers. A community of prophets.

It has always been dangerous to take up the work of prophecy. Pulling off the veil of self-willed ignorance, and shining the light of truth. No matter how guided by decency, integrity and of course, truth, prophets alienate the world. Yet, the Word of God is always prophetic. Followers of the great I-Am, followers of Jesus Christ, are going to be called and sent into the wilderness of prophetic living, speaking and serving.

But prophets are a company. Believers are not alone, not singular. John baptizes a community, a brotherhood-sisterhood, that will hold each other, keep each other faithful, protect each other, and shower one another with God’s love.

God of truth, God of peace, God of wilderness people, make us strong in your Word. Make us loud, obnoxious if necessary, but always faithful, to speak your Word of saving, of healing, of sharing, and of loving. In the wilderness, let us always know that you are with us, in Christ. Amen

Wednesday, December 7

Shannyn Fuerst; Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church

Isaiah 35:1-10

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ²it 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.



At the end of September, I took my first road trip since Jeremy died. We loved to road trip together. Taking the trip was a big step and one I had considered and tried for months. Even still, it took me an extra day to get out of the house with all the “feels” going on. As I drove down I-5, out of Seattle towards Bend, Oregon tears accompanied me. I was not surprised by this, but rather welcomed it, for tears hold the different memories and emotions. Jeremy and I had been to Bend once before and kept planning to go back again. We wanted *just the right time*. *We had saved hotel points to stay there and we were offered a lovely Air Bnb for a getaway. We just needed to decide on the timing and the activities. It should have been a simple road trip for us--there is much to do in Bend. But we wanted that “right time” when it would be fully relaxing and fulfilling.*

Bend, Oregon is a high desert. Surrounding the area are mountains and volcano structures. Hiking trails, breweries, kind people, and all sorts of outdoor beauty are part of what makes Bend beautiful.

I camped and the first morning found an off-leash dog area called the “Good Dog Trail.” There were miles of trails through the brushy desert plants and rocks that jutted around. Lucy, Millie, and I spent a few hours poking our way around, enjoying the silence and the beauty. One trail went down by the Deschutes River, where we sat. It’s interesting how the wilderness and the dry land can hold healing...how something that feels dormant can be brought forth with some time and space. The time for thinking and praying was present. The preparations for returning to Faith gently rolled through my mind as I thought about people, upcoming events, and worship. Something was starting to blossom.

A next step, whether hard or not, holds the opportunity for something to blossom. Desert plants don’t bloom often, but when they do, it is spectacular and beautiful. Those blooms are present in the plant, just waiting for the right time to come forth. Patience, nutrients, time, and space bring forth what is in us.

In this Advent time, we wait for the Savior to be born. We await with anticipation the joy and the celebration. We are eager for the blossom to come forth, that is the light of the world. But first, we wait...and sit...and ponder...and pray.

Loving God, you sit with us in the desert places drawing up nourishment from deep within. Guide us in the wilderness, water us in the dry places, and bring forth the blossoms with rejoicing. Amen.

Thursday, December 8

Karla Petersen; Faith Lutheran Church

Psalm 146:5-10

⁵Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help,
whose hope is in the LORD their God;
⁶who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;
who keeps promises forever;
⁷who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food
to those who hunger.
The LORD sets the captive free.
⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD lifts up those
who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
⁹The LORD cares for the stranger;
the LORD sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the
way of the wicked.
¹⁰The LORD shall reign forever,
your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!



Hallelujah! We KNOW this is our God of Grace and Salvation.

Each of us is called to live in a way that brings God's promises and wholeness and love into the world. Oh, how hard this is! We keep falling into the ways that bring us down.

But, we don't despair.
This Psalm is not just a song.
It is not a wish.
It is praise and promise!
It is joy and grace!
It is....LOVE.
Hallelujah!

*God of Hope,
Keep your soft, gentle hand on our hearts and in our lives. Give us
the courage and the strength and the compassion to be Your voice
and Your love and Your light in the world. In Your Mercy, hear Our
Prayer.*

Friday, December 9

Sandi Dexter; Faith Lutheran Church

Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b}My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
⁴⁹you, the Almighty, have done great things for me
and holy is your name.
⁵⁰You have mercy on those who fear you,
from generation to generation.
⁵¹You have shown strength with your arm
and scattered the proud in their conceit,
⁵²casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.
⁵³You have filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴You have come to the aid of your servant Israel,
to remember the promise of mercy,
⁵⁵the promise made to our forebears,
to Abraham and his children forever.



Mary, that young girl, not yet married - though engaged - hears the words of an angel. She does not shy away, and, after taking it all in, she embraces God's call to be the mother of Jesus. She is poor, someone who is invisible to those around her. And God chose her! She remembers the people who came before her and that God had provided for them. Mary knows what her role is to be and that God will provide for her as she recounts all God has done for her ancestors. Mary offers thanks and praises God.

Mary says yes! There were many obstacles in her way and yet Mary answered God's call to be the mother of God's only son. She gave her body and her life to answer God's call. We, too, can follow the example of being good and faithful servants. Our church needs worship assistants, ushers and fellowship hosts, people who can help out when leaves are covering the sidewalks, those who will be leaders and serve on committees - and so much more. Look through the weekly news and discover where you are needed and, like Mary, and say yes and be glad!

*Good and Gracious God,
We are grateful for Mary who answered God's call to be the mother of Jesus. Help us find ways in which we can answer your call to be ministers of your word in what we say and do. Give us the joy that Mary felt as we do God's work. Amen*

Saturday, December 10

Donna Shy; Faith Lutheran Church

James 5:7-10

⁷Be 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. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.



“Be patient.” These words jump out at me. Being patient is often difficult for me. I view patience as a passive attribute, but I like to be active. The unknown author of this book holds up farmers and prophets as examples of those who show patience. This author writes, “You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts . . .” Ah. The route to patience is not through passivity. It requires strength. It takes strength to endure suffering. It takes strength to not grumble about others. It takes strength to join with others, working to make sure that all God’s children are fed, sheltered, clothed, and respected.

These verses come from the middle of James 5. The opening verses of this chapter are a powerful statement against those who conspire to live in luxury and pleasure, at the expense of the laborers and the harvesters. It’s a statement promoting social justice, urging compassion and care for the poor. We are asked to be strong enough to join in communities of care for others.

In researching this passage, I went down a rabbit hole of St James the Apostle and St James, brother of Jesus; of St James the Great and St James the Just. Impatiently, I kept attempting to find the definitive answer to which James identifies himself in the salutation “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Patience. Whoever the author, the book of James has thoughtful words about faith and wisdom, suffering and endurance. The author counsels a patient spirit and a strong heart. I need to stop complaining about what is unknown and what can’t be done. I need to patiently and confidently work to relieve the suffering of others.

Oh Lord, be with all who are suffering. Be with all who are showing compassion for others. Give us the strength to trust in your ways. We pray in faith for your mercy and grace. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 11

Rick Friedhoff; Faith Lutheran Church

Matthew 11:2-11

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'
¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."



John the Baptist is a key actor in our salvation history.

His was the voice crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight". John participated in the baptism of Jesus and he was right there to hear the Voice from heaven saying: This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Shortly after the baptism John was imprisoned and followed the ministry of Jesus from afar.

John, who had been, preparing the way for Jesus, and heard the voice from Heaven proclaim Jesus as Beloved, had questions about the ministry Jesus to the poor, the most vulnerable, and the outcast. This ministry did not seem to fit the Jewish vision of Messiah as a powerful liberator/savior. To get answers to his questions John sent one of his own disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the One or should they wait for another.

The response of Jesus is to paraphrase Isaiah's proclamation about how the people of God are to be saved. Matthew's text does not say how John reacted to the reply of Jesus. I assume it was an Ah Ha moment and John realized that Jesus was the healing "servant savior" and not the "powerful force" the community had been expecting.

Given John's questions about Jesus' ministry it is easy to understand how we can have questions, doubts and sometimes be discouraged about the effectiveness that a servant based faith and ministry is having on today's rich and powerful society that celebrates wealth, power, and winning as golden calves. We might ask "Is this the way, the right approach.

Jesus responds to our questions and doubts when He says "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them". Advent can be a time for our own Ah Ha moment to strengthen our Faith and give us energy to be workers who help proclaim and build the Kingdom of God on earth.

Monday, December 12

Shannyn Fuerst; Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church

Isaiah 7:10-16

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹²But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. ¹³Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted."



Here is the promise:

God is with us, so that we might live.

God is with us, so that we might believe.

God is with us, because it is hard to believe, and God knows it.

In a world full of...everything...what does it mean to you that God is with us? Each person may answer that differently. It could shift day to day or year to year based off of your experiences and needs. It could be answered differently at various ages and stages of life. It can feel different in times of sorrow or in times of joy. What does it mean to you, today, that God is with you? That God is with us?

It is a promise. A promise given to us and of which we are reminded over and over and over again. I had a preaching professor who once said that he needs to go to church every Sunday because seven days is a long time to remember the promise.

God is with us, so that we might live.

God is with us, so that we might believe.

God is with us, because it is hard to believe, and God knows it.

Holy God, you are with us. Be present in our everyday mundane actions, living, and believing. Open our eyes and hearts as you show us and remind us that you are with us. Amen.

Tuesday, December 13

Rebecca Keith; Faith Lutheran Church

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

- ¹Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
²In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
stir up your strength and come to help us.
³Restore us, O God;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.
⁴O LORD God of hosts,
how long will your anger fume when your people pray?
⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.
⁶You have made us the derision of our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
⁷Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.
¹⁷Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one you have made so strong for yourself.
¹⁸And so will we never turn away from you;
give us life, that we may call upon your name.
¹⁹Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.



My instinct is to retreat from Old Testament passages focused on God's anger and punishment. Perhaps others feel the same - I signed up to write a devotion on the last possible day, and this was one of the few passages remaining!

Early last spring, I went through a time of spiritual desolation where I really could not see or feel God's presence in the world. This psalm speaks to such desolation. But the Advent hope and promise is also there. "Restore us, O God of Hosts" "Restore us" is the repeated refrain. There is faith that restoration of hope and salvation will come, not from our own power or action, but from God, from the one at God's right hand. The psalmist completely trusts that God can restore and give life.

So it was for me. On a cold Palm Sunday morning, in Washington, DC, where I was travelling with my family and friends, I felt and knew God's presence again. Left to my own devices, I would never have been restored. In this time of dark as we wait for Christmas, I am grateful that God's restoration comes, not through me, but through God's boundless love.

Dear God, thank you for your promise that darkness will not overcome us and that you will always restore us to your boundless love. Amen.

Wednesday, December 14

Misi French; The Heart's Way Home

Romans 1:1-7

¹Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



In just seven short verses the term 'called' is referred to three times.

Called to be an Apostle.

This is how Paul understands what God is asking of him, he felt called to spread the gospel. This is action oriented. It is directive in how you live your life. In what ways are you called to spread the Gospel?

Called to belong to Jesus Christ.

This calling to belong feels like a much deeper calling. It is an understanding of who you are at the very core of your being. To belong to Jesus Christ means that you are loved unconditionally. Do you feel this calling? Do you believe it?

Called to be Saints.

In the Catholic tradition only a few can be recognized as a Saint and it is not easy to get that distinction. A saint gives us a clear example of how Christians should live. Of course, no one who was alive ever got this distinction. My guess is that if you were already dead there was no chance you would mess up your image. But this call is for the living, "to all God's beloved people in Rome, who are called to be saints." A living saint isn't someone who never fails, but rather someone who never fails to get up again. Someone who strives to be better. Someone who cares for the environment, the world and the people in it. Can you put on your crown of sainthood?

Sometimes this 'calling' feels like a tall order. Sometimes I wonder if I am worthy. But it is not about you or I being worthy, it is a response to God's love.

God of mercy and grace, give me the creativity to spread your word, the vulnerability to understand my belovedness and the wisdom to live a life worthy of sainthood. Amen.

Thursday, December 15

Estelle Morley; Faith Lutheran Church

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.



When you want to hear and/or see today's local and worldwide news, to which channel do you turn? Do you trust your sources? Do you hear and see the truth? Do you get the whole story? Do others tell it differently?

The writer of Matthew was a truly inspired news caster. In the few quoted verses above he not only tells the Good News that Emmanuel "God with us" is to be born but that the birth of Jesus is bringing forgiveness, salvation, and new life to the whole world. Matthew is believed to have been written about 85 A.D. to Jewish people telling how Jesus' birth and ministry is the fulfillment of prophecies. The whole gospel contains more than 60 Old Testament prophetic references, 16 of which are fulfilled by Jesus.

Verse 18 boldly states: "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way." The writer is telling the news-like-it-is and is also giving the story-behind-the-story. He has already given the Son of David's genealogy and ancestral lineage. Now he is explaining how Isaiah's prophecy of the upcoming virgin birth is being fulfilled.

God speaks to Joseph in a dream. The whole trajectory of Joseph's life was being changed with each new day, each night, each dream. Joseph's ears were open; his eyes were seeing more clearly; his heart was bursting. Obedience to God's plan became his goal. God was shouting good news and commanding new action. Joseph's plan to divorce Mary quietly to avoid shame and disgrace was being altered. His faith was deepening and his gratitude and love was preparing him for his adoptive fatherhood role. Notice how quickly Joseph obeys and trusts the commands given by his God.

I am intrigued by the dream aspect of this story because I have been gifted with a rich dream life. On occasion, God has spoken to me in dreams and revealed clarifications and new plans of action. I know that Emmanuel "God with us" speaks to us in various ways.

How is God speaking to you? Is it through the printed Word, through preaching & education about Jesus who is The Word and The Truth, through dreams, angels, other persons, through creation? Are you seeing, hearing, receiving, and responding in faith?

Eternal God, through the ages you have spoken to all peoples. May our hearts, ears, eyes, and minds be open to receive your love, grace, mercy, and hope. All glory, praise, and honor to you, our Emmanuel. Amen.

Friday, December 16

Todd Wagner; Faith Lutheran Church

Isaiah 9:2-4

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.



I recently volunteered at the Grunewald Guild. It was an Ignatian spiritual weekend retreat. Ignatius is a Catholic saint. Besides my volunteer duties I was encouraged to participate in the retreat.

At one of the sessions the leader encouraged us to think of saints we have known who are in the ground now. My brother Kirk immediately came to mind. Saint Kirk Timothy Wagner. That thought made me smile. I felt warm and relaxed. His suicide has always been a sad memory for me. The three of us brothers did not grow up in a loving family. Two of us escaped. Kirk and myself. I left as soon as I turned eighteen. Kirk escaped, but did not make it out alive.

Saint Kirk, I imagine him welcoming me when I enter heaven. I bet He is still singing folk songs and playing his guitar.

What about the assigned text?

The words that spoke deeply to me are: "yoke of his burden, staff, and rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Midian." God has broken the oppressor's staff and rod. I survived and flourished. My brothers did not. God heals wounds.

I look forward to taking walks with Kirk.

Saturday, December 17

Heidi Renz; Faith Lutheran Church

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.



I was delighted to find my #1 favorite Bible verse in the list of scriptural passages for Faith Lutheran's 2022 Advent Reflections.

Being one of the world's most appreciative George Handel enthusiasts, I always experience added pleasure when I read Isaiah 9:6 because I then remember the part of Handel's Messiah that features this favorite scriptural passage. I have believed for many years that Jesus cowrote this music with George Handel as a gift to humanity. Listening to Handel's Messiah" is like experiencing the best of Christmas ~ regardless of when I hear it.

Imagine how many people have seen or heard the words of Isaiah 9:6 at some time in their earthly experience. And also, imagine the millions of people who have enjoyed Handel's oratorio at least once. The music and the lyrics combine to fill one's heart with joy ~ regardless of other circumstances in the listener's life.

The words ~ either sung or spoken ~ are one of God's Christmas presents to everyone. We are also reminded that God is our Counselor and will never fail us. He is there for us 24/7, through all the highs and lows of our lives. He is one of our very best cheerleaders ~ Jesus could be called the Cheer Leader Extraordinaire because of the magic He shares with us of what we can do and be in our lives.

Let us also remember when we read the words from Isaiah that Jesus is Mighty God and the Prince of Peace. He is the Government over all creation, serving all living things with love, goodness, and the highest ethics. What a marvelous God we have! Jesus truly is the best Christmas present any of us could ever receive. I thank the prophet Isaiah for bringing the beautiful words of 9:6 to us.

May it be that Isaiah and people everywhere ~ even those who are now in heaven (including our beloved pets who have brought us so much joy) ~ have a splendid Christmas. May our hearts be filled with both peace and good will in this holy Christmas season of 2022.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday, December 18

Karla Petersen; Faith Lutheran Church

Psalm 96

- ¹Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ²Sing to the LORD, bless the name of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.
- ³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.
- ⁴For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.
- ⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have made the heavens.
- ⁶Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.
- ⁷Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
- ⁸Ascribe to the LORD the honor due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.
- ⁹Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, all the earth.
- ¹⁰Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples with equity."
- ¹¹Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.
- ¹²Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O LORD,
for you come to judge the earth.
- ¹³You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth.



My sisters and I used to sing versions of this song through church choirs as kids, youth groups in high school, and even in college when we'd come home and mom and dad would convince us to sing at church. I remember the joy of raising our voices together, breaking into harmonies and coming back together.

Now, 40 and more years later, it still feels like a "new" song. Life brings us through circles and cycles and declaring God's glory is the center thread through it all. The world is in tatters, it seems, and it is sometimes hard to sing with joy. So we sing with longing, and lament, and grief. But still, we sing. We sing because we believe. We believe in God's promises. We believe in God's grace. We believe in God's love... for us and for the world.

God of Love,

Keep us surrounded in the joy of Your Love, so that the days we live, whether hard or easy, are grounded in Grace and Peace.

In Your Mercy, hear Our Prayer

Monday, December 19

Shannym Fuerst; Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹²training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.



This scripture passage is read on Christmas Eve.

Here, the Apostle Paul writes to his partner and co-worker, Titus, expressing the extraordinary good news about the salvation of God. All that comes next hangs on this statement: this salvation has been presented to us through the appearing (or epiphany) of the “grace of God.”

The salvation of God is entirely a grace gift. Everything that we might wish to include in a message of salvation—particularly at Christmas—is embraced by the free gift of God.

It is getting closer to the holiday. Kids (ok, many adults too) are bouncing around excited for those moments when the colorful packages are placed under the tree and the joy of unwrapping what is inside. Some others may be stressing about those colorful packages that are difficult to afford and worry about the comparisons to come. For others, the colorful packages bring warm memories of times past and for others they bring pain.

No matter what those colorful packages hold with them, we come back to the central focus, the gift given to us in Jesus Christ, which is salvation. It is a free gift, no strings attached, nothing that is earned, nothing that we have to pay for or owe. It is entirely a grace gift.

As those packages are wrapped and unwrapped, we simultaneously remember the gift of salvation, the grace gift given to each person, to you, child of God.

We thank you, O Lord, for the gift of salvation. We thank you, O Lord, for Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday, December 20

Julie Pierce; Faith Lutheran Church

Luke 2:1-14

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.

²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"



Imagine a young woman, very pregnant, taking a journey of approximately four days. She does this, riding a donkey, as the man she will marry walks beside her. Perhaps she also walks. Perhaps they both wonder where and how they will sleep each evening; what food and beverages they will take with them; what circumstances they will encounter. They are probably on this road with other pilgrims, also obeying their orders to go from their homes to Bethlehem.

Imagine their exhaustion; imagine their frustration when they learn that there is no more room for them to stay when they arrive at their destination.

Imagine their relief when the Innkeeper and his wife invite them to bed down with the animals. Fortunately, the stable is inside the Inn, as was then the custom. Imagine the Innkeeper's wife bustling about to make a bed for them as comfortable as possible. Then imagine the pregnant woman going into labor, so young, away from home, with no women of her family to assist her. Luke's report doesn't explain who provided the "swaddling clothes". My imagination tells me that they were provided by the Innkeeper's wife, and perhaps her friends, or even some of the guests at the Inn.

Today there are women and men coming to our country, to our state, to our city. Some of them are young; some of them have been on arduous journeys; some of the women are pregnant; They have had to travel with very few items. They arrive hungry and exhausted. Who welcomes them? Who gives them clothing, who provides warmth, housing, food?

We do. We welcome them. We give them clothing. We provide warmth. We provide housing. We provide food. Why are we doing this for people in our city, our state, our country, all over the world? We do this because we are called to do so. Because Jesus called us to do so. And, most importantly, because we are children of God.

Dearest Jesus, your human parents struggled, as have many other travelers, journeying to places unknown. Help us to provide for them as we imagine the Innkeeper and his wife did for Mary, Joseph and you, their baby. Amen.

Wednesday, December 21

Author Unknown

Isaiah 62:10-12

¹⁰Go through, go through the gates,
prepare the way for the people;
build up, build up the highway,
clear it of stones,
lift up an ensign over the peoples.

¹¹The LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:

Say to daughter Zion,
"See, your salvation comes;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him."

¹²They shall be called, "The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the LORD";
and you shall be called, "Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken."



Advent is an attitude of anticipation. The entire season prepares us to allow Christ into our hearts, sometimes in ways far different from other times when we celebrate the "excitement of December." Many people want everything about this season to stay the same year after year: the same carols, the same schedule for giving gifts, even food prepared in the same way. Consistency does give consolation to the heart.

But another truth tells us that each year ought to be different. We are not the same. We are faced with different responsibilities, moved by different insights, changed by circumstances we didn't have before, challenged by fresh opportunities and different memories, equipped with increasing or diminishing capacities for coping with all these variations. So we never "Advent" in exactly the same way.

In the lead up to December 25th, we celebrate the people close to that first Christmas. By reflecting on how Christ's love came to them, we can embody their graciousness and ask their help as we live into our Advent. It is important, of course, to be gracious as we welcome Jesus - who never changes. For twenty centuries, as God-infant and God-man, he has never varied in the genuineness and hopefulness of his offer of love. The message of his Christmas story is constant and always with us.

Thursday, December 22

Celtic Benediction by J Philip Newell

Psalm 97:1-2

- ¹The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice;
let the multitude of the isles be glad.
²Clouds and darkness surround the LORD,
righteousness and justice are the foundations of God's throne.



For your Spirit woven into the fabric of creation
For the eternal overlapping with time
And the life of earth interlaced with heaven's vitality
I give you thanks, O God.

For your untamed creativity
Your boundless mystery
And your passionate yearnings
Planted deep in the soul of every human being
I give you thanks.

Grant me the grace to reclaim these depths
To uncover this treasure
To liberate these longings
And in being set free in my own spirit,
To act for the well-being of the world.

*Recall the events of the day
And pray for the life of the world.*



Friday, December 23

Rebecca Keith; Faith Lutheran Church

Psalm 97:6-12

- ⁶The heavens declare your righteousness, O LORD,
and all the peoples see your glory.
⁷Confounded be all who worship carved images and delight in false gods!
Bow down before the LORD, all you gods.
⁸Zion hears and is glad, and the cities of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O LORD.
⁹For you are the LORD, most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.
¹⁰You who love the LORD, hate evil!
God guards the lives of the saints and rescues them from the hand of the
wicked.
¹¹Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the honest of heart.
¹²Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous,
and give thanks to God's holy name.



"You who love the Lord, hate evil!" What does it mean to 'hate evil'? It seems this sentiment has been used by believers of many faiths, including Christianity, to justify race-based violence, acts of terrorism, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, and a variety of persecutions based on characterizing people with different beliefs as 'evil'. I myself am not immune, at times feeling great anger towards people and institutions that I perceive as evil.

In recent years, I have found comfort and inspiration from the teachings of Franciscan Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation. As a Franciscan, Father Rohr is inspired by the teachings of St. Francis, including a core principle that "the best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better."

When I focus on the misdeeds and evil of others, I find myself upset, feeling helpless, and angry. When I try to practice a better way, it is at times possible to experience light and joy. For me, this passage is not about following the law and feeling self-righteous. It is about turning to God and seeking help to hate evil by practicing love.

Dear God, today help me feel your love for me, for those who frustrate me, and for all people. Help me to love you back and to share this love with those I meet. Amen.

Saturday, December 24

Mary Jo Hershly; Faith Lutheran Church

Titus 3:4-7

⁴When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. ⁶This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.



We are not saved through our own efforts. I've always thought this calls for rejoicing! If it was left up to me, there would be no hope for my salvation. Yet, through Jesus Christ, I have hope.

I have been told I'm forgiven more than once in my life. Even though the offense is never mentioned again, I always wonder if the person I offended still remembers. I still feel guilty, and guilt always gets in the way of relationship. I know it is the same when I am the one doing the forgiving. I can feel it. There is tension.

Maybe I am not as good at forgiving as I would like.

A little while ago I listened to a sermon about how Jesus took our sins upon Himself. That, by being justified through Jesus Christ, we aren't just forgiven, the slate is wiped clean, as if we had never sinned. I don't know if the preacher got it right, but I hope he did. Imagine standing in the presence of God, embraced by unfathomable love, and rather than feeling guilty, we experience pure joy. What a gift!

Dear Lord,

Teach me how to forgive so that it is as if I had never been wronged, making no room for guilt, with relationship undiminished. Amen.



*May the celebration of our Lord and
Savior's birth draw you closer to him
and to those around you.*

*May God's Spirit stir in each of us a
desire to love him and each other in
new and creative ways!*

Merry Christmas