

*The Season
of
Advent*



2014



www.discipleshomemissions.org

Friends,

We are pleased to offer information and meditations, to facilitate your observance of this year's season of Advent. Lectionary based meditations are being offered for each day from Thursday, November 27th (3 days of lead in to Advent) through Christmas Day. The actual beginning of Advent and the Christian year is on Sunday, November 30th, which is four Sundays prior to Christmas. We are presenting this material using the theme **"The Baby Changed Us All."**

Advent can be observed individually, as a family, or within the congregation. In each context, study, meditations, and service projects (collecting winter wear for those in need, visiting nursing homes, or taking baked goods or crafts to shut in members) are constructive activities. In all of these involvements, we seek to understand the coming of Christ, while acting on his behalf.

The display of Advent Wreaths and lighting of Advent Candles is primarily a congregational practice, though some families maintain this tradition. The five candles also have special meaning. There are four candle of color formed in a circle, with a white candle in the center. Each week a new candle is lit. The first candle is the candle of Hope. It is purple. The second candle (purple) is Peace. The third candle is Joy. The color of this candle is traditionally pink. The fourth candle is purple and it the candle of Love. The fifth candle, which is white, is traditionally lighted on Christmas Eve. It is called the Christ candle.

Besides the Advent Wreath, some celebrants attach particular importance to decorating their trees or displaying their Nativity scenes in progression. There are variations of these practices, but each involves adding

gradually to the display with the baby being the last addition to the manger or the star being the last addition to the tree.

Whatever your way of observing Advent may be, we trust that you will benefit from the renewed awareness of the love of God. Be blessed and be a blessing.

Basking in the Light,

Your Friends at Disciples Home Missions

The writers for this year's Advent resource are the Rev. Betty Miller Green and the Rev. Dr. Irvin W. Green. Together, they have written Advent (2011, 2013) and Lenten (2012, 2013) resources for Disciples Home Missions, as well as being involved in planning and presenting the educational component of the National Convocation of the Christian Church (DOC) on multiple occasions.



Betty Miller Green is an ordained minister, with diverse educational preparation that has extended her ministry to the fields of Education and Behavioral Health. She has served in support roles at several congregations, with a focus on Family Ministries and the empowerment derived from Women's Ministries. Rev. Green served the Michigan region as Regional Moderator. She is presently a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary.

Irvin W. Green is the Interim Pastor for First Christian Church (DOC) of Cuyahoga Falls, OH. He has served Disciple and United Methodist congregations and institutions in five regions, over a period of more than twenty six years. Dr. Green has served in multiple capacities in the regional and general ministries of the Church. Presently, he is a member of the National Convocation Board of Trustees and the Ohio Region's New Congregation Committee.

Hope ~ Peace ~ Joy ~ Love

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Daily Advent Readings 2014

Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings—Year B

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19	Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19	Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
				Zechariah 13:1-9	Zechariah 14:1-9	Micah 2:1-13
				Revelation 14:6-13	1 Thessalonians 4:1-18	Matthew 24:15-31

First Sunday of Advent (November 30 to December 6)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Isaiah 64:1-9	Psalm 79	Psalm 79	Psalm 79	Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13	Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13	Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19	Micah 4:1-5	Micah 4:6-13	Micah 5:1-5a	Hosea 6:1-6	Jeremiah 1:4-10	Ezekiel 36:24-28
1 Corinthians 1:3-9	Revelation 15:1-8	Revelation 18:1-10	Luke 21:34-38	1 Thessalonians 1:2-10	Acts 11:19-26	Mark 11:27-33
Mark 13:24-37						

Second Sunday of Advent (December 7 to 13)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Isaiah 40:1-11	Psalm 27	Psalm 27	Psalm 27	Psalm 126	Psalm 126	Psalm 126
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13	Isaiah 26:7-15	Isaiah 4:2-6	Malachi 2:10—3:1	Habakkuk 2:1-5	Habakkuk 3:2-6	Habakkuk 3:13-19
2 Peter 3:8-15a	Acts 2:37-42	Acts 11:1-18	Luke 1:5-17	Philippians 3:7-11	Philippians 3:12-16	Matthew 21:28-32

Mark 1:1-8

Third Sunday of Advent (December 14 to 20)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	Psalm 125	Psalm 125	Psalm 125	Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26	Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26	Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55	1 Kings 18:1-18	2 Kings 2:9-22	Malachi 3:16—4:6	2 Samuel 6:1-11	2 Samuel 6:12-19	Judges 13:2-24
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	Ephesians 6:10-17	Acts 3:17—4:4	Mark 9:9-13	Hebrews 1:1-4	Hebrews 1:5-14	John 7:40-52
John 1:6-8, 19-28						

Fourth Sunday of Advent (December 21 to 27)

Sunday Dec 21	Monday Dec 22	Tuesday Dec 23	Wednesday Dec 24 a.m.	Wednesday Dec 24 Nativity of the Lord I	Thursday Dec 25 Nativity of the Lord II	Thursday Dec 25 Nativity of the Lord III
2Samuel 7:1-11, 16	Psalm 96	Psalm 96	Psalm 96	Isaiah 9:2-7	Isaiah 62:6-12	Isaiah 52:7-10
Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26	Zephaniah 3:8-13	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Ecclesiastes 3:1-8	Psalm 96	Psalm 97	Psalm 98
Romans 16:25-27	Romans 10:5-13	Romans 13:11-14	James 1:17-18	Titus 2:11-14	Titus 3:4-7	Hebrews 1:1-4 [5-12]
Luke 1:26-38				Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]	Luke 2:[1-7] 8-20	John 1:1-14

Daily Meditations

Thursday – November 27, 2014

*Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.
Psalm 80:3*

Unmet needs or unfulfilled expectancies tend to grow, in the urgency with which they are expressed or experienced. In Psalm 80, the psalmist expands the way that God is called upon from “O God,” in verse 3, to “O God of hosts,” in verse 6, and finally “O Lord God of hosts,” in verse 19. Each of the verses goes on to include the appeal “let your face shine, that we may be saved.” The entire psalm revolves around the desire to be saved and all of the historical occasions when Israel has needed to be saved, and God has responded.

Any person or nation could rewrite this psalm, substituting our own historic or personal predicaments. Some would not credit God for their deliverance, but that would be an omission. God has not justified every action of any of us, nor has God corrected every misstep. What God has done is to love and bless all persons, offering them an expanded menu of possibilities, for all who walk with God.

As we enter the season of Advent, we continue to need and to seek God’s restoration. Each of us has experienced our own wilderness



time, our own forms of captivity, and our own hunger and thirstiness. Much of our need is resultant from our lapses in faithfulness. As with Israel, we are in need of God’s intervention. We prepare, with anticipation of an infusion of blessings, delivered by the coming Christ.

God of Restoration,

We await your blessings and your forgiveness. We have been blessed in the past, but did not fully appreciate or secure ourselves in these blessings. In your graciousness, establish us anew. We are dependent upon your love and your mercy.

*In Christ,
Amen*

Friday – November 28, 2014

*On that day, there shall not be either cold or frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light.
Zechariah 14:8*

When we await future things, we usually lack details of what is coming. We are able to anticipate that these things will be good if they are from good sources or problematic if they are produced by negative sources. Without hearing the tune, which presently does not exist, I know that the next recording by Stevie Wonder will be pleasing to me and well received by the public. He has demonstrated himself to be a good and reliable source. Such confidence is less than absolute, when vested in humans, but is fully justifiable when vested in God.

Zechariah may have been provided with accurate details of future days by way of revelation. He also may have provided imagery which was consistent with what he knew of God’s goodness. Those

concerned with extreme temperature conditions will no longer be troubled by heat or cold. Those whose productivity is tied to daylight hours will have limitless light. In the manner of Zechariah, I have often claimed that in God’s realm there is Polish sausage without cholesterol. It all depends on what troubles one seeks to be liberated from.

The day to come which Zechariah calls “that day” is typically understood to be the end of human history. Most prophecy seems to envision a final settling of circumstances in which God straightens things out “once and for all.” Nobody could have understood that Jesus would be capable of redirecting the world without shutting it down. We are still living into his reformation but it seems clear to some of us that history has not ended, but the Savior has come.

Transforming Lord,

You change us and our surroundings, in ways that we can never understand or envision. You know how to bless. We are willing and able to entrust the details of our blessing to you.

*By your power,
Amen*

Saturday – November 29, 2014

*I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the survivors of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture; it will resound with people.
Micah 2:12*

Having spent a lifetime in the Church, images of the people of God being gathered together seem poetic, at best. It must be representative of something that may actually happen. Church folks struggle to be gathered for a group portrait. Certainly God’s intentions are authentic, but

gathering us together must be a metaphor. It is far easier to embrace visions of God collecting the remnant of Israel or of "Fillintheblanks" Christian Church. The remnant has not come together willingly, nor is there sufficient energy to object.

God is not limited to our vision of the future. Instead, we are invited to God's vision of the future. To experience the best of what God has for us, each of us is called to "be gathered" with some folks that we are not accustomed to spending time with. God will convene a reunion which could be entrusted to nobody else, but God.

We are called upon to believe in and to expect the unexpected. Jesus epitomizes this. He was a king without health care, born where humans were in the minority.

He was not a remnant, nor are we. He stands as clear evidence that God can gather whoever God wants to gather. There will be very few "no shows," for the gathering will "resound with people."

Convening Lord,

Gather us when and where you please. It is clear that your plans are more promising than ours. Give us acceptance, rather than tolerance, of those with whom you gather us. You are Lord, and not any of us.

*In Surrender,
Amen*

Sunday – November 30, 2014

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. Isaiah 64:1-2



We await the coming of Christ, not only during Advent, but at every key juncture of life. We expect Jesus to show up at our baptisms, graduations, and to meet us at summer camp, when the Gospel message begins to be personal to us. Although we are clearly aware of our need for Jesus, we are not without expectations, or even demands, regarding how his arrival and time with us will unfold. Christians only have to see or imagine an event once or twice for it to become an expectation.

In Isaiah 64, the prophet has decided that some godly pyrotechnics are called for. In his view, God ought to rip heaven apart on the way to rescuing Israel on earth. Mountains, which have not participated in any act of injustice, should be frightened or shaken into a state of quaking. It is an impressive vision, reminiscent

of the throne scene in Isaiah 6, but it may be overkill for a God who simply said "let there be light."

We need to trust God to determine how dramatic or understated each occasion needs to be. We run the risk of joining Naaman, who jeopardized his blessing by insisting on the healing of his choice. Jesus cannot be counted on to look like we expect, act like we expect, talk like we expect or bless like we expect. Jesus can be counted on.

Heavenly God,

We submit ourselves to your methods and to your outcomes. You know how to bless and we need blessings. Come as you choose and when you choose. We will praise your name and worship you.

*In God We Trust,
Amen*

Monday – December 1, 2014

For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. Micah 4:5



In the display and handling of the flag of the United States of America it is taught that the U.S. flag should never be displayed at a lower level than that of another nation or dipped in respect of another nation's flag. The guiding principle is the belief that there is no nation that the U.S. needs to look up to. Although this is a reflection of national pride, it is good, in my opinion, that presidents and other representatives of this nation have been willing to be humble and respectful enough to bow before kings, queens, and popes. Being the "big dog" does not require treating others as puppies.

There are differences in observing the ways that our Bible and other Christian writings speak of the "gods" of other faiths. It may be that we should not only use lower case letters, but should also add quotation marks. This is true because it reflects our actual belief that there is only one God. The other faiths, according to our faith, do not have lesser gods. They have elected to not embrace the only God. Others will walk in the name of their "gods" for a while, but only the true God will be available to serve and walk with forever.

Our GOD,

We love you dearly, but we are willing to share. We cherish you, but do not possess you. May the world around us come to experience your love and your blessings.

*In Jesus' Name,
Amen*

Tuesday – December 2, 2014

Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labor? Micah 4:9

Even while we await the coming of Christ or God's next blessing, there should be a deepening of our faith and expansion of hopes, based upon God's record of deliverance. The questions that the writer poses in

this text call for such faith and hope to show up, even in times of despair. These questions call to memory Jesus' response upon being awakened by the disciples during a storm. Though the storm was every bit as bad as they feared, his question was "have you still no faith."

Some of us have become so accustomed to crying, aloud or otherwise, that we cry as a first response. Some have even advanced the notion that those who cry more readily are more in touch with their feelings. This text does not invite us to put away our legitimate feelings, but to allow trust in our God to embolden us.

The question "is there no king in you" returns us to the pivotal scene in the great movie classic "Beverly Hills Chihuahua" when the featured pooch escapes her pampered persona and discovers her "inner bark." This was made possible in the movie because of a visit to the state of Chihuahua in Mexico, where the dogs that are named for that locale are not viewed as "Toys", but as royalty. When we recognize our origin we will claim our royal heritage.



King of Kings,

Your royalty is in each of us and calls us to live boldly. Though we still fear, we will look within, to find the strength and capacity that you have created in us.

*In Your Image,
Amen*

"...Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:36

In the text, Jesus warns hearers that they should be sufficiently vigilant and aware to escape "all these things." He has named some of these things, but the message may be strongest when each person plugs in their own version of "these things." For some, these things are those that they stoop to when going after a particular job. For others, the failure to go after any job is "these things." The category reaches into every area of our lives. It involves how we work and how we play. It adds up to being an expression of who we are. We must escape those things that will present us before the Son of Man as undesirable.

Although Jesus speaks of the Son of Man in the third person, we should be certain to know the he speaks of himself. He is a compassionate judge who is hoping to prepare each one who will stand before him. He wants to find in your favor. In order to do so, he will provide all that you need to be ready. We must each create our "these things" list and work to overcome whatever threatens our eternity.

Righteous Judge,

We have many things to withstand, but we have everything that we need to do so. Grant, to each of us, your divine counsel and judge us with your supreme mercy.

*In Humility,
Amen*

Thursday – December 4, 2014

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

Psalm 85:10-11

Earlier in this psalm, the psalmist has invited God to restore Israel. This would not be the first such restoration. It is, in fact, the memory of previous restorations that allows the psalmist to view the possibility of being restored with such positive anticipation. God has been a difference maker in the past and the invitation is extended for God to do it again.

The picture that is painted of a future restoration involves a meeting between love and faithfulness. There is no mention of what they might talk about in their meeting. Meanwhile, righteousness and peace are off to the side kissing. We have long known that true peace would require righteousness, but we never knew that they were “an item.” Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, while righteousness looks down from the sky. Certainly, God would like to see these attributes coming from those on the ground, but maybe being showered from above and grounded from below will bring us to that point.

It is significant that the psalmist envisions the things that are most needed coming to life. Faithfulness, peace, righteousness, and love are all personified. The claim is being made that the Israel and all others in the world would benefit if goodness became a person and lived among us. At that time, it seemed like a good idea. At this time, it is our central theme. We need God walking with us.

Living God,

You have, indeed, walked among us. You continue to keep your promise to always be with us. May we walk in such confidence that your presence empowers us to bring righteousness, peace, love, and faithfulness to your people.

By Your Power,

Amen



Friday – December 5, 2014

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you...” Jeremiah 1:6-7

Surprisingly, these words come immediately after one of the most quoted callings in all of the scriptures. God has announced to Jeremiah that he has been known even before conception. His consecration occurred prior to birth. Instead of immediately celebrating this news, Jeremiah’s first words are words of hesitation. He is not alone in this. Moses cited his stuttering, disciples announced a family funeral, Sarah pointed out her advanced age, and you and I named our own versions of “I AM ONLY.”

“I am only” is our self pronouncement of “not enough.” Whether noting our gender, our stature, our insolvency, or our level of education, we hear God calling and respond “I AM ONLY.” In this moment, we seem to forget that God is fully aware of what we are “only.” God, who knew each of us before conception sees all that we are and all that we can be.

Throughout the Bible, God has a saying that sounds very close to ours. Instead of “I am only”, God reiterates “I AM.” In the face of every question of identity, capacity, or power, the God of creation and the Savior of the

world respond “I AM.” As we walk with Jesus, who comes to redeem us, we can traverse the gap between “I am only” and “I am.”

God of Being,

Enlarge our view of ourselves, so that we can enlarge our understanding of your calling. Use us to do great things, because we can, by your power.

In Faithfulness,

Amen

Saturday – December 6, 2014

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do them?”

Mark 11:27-28

The questions from the temple officials were rhetorical. There was no answer that could have actually sufficed. They knew that, in terms of their stated policies and practices, Jesus was acting without appropriate authority. Jesus knew it too, but never sought authorization from temple officials or anyone else.

In the 1955 play “Guys and Dolls”, a gambler named Sky Masterson said “One of these days in your travels, a guy is going to show you a brand new

deck of cards on which the seal is not yet broken. Then the guy is going to offer to bet you that he can make the jack of spades jump out of this brand new deck and squirt cider in your ear. But, son, do not accept this bet, because as sure as you stand here, you're going to wind up with an ear full of cider." Sky Masterson teaches us that we cannot let others define us, nor should we "play their games."

Jesus knew better than to "play the officials' games." Instead, he posed a question to them. He said that he would answer their questions if they could answer his. He claimed authority over the conversation and inserted "his game." This is appropriate because Jesus is not one who is granted authority. He is the grantor of authority.

God of Authority,

You have granted us permission to speak of your Kingdom. You have allowed us to claim your name. Because of your authority, we can convey to all the love of Jesus.

By His Name,

Amen

Sunday – December 7, 2014

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Isaiah 40:1 KJV

On yesterday, we participated in the annual performance of the Cleveland Messiah Chorus. Each year, the concert is held to present Handel's great work "Messiah." The Gospel story is told in musical renderings of significant scriptures. Part one of the three segments of this masterpiece draws heavily from Isaiah 40.

The first words sung are in a solo for a tenor which offers "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." The tenor goes on to promise "Every valley shall be exalted." This leads the entire assemblage to stand and proclaim "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." Finally, in selection number nine, the alto and the chorus combine to assert "O thou that tallest good tidings to Zion, get thee

up to a high mountain and say to the cities of Judah 'behold your God'."

Without speaking in the vernacular of the biblical days, or of the 18th century English translation of this scripture, we are still called upon to proclaim the goodness and presence of God. Our "high mountain" may be the internet or some other expression of electronic communication. Our purpose remains to be the comforting of God's people. In every generation, God desires comfort for the people of God. Jesus comes not only as the fulfillment of Isaiah's words of prophesy, but with the same purpose, the comforting of God's people.

Exalted Lord,

You send us messengers to offer us comfort and we are glad. Call us beyond our comfort, to godly action, for we know that we too are your messengers. We thank you for all who have come or will come, especially, Jesus, our Lord.

In His Name,

Amen

Monday – December 8, 2014

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1

In seminary training, students are often asked to identify their warrant. A theological warrant is not unlike a warrant for your arrest. In the case of an arrest warrant, a person can be arrested pursuant to the authority

of the grantor of the warrant. The arrest is based upon this authority. In the case of theological warrants, our beliefs or claims are based upon whatever causes us to embrace these claims or beliefs. Most believers offer scripture as a warrant.

The psalmist identifies the Lord as a warrant. The Lord is named as the psalmist's "stronghold for life," that is, the ultimate source of all strength. With such a source, the psalmist asks, in utter disregard of the identity or nature of any antagonists, "of whom shall I be afraid?" The assumption and theological claim is that God is capable of delivering the psalmist, and us, from any attack or opposition.

Like the psalmist, each of us will continue to face opposition throughout our lives. With faith comparable to that of the psalmist, we can be confident in advance. Without detailing exactly what or who will challenge us, we can know that we have what it takes to face each challenge. This is the salvation that comes to us, during Advent and beyond.

Guiding Light,

We face opposition at every turn, but we do not continue to fear. Our plans and our identities are frequently questioned, but we know who we are. Because we trust in you, we can live boldly and confidently. For this we give thanks.

In Your Care,

Amen





Tuesday – December 9, 2014

Though an army encamp against, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet will I be confident. Psalm 27:3

Because this psalm is well stated and feels good to speak, it is cherished and often quoted. We use it to fend off countless ordinary struggles. When it rains on our picnics, we quote it. When we miss our usual bus, we call forth the warning to encamping armies. We bravely assert that our hearts are not afraid, when our lunch order is messed up. Having spoken with such boldness, real problems emerge and we fall apart. We lack the perspective of the psalmist.

The presumed writer of this psalm actually had armies to encamp against him. Wars were aimed specifically in his direction, one led by his son Absalom. He experienced sitting at the dinner table, when Saul decided that throwing a spear at him would be a good “mixer.” The challenges faced by David, at every stage of life, were anything but ordinary.

We can continue to claim this psalm. We can, if we choose, claim it with deeper meaning. The words that we have applied to our small challenges hold true, even in the case of earth shaking difficulties. God is not limited. Our perspectives have been.

Boundless God,

Deliver us from armies and opponents, large and small. We need to know you, in everyday affairs, and to call upon you in the case of life changing events. Gladly, you are up to any challenge.

In Reliance,

Amen

Wednesday – December 10, 2014

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! Psalm 27:13

Throughout the world, packages sit with notes which say, do not open until Christmas. In some cases, those who know their family members well enough recognize that this will only occur if the packages are hidden. Such packages are stashed in closets, attics, automobile trunks, and even homes of others. All of this becomes necessary because some of us find it impossible to wait for the proper time.

Our impatience would be understandable or even cute, except that we are equally impatient with other matters. In our insistence to discover even the things that we are expressly forbidden to know, we open mail, peek in medicine cabinets, listen to private conversations, and even ask questions of those whose privacy we are disrespecting.

Even though these ethical breaches are less acceptable than sniffing out Christmas presents, they are only symptomatic of a larger concern. When we become unwilling to wait for what is coming (or not), we reject the idea of Kairos. Kairos, which is understood to mean God’s time or the fullness of time, is not expressed in terms of chronology, but in terms of propriety. On many biblical occasions, Israel chose a reckless course of action, rather than to wait for God. We have continued this behavior in our own time. Waiting for the Lord displays more than patience. It says that we submit to God’s Lordship and acknowledge our dependence.

Punctual Lord,

Your time is the right time. We accept that, even when curiosity seeks to overwhelm us. We would rather wait for your blessings than to hurry to receive what any other can offer us. Take your time, Lord.

In Surrender,

Amen

Thursday – December 11 2014

Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. Habakkuk 2:2

Countless sermons have been preached, using this verse as the basis by which a new ministry or a new emphasis is presented to a congregation. On some occasions, the message is accompanied by an elaborate written rendering of this new venture. Sometimes there are banners or flyers. The assumption seems to be that better graphics imply a better vision. This assumption probably agrees with what some understand the text to say. We are to write the vision so clearly and so large that it can be read by runners, as they pass.

Even though most of our congregations would be well served by revamping their promotion and publicity approaches, scripture is seldom concerned with public relations. We have too often relied on marketing our visions, rather than making sure that we have properly



discerned a vision. Many of our programs and campaigns fail not because the signage was too small, but because we were promoting the wrong vision.

It is telling that we so embrace verse 2 of this chapter. Verse 1 is not nearly as popular, but it is there that the commitment is made to seek the vision from God. It reads "...I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint." Verse 3 advises that there is a vision which should be awaited even if it tarries. The vision that we are to write on huge placards is the vision of God. We are to make it plain and to abide by it.

God of Vision,

Reveal to us what our governing vision can and must be. We can never do your work without hearing from you. Show us your plan and the places that each of us is called to occupy. We are your work force. Employ us.

In Compliance,

Amen

Friday – December 12 2014

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14



As we prepare for the birth of Christ, we read of Paul's aspirations to live into the resurrection of Christ. One could wonder is this an oversight by the lectionary team, but I believe that it is thematically connected. We and Israel have spent lives and generations awaiting the coming of Christ, whether into the world or into our hearts. We believe that, when He comes, we will be made more complete. Paul is at a different point in chronology, but seeking the same wholeness.

He acknowledges that he has not made it his own. This is a dual admission. Firstly, he confesses that he is still aspiring, having not yet arrived. He wants all that life in Christ has to offer, as we do. Secondly, there is the awareness that the outcome is not in his hands solely or entirely. Our best efforts still require God's actions. We are the created, not the creators.

Paul's personal strategy, in aspiring to these things, serves us well. It is necessary that we allow the past to be the past. No future destination can be located in our rear view mirror or in our congregational anniversary book. We must not only look to what lies ahead, but to "press on" toward our heavenly call and any earthly callings that God has for us.

God of Wholeness,

Show us your calling and the path to fulfilling it. We seek to be all that you desire for us. Let us know that every change and all of our growth resides in the future.

In Faithful Striving,

Amen

Saturday – December 13 2014

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for the sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. Psalm 126:5-6

In most cases, scriptures about restoration have to do with the sins of those seeking to be restored. This text reminds us of the need to be restored



from what has befallen us. It is good to know that God issues no-fault policies for those who have been victims of circumstances. This is essential in a world where "stuff happens."

The text is a celebration of the willingness to push through. In the face of too much or too little rain during the planting season, we must push through. When the economy seems to be on an endless sliding board, we push through. When it appears that our troops are only home long enough to get a change of clothes, the children of God push through. Every instance of pushing through does not result in a breakthrough, but every breakthrough is the result of pushing through.

The psalm asks of God that there be more breakthroughs. It is assumed that the faithful will persist in their efforts, but God is the one who can assure the harvest. Our harvest is not only agricultural. It consists of the fruits of all of our faithful efforts. We sing with gusto of "bringing in the sheaves."

Lord of Results,

We thank you for your blessing of our efforts. We will strive, but we need you to make our harvest bountiful. Inundate us with your outcomes.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

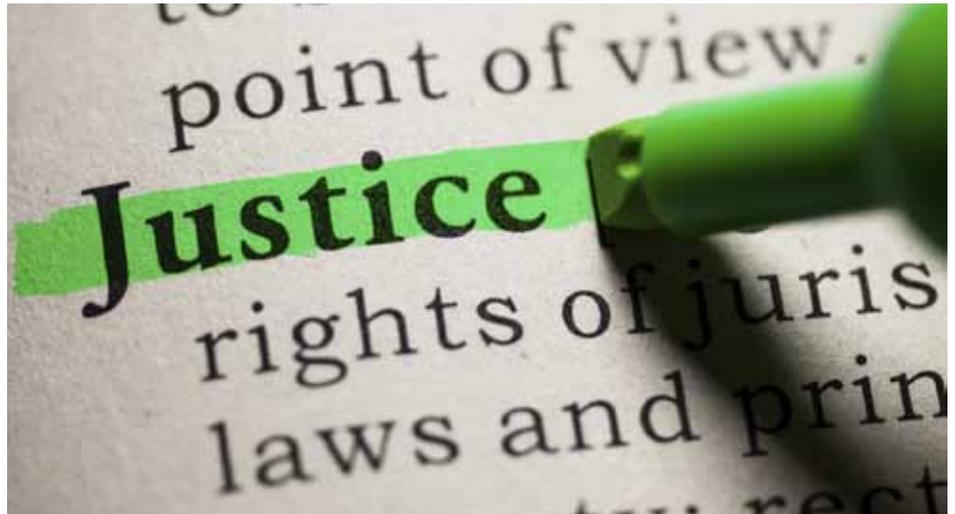
Sunday – December 14 2014

...and they shall rebuild the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former desolation and renew the ruined cities, the devastation of many generations. Isaiah 61:4 AMP

In our home we have several television shows we like to watch. We especially like the shows in which old and outdated homes are restored. The renovation of old homes has become the way to go. We still recall the days when purchasing a new home was the preferred norm. Today, most people cannot afford the budget for all the things of desire in a new home. Since new owners are looking to get more for their money they must seriously consider taking on a restoration project.

It takes vision and patience to restore a home. Convincing buyers to even consider restoration is a major task. After convincing the buyers to go with the renovation, keeping and holding their trust throughout the process is a major task. Anything and everything is at risk. At some point during the process, the ability to see into the future is what is needed. In the end everything usually comes together in televised restorations. At that point, one can easily see the value of restoration.

Advent comes, just in time to renew our strength and to restore our joy so that we can push on. Like the homes on the television, we need to be restored. We could be afraid except for one thing. The thought of seeing the newborn baby is all the fuel we need to keep moving forward.



Gracious and ever faithful God,

You provide us a glimpse of the future as you gently guide us on, even when everything around us screams no, a baby comes alone and changes everything.

Patiently,

Amen

Monday – December 15 2014

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm... Ephesians 6:13-14a

Making decisions is a part of life. We make decisions daily. Some decisions are small and do not have a lot of meaning or significance. Some decisions are life changing. A decision may say a lot about who you are as a

person. It can describe your integrity and your character. The decision to stand up for injustices against others can be life changing as well as life giving. Standing with our decisions against the attacks of others can be very difficult.

Speaking up for others is not something one does just when it is convenient or comfortable. "Hands off, it's not my problem" seems to be the popular response of the day. It is also the easy route to take. Advent is a reminder that who we are, as Christians, has meaning beyond the seasonal greeting and a few coins or dollars in the collection envelope for Christmas blessings. What we have to give is not always monetary.

The families that receive the blessing of dinners at Christmas receive the message that someone in this world cares about them. The same people receive a totally different message when you sit down at the table with that person. You then send a message beyond care. You send a message of genuine care and love. This is a message of acceptance that warms their heart and brings not only a feeling of hope, but genuine joy.

Lord of Joy,

Give me the strength and courage that I need to stand against unrighteousness toward others. Help me to bring hope, joy and peace through acts of genuine love.

In Christ,



Tuesday – December 16 2014

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, sent priest and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely. "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "Then who are you?" "Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John 1:19-22 NIV

It is a very uncomfortable feeling when you are being questioned. When I read this passage I am always reminded of the recurring scene of interrogation, of suspected criminals that I have seen on television. The suspect is put in a small room and grilled for hours and hours, without a break. The room is hot and uncomfortable. The suspect goes without food or water. In such situations the idea is to put on the pressure until the suspect gives in, out of exhaustion.

This passage of scripture gives no indication of how long John the Baptist was questioned. Nor is there any indication of what he was thinking. The questions seemed pretty straight forward and so were John's answers. This passage of scripture makes me wonder how and if I would be able to stand up to such interrogation. If you do not know who you are in Christ, you could easily buckle.

We are not living in a time or place where Christians are under such constant interrogation. Nor are we living under such oppression that you could be killed and punished for your Christian beliefs. However, the questioning, testing, and trials are still there. They just look different and are not as visible. Others who are not believers trap you or taunt and entice you. They are joy stealers. They can suck the joy of Christian life right out of you. We must guard our hearts against these situations in our lives that threaten to rob us of our joy.

We need the joy that advent brings. It is a time to renew our strength and renew our faith in God. It is also a

time to remind us that God will be with us in our days of trial.

God of Joy,

We thank you for your continued love and blessing. We thank you for standing by us in the moment of truth when others question us. You give us the courage to stand.

Joyously,

Amen

Wednesday – December 17 2014

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore. Psalm 125 1-2 NIV

As most of us have observed, when someone has real passion for something they never seem to grow tired of working at it. Runners, in training for a marathon, will run regardless of the weather. They invest in the best running shoe. They run every day. They push themselves to train, even when they are tired. They make sure to put time for running on their schedules. They build their schedules around running. Anyone

who truly knows them has no doubt what their passion is.

What if we lived out our faith in the same way? What would that faith look like? I think it would look similar. It would not matter what the weather was or what season. You would push yourself to live according to your faith, beliefs, and values. In fact, you would build your schedule around your faith-building activities. You would reserve time in your schedule. Anyone who truly knew you would have no doubt what your passion is.

It would not feel like work. Unshakable faith does not happen overnight. If it is something you desire, you must work on it. It is a lifetime investment. You have to also allow that faith to work on you and within you. The starting place is wherever you are right now. Where we are might require our taking baby steps toward our goal, but it is a start.

LORD,

We thank you for your continued patience as we develop in the faith. Your loving presence, as we continue on our faith walk, gives us comfort and reassurance.

Lovingly,

Amen



Thursday – December 18 2014

*Every house is built by someone,
but God is the builder of everything.
Hebrew 3:4*

As newly married couples establish a home they focus on many things. They talk about their budget and the things that they want in a home. They decide together on things such as the neighborhoods they want to live in, type or style of home, the number of rooms, and more.

While all these things are important, the amount of importance placed on these things may outweigh the benefits that they actually receive. As they make their decisions, most couples forget to include God. The priorities of society have led many couples away from their Christian values and beliefs. The enticement of having a beautiful wedding and home are too often the prevailing focus.

In many ways, this is very similar to the commercialization of Christmas. As Christians we must always be aware of this element in all the areas of our life, not just at Christmas. We should actively (and sometimes aggressively) address commercializing that threatens to order our lives.

Advent provides us with an opportunity to “clean house” and clear our minds. It helps us to be prepared to receive the baby Jesus once again and be renewed.

Lord,

We give you praise, for you always know just what we need and when we need it. We thank you Lord, for your patience and understanding when we go astray. We are thankful that you receive us with open arms, to bring us back into the fold.

In Christ,

Amen

Friday– December 19 2014

*And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,
“Let all God’s angels worship him.”
Hebrew 1:6*



Everyone looks forward to the birth of a new baby. The time of waiting for the new birth fills us with hope. We look forward to the anticipated arrival of new life. There is something about having life in the home that seems to change everything. Everyone wants to come and see the new baby. Everyone wants to hold the new baby. Family members come around who have gone astray and estranged been from each other.

A new baby brings family and friends together. There is more laughter and fewer arguments. People become more generous. It is noteworthy that we are also more often more cooperative and tolerant of each other’s differences.

As we prepare to once again receive the Christ child, we look forward with hopeful expectation. Even though we know that this anticipated birth is just a reenactment, it elicits the same level of excitement. Symbolic or real, a baby changes everything. This is not just any baby. This is “the baby that changes everything.”

Loving God,

We are grateful for each opportunity to receive new life. We are grateful that you remind us to prepare our hearts and minds once again to experience the blessings of Advent.

Lovingly Awaiting,

Amen

Saturday – December 20 2014

The flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with faces to the ground. When the angel of the Lord did no show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the Lord. “We are doomed to die!!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” Judges 13:20-22.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that, by our own interpretation, look pretty bleak. We do not see a way out. In Manoah’s eyes he and his wife had done a bad thing. In his day and time it was an ultimate sin to see the Lord. This kind of sin was unforgiveable. Manoah and his wife had taken a young goat as an offering and sacrificed to the Lord. They were anticipating the blessing of having a child. According to scripture Manoah’s wife was barren.

When we look with our human eyes at situations, we see limitations and obstacles. We have doubts and questions about any possibility of a favorable outcome. We have conditioned ourselves to accept and live within the limitations of what we know and understand.

God has a way of making the impossible, possible. God can take any situation and turn it around. When we find ourselves in situations that we cannot understand or explain, we must learn to let go and let



Monday– December 22, 2014

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all people. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. Psalm 96 2-4. NIV

Years ago my husband and I joined a choir at church. A verse in one of my favorite songs repeated “God has done marvelous things, praise the Lord.” As I sang this song, my mood was always joyful. I do not think I could sing this song if I was not able to look back over my life and see some of God’s blessings in my life.

The experience of the choir helped me to understand the scriptural references of many of the songs we sing in church. It also helped me to gain a deeper appreciation of the scriptures.

That experience became even more magnified as I sang in the Cleveland Messiah Chorus. I used to wonder what all the excitement was about when Handel’s Messiah was performed. Now that I have experienced it first hand, I count it a blessing to hear it or sing in it. The rush of people who want to join in when it is time to sing the Hallelujah Chorus adds to the excitement. The sound is powerful. Hallelujah, what a wonderful way to engage in the season of Advent.

God handle it. Although Manoah’s wife was barren, through God’s intervention they were blessed with a child.

Most Loving God,

Help us to let go when we need to, so that we can receive all the blessings you have predestine for us.

By Your Power,

Amen

Sunday– December 21, 2014

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. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. Luke 1:46b-49.

Many of the elders in my life have often said that “God works in mysterious ways.” Truly it has to be a mystery when a woman, who claims to be a virgin, turns up pregnant! It is even more mysterious to hear her singing praises to God and calling herself blessed!

As a child I was taught that there were certain things that you did not question. Things found in the Bible were high on the list. Even in this day, this passage continues

to remain somewhat of a mystery. Even as I write this passage, I look over my shoulder. I can feel my elders breathing down my neck in disapproval. Do not speak it, do not think it and definitely do not write it down.

As an adult I have come to learn that my God does not buckle or back down to what people think. God has a plan and reason for everything. God is always in control! If Mary were living in my childhood days, she would have been shunned by society. No man would have stepped forward to rescue her in marriage. As no man (in those days) would want to give their name to another man’s child.

Mary was still very young. When would she have learned to speak with such depth and presence of mind about the Lord’s goodness? She was carrying within her not just a baby. She was correct, all generations would call her blessed. She was not just carrying a baby. She was carrying the baby that would change everything.

Almighty God,

You lovingly care for us and bless us in ways that we cannot understand. It is because of your unwavering love that we are blessed.

In Appreciation,

Amen.

God of Love,

You find ways to demonstrate your love and accept us. Thank you Lord, for the opportunity to praise and celebrate you in song.

In Praise,

Amen

Tuesday– December 23, 2014

Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Psalm 96, 7-9 NIV

When a friend was ordained, I was blessed with the opportunity to read this passage of scripture at the beginning of the ordination. At the end of the reading, the choir was joined by those in attendance with a highly spirited song based on this scripture.

The sanctuary was on fire. The spirit of the Lord was truly in the place. By the time the song was over, no one could sit down. It was truly a stirring experience and a real blessing. The place was bursting with love as we honored the person being ordained and praised God.

Have you ever had an experience in which you palpably felt the presence of God? God is always demonstrating unconditional love toward us. When you feel God's presence, just take a moment and thank God. It does not have to be in response to an earthshaking act of love. It may just be a small blessing. Let the world know, "hey, God has just blessed me."

Thank You LORD,

Thank You LORD. Thank You LORD. I just want to Thank You LORD.

Amen

Wednesday– December 24, 2014

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... Ecclesiastes 3:1

One translation of the word "Ecclesiastes" is "the preacher." The words of this book read as if a preacher is offering a series of sermons. Many present day sermons are influenced by the wisdom of this ancient preacher, traditionally believed to be Solomon. It may be that, among all the wise sayings and guidance attributed to Solomon, this is the most profound.

The message of Ecclesiastes 3 is that creation has anticipated all that will occur in human history. Everything that we will do or experience is accounted for, from throwing stones to suffering death; the full range of experiences is accounted for. No list can be fully exhaustive, but the parameters are described as infinite by such component themes as "war, laughter, planting, and dancing."

God has made an appointment for every event and set this occasion in an eternal datebook.

The standing appointment for celebrating new life has come. It is not a singular appointment. We can never embrace or understand the greatest gift possible in one shot. Even with the annual revisiting of the manger scene, we can only catch a glimpse of the meaning. The time has come for us to gaze deeply into the heart of God. When we do, we will see a picture that includes this baby, caring for each of us.

God of Order,

We are blessed because you have forseen all that matters. We will never experience anything that you are ill prepared for. In Christ, we can be prepared for all that comes our way. Tonight, we look with anticipation toward the rebirth of Christ into our lives and our world.

In Him,

Amen

**Wednesday– December 24,
Nativity of the Lord I**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; you have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. Isaiah 9:2-3

We have come a long way. We are like the runner who has trained for the big race. It's time now to run the last mile of the race. We have weighed-in, trained every day and eaten nutritious (spiritual) meals. We see the finish line ahead.

This was and never will be an ordinary race. It is not really a race anyway. It is a journey. We are only ready to cross the finish line when we (as believers) can cross together. We began this journey together and we will finish together. We will cross over together and celebrate together.

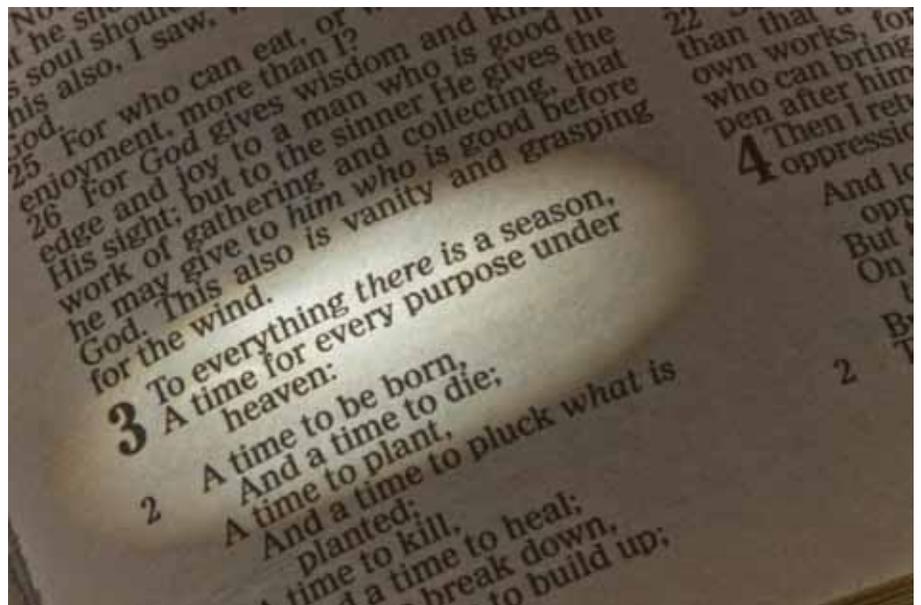
The line that we are preparing to cross has been regarded as our finish line. It is really not a finish line. It is a line to another new beginning. Tonight when the clock strikes midnight, we will usher in the new morning. In the distance we will hear the angels singing; "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given....and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace..."

Lord of All Time,

Let us receive the baby that changed everything.

Thank you Lord,

*Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,
Amen, Amen, Amen.*





*Thursday– December 25, 2014
Christmas Day
Nativity of the Lord II*

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy to all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

I like to believe that scripture speaks to me, even though every word of the Bible is written thousands of years before my arrival. This is not to say that it is speaking to me instead of those who were actually involved in the narratives. I believe that there are present day learnings available from the lessons of every generation. This text has much to say to all of us on this Christmas Day.

We are not to be afraid. Our fears are not those of the shepherds in Luke, but we are assured that we need not fear. There are economic problems in the land, but we should not fear. Troops are at risk in multiple places each year, but we should not fear. The politics of the nation are historically divisive, but fear should not be our response. A mature understanding of the admonition against fear may be to know that harm does befall each of us at times, but fear will not offer relief.

Relief is available from the message of “good news of great joy to all people.” God has good news for every

person. No matter what is happening in the cultures of the world, God is still in love with us. God’s love is not passive. It is active and effectual. It leads us to good places and teaches us good things. We are beneficiaries of the greatest possible source of power.

To each of us , a Savior is born this day. In every city and in rural places, a Savior is born. Jesus does not come to us as a baby this day. The fullness of his power and capacity is brought to bear in every situation in which we allow ourselves to embrace Christ with new faith and with new hope.

Lord of Lords,

We praise you and glorify you for the newness that Jesus brings, again and again. On this day, there is nothing more to ask of you. All that we have been offered calls forth profound gratitude. Thank you, Lord.

Now and Always,

Amen

*Thursday– December 25, 2014
Christmas Day
Nativity of the Lord III*

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Psalm 98:4

Most of us are quick to embrace most of the language of verse 4 of Psalm 98. We are eager to make joyful noise. We can often be heard breaking into joyous songs or singing praises. We struggle with “all the earth.” Even in this very psalm, images of God’s victory tempts us to imagine or assign who this victory is to be “over”. We are not comfortable with envisioning success which does not vanquish anyone. God certainly intends to be victorious, but not over the family on the corner of your block. All of creation is welcome to God’s victory, even those that you or I would exclude.

The psalmist paints a picture for us, so that we can begin to understand who and what are included in “all the earth.” We are invited to employ the lyre and the sound of melody. Trumpets and horns are played, while the sea and all of its contents roar. This must be pleasing, for the floods begin to clap their hands. All of these things lead to the hills offering a song of joy. This all constitutes a good expression of “all”, but not until we can get humanity to join in this celebration.

The psalm began with the words “O sing to the Lord a new song...” All of God’s creation is prepared to jointly “make a joyful noise.” To show us the way, Jesus has come into our world. He is not content to sing a new song by himself. The psalmist is talking to each of us. We have not assembled as “all the earth” until each of us is present and welcoming the presence of one another.

Lord of All,

We pray that we may learn to embrace all of those who you embrace. Show us how to achieve victory over conditions and behaviors, but not over your people. Your victory is constructive. Allow us to share in it.

In the Name of Jesus,

Amen



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