The Season of Advent 2016
Introduction

Although the rest of the world will celebrate the start of the New Year on January 1st, the Christian year begins on the first day of Advent. This year, the first day of Advent is Sunday, November 27th. As you and your family eat the leftovers from your Thanksgiving dinner, remember to tell one another Happy New Year, because our new year, new day starts more than a month before the rest of the world.

The word “advent” is derived from the Latin word adventus, which means “coming” or “visit.” The Advent Season begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. During the Advent Season we look back and forward at the same time. During this season our focus as Christians is two-fold: we look back in remembrance of the first coming of Christ as a baby named Jesus, born in a manager and we also anticipate the second coming of Christ to earth, which will consummate his eternal kingdom. Just as Israel longed for the Messiah to come, Christians also long for their precious Savior to return.

Each of the four Sundays has been given a thematic focus to help us remember the first coming and to expect the second. These days are hope, peace, joy and love. Why these particular themes? Hope, peace, joy, and love are the gifts that Jesus came into the world to bring us during his first coming. These gifts were made manifest during his 33 years on the earth, and they remained with us when Jesus ascended to heaven and sent his precious Holy Spirit to remain with us as we await his return.

Celebrating the Advent Season is also a time to study both Old and New Testament scriptures. These scriptures lead us to center our hearts and minds on the themes and purposes of the Advent Season. Lent is traditionally the time that many Christians and churches spend time fasting and focusing on prayer and “getting right with God.” However, Advent should also be a time of penitence, prayer, and realignment with the will and word of God. I challenge you to use the next forty days to prepare your hearts to celebrate Jesus’ first coming through Mary’s womb and look towards his soon coming return.

Use this devotional as a guide to help you to remember the true meaning of Christmas and why God wrapped himself in flesh and came to earth in the person of Jesus. Jesus did not come for us to have toys, money, clothing and food on Christmas Day. No, Jesus came to bring us Christmas gifts that will never break—hope, peace, joy and love. All of these gifts can be found as we walk intimately with Jesus, experiencing life with him as our personal Lord and Savior. Walking with Jesus is not an easy walk. Jesus calls us to love like he loved, to live like he lived, and to obey his commands. That is exactly what this daily devotional will do—it will challenge you.

As you use this devotional, be sure to read each of the scriptures for the day prior to reading the daily meditation. The meditation focuses on one of the daily scriptures and exists to challenge you to mature in Christ and become all that God has created and called you to be. Read each scripture and meditation with the spirit of expectation that Jesus will, in fact, fulfill his promise given in John 14:1-3; Christ will return again to take us to be with him and his Father in paradise.

About the Author

The Reverend Leah D. Jackson, Esq. was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. She was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by Ray of Hope Christian Church in Decatur, Georgia, where she currently serves as the Minister of Christian Education. She is also a licensed member of the State Bar of Georgia and specializes in Technology and Intellectual Property law.

She is the proud author of the devotional, Daily Manna from the Psalms: Nuggets of Hope for the Hungry Christian. She was licensed as a Minister of Dance in 2008 by Dr. Pamela Hardy, the founder and leader of Set Free Evangelistic Ministries.

Leah served as the advisor for the Spelman College Dance Ministry, Movements of Praise, for 5 years.

Leah received a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy with a focus in Child Advocacy from Spelman College in 2002; a Juris Doctor from Walter F. Georgia School of Law in 2005; and Master of Divinity from McAfee School of Theology in 2012.

She has the distinction of serving as both a member of the Board of Visitors for McAfee School of Theology and a member of the Board of Advisors for Set Free Evangelistic Ministries. She is also a member of the Editorial Board for Just Women Magazine. Leah also served as a member of the committee for the 2014 Quadrennial Assembly, which was held in Atlanta, Georgia.

Leah has been called to minister the word of God as a preacher, pastor, educator, and dancer. She has been dancing since the age of four and involved in dance ministry since she was saved at age twelve. Leah is the founder of Agape Seed Liturgical Dance Company, a group of individuals from various ministries and churches seeking God’s heart through worship.
## Daily Advent Readings 2016

### Year (NIV Bible)

#### First Sunday of Advent (November 27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 24:36-44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Second Sunday of Advent (December 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 11:1-10</td>
<td>Psalm 21</td>
<td>Psalm 21</td>
<td>Psalm 21</td>
<td>Psalm 146:5-10</td>
<td>Psalm 146:5-10</td>
<td>Psalm 146:5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 3:1-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Third Sunday of Advent (December 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 11:2-11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fourth Sunday of Advent (December 18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday Christmas Eve</th>
<th>Friday Christmas</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 1:18-25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John 1:1-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: 2 In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 5 Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 2:1-5

As we look back, in remembrance, to the birth of a little baby in Bethlehem, our text calls us forward. It calls us to set our eyes on the “last days.” The prophet Isaiah was not simply referring to the end of time, but instead to the commencement of a specific period of time—the coming of the Messiah and resulting establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Fixing his eyes on the last days filled the prophet Isaiah with hope and great anticipation, because Jews and Gentiles would worship the Lord at the temple in his holy city. The last days would be days of peace between people who had been divided by hatred and bloodshed; together they would worship the one true and living God. What great news that is!

Isaiah did not know when the last days would come, but he knew that they would be a time of judgment. The light brings judgment, illuminating the darkness and all that falls below the righteous standard of Christ. Therefore, the prophet Isaiah called the people of Jacob to get ready. To “walk in the light of the Lord,” to live in obedience of God.

The last days began when Jesus came to us as that little baby in manger, but they will not be completely fulfilled until Jesus returns. As a result, we too should be motivated to “walk in the light of the Lord,” living righteously before our God and King.

Each Lent, we seek to purify ourselves by turning away from the noise of this world, temptations, and sin that pull us away from God. During Advent, we should also seek to be purified so that we can be found worthy when the light of Christ’s judgment is shined upon our lives.

What are you doing to get ready for Christ’s return? What are you doing to walk in the light? What specks of darkness do you need to address over the next 4 weeks?

Psalm 124

Psalm 124 is a praise song from the people of Israel to God for delivering them from their enemies. The people are clear that deliverance from hurt, harm and danger could have only come from God. Have you ever been in a situation where you knew that if God didn’t bring you out of it, you weren’t coming out?

I often find myself saying “Lord help me” in the midst of challenging situations or days. This persistent cry parts my lips in an effort to seek strength, guidance, or even courage, when I find my own to be inadequate. God often responds to this little prayer by reminding me of something he’s already done for me. Psalm 124 calls us to look back at how God has helped us in the past when trouble, danger, or need arises.

Do you stand in need of healing or deliverance today? A financial blessing? Whatever it is, God is calling you not to freak out. Not to trip. But instead to remember. Remember the last time that the Lord was on your side. Remember when God kept the flood of despair from engulfing you and the raging waters of anxiety from sweeping over you.

What would’ve happened if God did not help you in the past? Expect God to show up in equally or more amazing ways today.

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered
Israel's infancy was marked by the promise of deliverance. The prophet Isaiah was calling the people to anticipate the rebirth of the nation. The ultimate deliverance through the coming of Christ, which would bring the rebirth of the nation. The rebirth of the nation would result in enlargement of their territory (vs. 2-3) and multiplication of their people (vs. 1b). Even in the midst of bondage, they were being called to rejoice, to sing, and to praise God. The prophet Isaiah was calling the people to anticipate what was on the other side of the humiliation and shame that came with their discipline — restoration.

While our sins may temporarily forge a wedge between God and us, God’s love for us is unfailing and never-ending. It is this love that causes God to forgive us and redeem.
us. It causes God to call us back to himself. Restoration starts with repentance (1 John 1:9). After you confessed your sin and turn away from them, rejoice in anticipation of your restoration.

Thursday – December 1, 2016

1 Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. 2 May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. 3 May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. 4 May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. 5 May he endure[a] as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. 6 May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. 7 In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

Psalm 72:1-7

Many believe that David wrote this psalm in anticipation of Solomon’s inauguration as king. Like any great leader, David’s prayer was that his successor would lead with justice and righteousness and that the people would prosper. Although Psalm 72 may have been an immediate prayer for Solomon, it is likely that the psalmist was also referring to the last and the greatest of his successors, Jesus.

The return of Christ promises to bring justice for all, something that only he can bring forth. For “he will judge [God’s] people in righteousness, [God’s] afflicted ones with justice.” (vs. 2) We are living in an unjust world and in unjust times. People are discriminated against and oppressed based on their race, class, age, gender, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation. Does anyone care about the lack of justice in our world? God cares. In fact, the Lord loves justice (Isaiah 61:8) and God calls us to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

Our text reminds us that Christ will return to bring justice to his afflicted ones (vs. 2). Are you simply waiting for the wrongs of society to be corrected when Christ returns or are you fighting for justice today? Don’t just pray, defend the cause of the afflicted. Pick a cause. Get involved. ACT justly today.

Friday – December 2, 2016

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! 17 The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; 18 for about forty years he endured their conduct[a] in the wilderness; 19 and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years. “After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. 21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. 22 After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’ 23 “From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. 25 As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’

Acts 13:16-25

Our text teaches us that God had a plan to save his people from the very beginning. The people of Israel had their own plans and God obliged them. They repeatedly asked for a king and God eventually answered their prayer by giving them King Saul, although it wasn’t in their best interest. This prayer request and answered prayer set the course of their future down a path of destruction, because each king led the people of Israel further and further away from the will of God. But God used their request for a king to bless them. Their first king may have been problematic, but God found a man after his own heart to be their second king. God gave them David (vs. 23). Although Israel would continue to go through much hardship, they would ultimately be saved through the lineage of David. Jesus would come forth as a descendant of a king, a king that God never wanted Israel to have. God used the very thing that wasn’t in their best interest to bless them, to redeem them, because he loved them.

We must be careful what we pray for; God might just give it to us. The answer to a prayer request that falls outside of the will of God may send you the long way or even the hard way down the path. God tried to avoid giving Israel that king, because he knew that it was not best for them. Trust that God has your best interests at heart. The next time that God doesn’t seem to be answering
In today’s text, we meet John the Baptist. John was the cousin of Jesus, but he had a specific assignment and he knew it. John was clear about his purpose. He was called to prepare the hearts of the people to receive their Messiah, Jesus. He knew he wasn’t the Christ, but instead was called to go ahead of him. Jesus was coming to turn the world upside down, to change the order of things, to replace the old covenant with a new one and therefore a foundation had to be laid—that was John’s job. God sent John to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3: “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

In these days, God is using his disciples to prepare people for the return of Christ. We have been called to fulfill the Great Commission: “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

What are you specifically doing to prepare the way? How are you helping to get people ready for Christ’s return?

**Saturday – December 3, 2016**

19 Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders[a] in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.” 21 They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” 22 Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”[b] 24 Now the Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” 26 “I baptize with[c] water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” 28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

**John 1:19-28**

**Right Way**

In today’s text, we meet John the Baptist. John was the cousin of Jesus, but he had a specific assignment and he knew it. John was clear about his purpose. He was called to prepare the hearts of the people to receive their Messiah, Jesus. He knew he wasn’t the Christ, but instead was called to go ahead of him. Jesus was coming to turn the world upside down, to change the order of things, to replace the old covenant with a new one and therefore a foundation had to be laid—that was John’s job. God sent John to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3: “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

In these days, God is using his disciples to prepare people for the return of Christ. We have been called to fulfill the Great Commission: “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

What are you specifically doing to prepare the way? How are you helping to get people ready for Christ’s return?

**Sunday – December 4, 2016**

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord— 3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

**Isaiah 11:1-10**

The prophet Isaiah is speaking words of hope over the people of Israel in our text. Although he prophesied that judgment would come upon Israel through the conquest of their enemies, he also foretold the day of redemption. In the process of being subdued, Israel would become like a decayed or fallen tree, but that would not be the end of the story; a little sprout would come forth from that tree, which would yet rise, expand, and flourish. God had planted life in the midst of the decay.

“Of Jesse” is a reference to the father of King David. The sprout, the life, that Isaiah prophesied would come forth from David’s line, even after the decay of his kingdom, even after the exile. Jesus was that life born out of the ruins of Israel. Born in the midst of poverty and obscurity. The Assyrians tore down Judah & the Babylonian exile destroyed its kingdom, but God called Jesus to spring forth to restore his family, his people and the world to its former glory.

A place can be full of destruction and devastation. It can be ravished by poverty, instability, and crime. It can even be burned to the ground by war and oppression, but God can bring life out of that place. It doesn’t matter where you come from, God can and still will use you, if you allow him.

Jesus would not only be the bearer of life, but also of peace and safety, both of which are signs of the Messianic Age. When Jesus returns, predator and prey, oppressor and the oppressed, friend and foe, will rest together in peace. We need the hope of this prophecy today, just as much as the people of Israel needed it back then. We live in a world torn apart by hatred and violence. Almost daily, we hear about a terrorist organization devastating a land
with its attacks on a group of people; whether it is Boko Haram or Isis, or its religious extremists, racists, or some other group of individuals drunk off of their power. Nevertheless, when Jesus returns all of these groups will have to respond to the coming of our Lord and his reign by living in peace with those they have historically oppressed.

Does the condition of our world fill you with a sense of discouragement or despair? Do not watch the news today. Instead, go before God in prayer. Ask God to fill you with a sense of anticipation of the peace and safety that his second coming will bring.

Monday – December 5, 2016

1 The king rejoices in your strength, Lord. How great is his joy in the victories you give! 2 You have granted him his heart’s desire and have not withheld the request of his lips.[b] 3 You came to greet him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. 4 He asked you for life, and you gave it to him—length of days, for ever and ever. 5 Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty. 6 Surely you have granted him unending blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence. 7 For the king trusts in the Lord; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken.

8 Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. 9 When you appear for battle, you will burn them up as in a blazing furnace. The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath, and his fire will consume them. 10 You will swallow them up in his wrath, and his fire will consume them. 11 Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed. 12 You will make them turn their backs when you aim at them with drawn bow. 13 Be exalted in your strength, Lord; we will sing and praise your might.

Psalm 21

Let’s pause today and take a look back. This psalm begins with David rejoicing (in the third person) about his victories over his enemies and hence the many blessings that the Lord had bestowed upon him. The psalmist is glad and full of thanksgiving. David recognizes that it was God, and God alone, that made his success possible.

We often remember to ask God for what we need, for the desires of our hearts, but we forget to thank God on the other side. What has God done for you recently? What prayer has he answered? What desire of your heart has been granted?

Verse 6 of our text says “surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.” Jesus had not yet been born, so David did not have the benefit of accepting Him as Lord and Savior and receiving the promise of eternal life. David was referring to receipt of a blessing of continuing value or a never-ending flow of blessings from God. Yes, David was this grateful for receipt of an earthly benefit. But we have received a blessing that far exceeds David’s. If God doesn’t do another thing for you, he has given you eternal life. Can you truly be thankful for that?

During Advent, we remember the first coming of Jesus as a baby in a manger. He came to bring us the gift of life. Abundant life. Eternal life. Be thankful unto him. How can you truly thank God for an immeasurable gift? Nothing beats a failure, like a try. I challenge you to try to beat David in thanking God for this awesome blessing.

Tuesday – December 6, 2016

14 I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. 15 Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. 18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—19by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. 21 Rather, as it is written: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.” [a]

Romans 15:14-21

Paul begins our text by telling the church in Rome that they were competent to do the work of ministry. Verse 14 says that “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourself are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” No matter what was going on in that church, in the lives of the people or what they thought about themselves, Paul declared that he believed they were good enough, had sufficient knowledge and were otherwise
1 Timothy 4:11-16

competent to instruct one another in the doctrine and perform the duties of the Christian faith.

The same is true of you. God has given you a ministry, that you are well qualified to perform. Yes you, have been given a ministry. You may have thought you had to receive a special call to instruct others about the faith, but we were all called in Matthew 28:18-20 when we received the Great Commission. You have been called to go. To make disciples. To baptize them. To teach them everything Jesus commanded.

This call to teach may seem a bit daunting, but Paul takes some of the pressure off us in this text. Paul called the people of Rome to simply share their testimony, which exactly is what he did. Paul went around testifying to what Christ had done through him (vs. 18) and through miracles and signs he witnessed (vs. 19).

Don’t be intimated by the ministry style, the platform, or assignment of anyone else, be yourself. God uniquely made you, so be you. Someone out there needs to hear the message that only you can share it. Share what you know, someone else has the assignment to share the rest. Go forth as an original today.

Wednesday – December 7, 2016

33 “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Matthew 12:33-37

In our text today, Jesus uses an example from nature to teach his disciples and respond to the criticism of the Pharisees. He uses a tree saying, “make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.” (vs. 33) The quality of a tree is known by its fruit, not its leaves or height, width or bark. It is the fruit that counts. What is in the tree, will come out of the tree, just as what is in people will come out of them.

The Bible makes clear the types of things we should be talking about, Jesus, his word, and things that would otherwise build others up. But we can only talk about that which is in us. Jesus says to us today, that what is in us will come out of us. Like the tree, if you’re rotten, rotten fruit you will bear, including thoughtless and careless words.

Ultimately, it’s a heart issue. Jesus is not only calling us to watch what we say, but to clean our hearts. If you want to bear kind fruit, you must be kind. Gentle fruit, you must be gentle. An apple tree cannot bear oranges, anymore than an evil heart will bear love. No matter how hard you may try to cover up bitterness, anger, hatred, or resentment, it will eventually come out.

Take a look at the fruit of the spirit today. Which are you the lowest in? Seek God. Ask him to refresh and refill you in this area. “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (vs. 34(b))

Thursday – December 8, 2016

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. 8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!” 14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. 15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” 16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Ruth 1:6-18
Ruth was committed. She was home, but she was unable to persuade Naomi to return. Naomi convinced Orpah to return that they had joined with in Moab. Behind everything and everyone she was running back to it, leaving her family cut their losses and ran. They ran out of Bethlehem and now, with 5 being the most committed. Ask God to give you staying power. Stay put until GOD says move.

Have you been waiting for a promise that God made to be fulfilled? Have you been waiting so long that it seems as if it won’t happen? Is it the promise that a loved one will be saved? Is it a promise that a prodigal son or daughter will return home? Are you waiting for your spouse to be made whole?

Whatever it is, we must be careful not to grow weary, irritated, or disappointed while we are waiting and we can’t allow scoffers to get us off focus. The scoffer is one that mocks, makes fun of or treats something or someone with contempt. As if waiting on the Lord isn’t challenging enough, we have to deal with people asking us “where is your God?” “Where is the answer to your prayer?” “When is your God going to do what he said?”

Peter was attempting to warn his readers that scoffers would come and therefore called them to remember that God’s word is true and faithful. He called the readers of this letter to remember “that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.[a]

2 Peter 3:1-10

Our text today is a meaty one, full of implications and manna for God’s people, even today. Naomi traveled to Moab with her husband Elimelech and two sons, Mahlon and Kilion in an attempt to escape a famine in Bethlehem. They were fleeing their homeland, heading to a foreign land in order to survive. The voice of God directing them to go to Moab is absent from our text. Although Elimelech was trying to save his family and his life, Elimelech died in the foreign land. Mahlon and Kilion married foreign women while in Moab, a direct act of disobedience to God’s commands and eventually died as well. How ironic, this family ran from a famine and died anyway. What do you do when trouble comes, do you run or do you endure?

When Naomi heard that the famine had lifted back home, she decided to return. Yet another survival attempt. Naomi was keenly aware of how difficult it is for a widow to survive and knew that her chances would be better back home in Bethlehem. She was prepared to cut ties with her daughters-in-law by returning them to their parents’ homes.

Orpah and Ruth committed themselves to Mahlon and Kilion in marriage, which means they left their families and joined to this one and their God. Every time the going got tough or trials came, Naomi and her family cut their losses and ran. They ran out of Bethlehem and now she was running back to it, leaving behind everything and everyone that they had joined with in Moab. Naomi convinced Orpah to return home, but she was unable to persuade Ruth. Ruth was committed. She was prepared to remain knit to Naomi, even though that meant leaving her homeland and her gods. Ruth was showing Naomi something that she never modeled, commitment.

One word must be our bound. How committed are you? How committed are you to your family? Your job? Your church? Your call? Rank your commitment to all the important areas of your life from 1 – 5, with 5 being the most committed. Ask God to give you staying power. Stay put until GOD says move.

1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. 3 Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these words the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.[a]

2 Peter 3:1-10
11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. 12 That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. 14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

2 Peter 3:11-18

Our text picks up where we left off yesterday. Yesterday we talked about God’s time vs. our time; waiting on the answer to prayer or for God’s promise to manifest. So what are we supposed to do while we wait? First, we are to be holy. Right = godly. Verses 11 and 12 say that “you ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”

Next, we are to live in anticipation. Anticipation means expectation, joy, and hope. Often times we get tired of waiting, which causes us to live in doubt or in fear, but our text calls us to sit on the edge of our seats as we look forward to a new heaven and new earth (vs. 13). We should be excited as we look forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise that his son Jesus will return for us and in turn all of our worldly concerns will pass away. We must always remember that earth is not our home and that our ultimate interests are beyond this present world in which we live. Just as Jesus has promised his return, he has also promised you what you are waiting for. Can you wait in hope, joy—in anticipation?

As you wait, “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.” (vs. 14) If you live holy and godly (i.e. in obedience to God and his commands), you will be making every effort to be found spotless and blameless, which should ultimately bring you a peace that surpasses all understanding because you will be living a life that is pleasing unto God, which will speed the coming of the day of the Lord (vs. 12).

Saturday – December 10, 2016

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. 6 And all people will see God’s salvation.’”[a] 7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” 10 “What should we do then?” the crowd asked. 11 John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” 12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” 13 Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” 15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with[b] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather his grain into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. Luke 3:1-18

John compared the religious leaders to a “brood of vipers” in verse 7 of our text. This may seem a little harsh, but John the Baptist was rightfully indignant in our text. He thought these people were like snakes that involuntarily came out of the grass because a fire was coming. They didn’t come into the light to expose themselves or to avoid harming someone, but to save their own skin. This is how John viewed the leaders to whom he was talking in our text. They didn’t respond to his constant cries to “prepare the way of the Lord” or to “get ready” or to “repent and be baptized” out of a genuine desire to be transformed, but in an attempt to flee the wrath that he promised was coming.

Do you know that God is “omni” to the third power? He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. God is
sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. 10 The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

Psalm 146:5-10

We live in an imperfect world, filled with imperfect people. There are oppressed and oppressors, rich and poor, healthy and sick, and free and captives. We often look at the disparities among us through eyes of sadness or even disbelief. We ask ourselves how could this be? Ultimately deciding that these imbalances are unfair and unjust. Yet the least among us, those discarded, disregarded, and disrespected by the world are priorities to God and are declared blessed by the writer of our text.

God takes up the cause of those that have been cast aside and counted out. While they may have lost faith and trust in society and the humans that run it, our text reminds them that there is still one that they can trust and hope in. Our text provides five reasons why the least among us can trust in God and are blessed by the writer of our text.

First, he is the God of Jacob. We live in an imperfect world, filled with imperfect people. There are oppressed and oppressors, rich and poor, healthy and sick, and free and captives. We often look at the disparities among us through eyes of sadness or even disbelief. We ask ourselves how could this be? Ultimately deciding that these imbalances are unfair and unjust. Yet the least among us, those discarded, disregarded, and disrespected by the world are priorities to God and are declared blessed by the writer of our text.

God takes up the cause of those that have been cast aside and counted out. While they may have lost faith and trust in society and the humans that run it, our text reminds them that there is still one that they can trust and hope in. Our text provides five reasons why the least among us can trust in God and are blessed by the writer of our text.

First, he is the God of Jacob. God has proven his trustworthiness throughout history— protecting Jacob and the patriarchs as they traveled and overcame their enemies. History has a habit of repeating itself; if he did it before, he can do it again. Second, God created everything that exists, including the heavens, earth, waters and everything within them. God can be trusted because he, as the creator, is in complete control of all things and people. Third, God can be trusted by the oppressed because God is on their side. Our God is a righteous and just God who desires to establish justice and set the captive free. Fourth, God is the God of Israel. God is the one who set the captives free and the one who is on the side of the oppressed. Fifth, the Lord sets the captives free.

We must be careful how we treat the least of these, the men, women, boys and girls that God is fighting for, advocating for, and standing with. If God is taking up their cause and lifting them up, so should we. If we are mistreating the humble among us or apathetic about their plight, we could find ourselves on the wrong side of a battle with God.

Does your heart reflect the heart of God? Do you care about those that God clearly loves? Can anyone tell? Ask the Lord to search your heart today and give you his heart, for his people.

Monday – December 12, 2016

1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” 4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One[d] with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. 5 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

6 My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. 8 By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I say to God my Rock, “Why

Sunday – December 11, 2016

5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. 6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — he remains faithful forever. 7 He uphold[s] the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, 8 the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. 9 The Lord watches over the foreigner and

all powerful, all knowing and present everywhere. This means that God is like Big Brother. He can see, hear, and knows everything you are doing, all the time, even before you do it. Everything you can even fathom, God already knows. So don’t think you can outsmart God.

Some Jews thought that the easiest way to respond to John’s teachings on repentance was to fake it. They thought that they could have the best of both worlds by running to be baptized without actually believing what John was saying or allowing their lives to be transformed. They pretended to repent, but there was no fruit, no evidence of their repentance. To repent literally means to turn and go in the other direction. The religious leaders had made no turn, but wanted to receive the benefit that came only with true conversion.

We do the same thing. We work and serve in the church, to seem godlier, but the attitudes of our hearts haven’t been changed. We show up every time the church doors are open, but mentally check out when the word goes forth. We preach at our neighbors, but don’t practice what we preach. God sees our hearts. He knows our motives, just as he knew those Jews.

John may have saved someone’s soul by calling the people out in our text. So I call each of us to a heart check today. Ask the Lord to show you the “why” behind your good deeds today. Why are you serving in a particular area of ministry? Why are you helping that person? Why are you sending words of affirmation to that neighbor?

Monday – December 12, 2016

1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” 4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One[d] with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. 5 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

6 My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. 8 By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I say to God my Rock, “Why

Sunday – December 11, 2016

5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. 6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — he remains faithful forever. 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, 8 the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. 9 The Lord watches over the foreigner and

all powerful, all knowing and present everywhere. This means that God is like Big Brother. He can see, hear, and knows everything you are doing, all the time, even before you do it. Everything you can even fathom, God already knows. So don’t think you can outsmart God.

Some Jews thought that the easiest way to respond to John’s teachings on repentance was to fake it. They thought that they could have the best of both worlds by running to be baptized without actually believing what John was saying or allowing their lives to be transformed. They pretended to repent, but there was no fruit, no evidence of their repentance. To repent literally means to turn and go in the other direction. The religious leaders had made no turn, but wanted to receive the benefit that came only with true conversion.

We do the same thing. We work and serve in the church, to seem godlier, but the attitudes of our hearts haven’t been changed. We show up every time the church doors are open, but mentally check out when the word goes forth. We preach at our neighbors, but don’t practice what we preach. God sees our hearts. He knows our motives, just as he knew those Jews.

John may have saved someone’s soul by calling the people out in our text. So I call each of us to a heart check today. Ask the Lord to show you the “why” behind your good deeds today. Why are you serving in a particular area of ministry? Why are you helping that person? Why are you sending words of affirmation to that neighbor?
have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?” 10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?” 11 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalm 42

There is nothing like designated times of rejoicing to remind us of just how bad things are for us. The son of Korah was a worship leader in the sanctuary who usually led Israelites on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, but he was unable to do so this time. The psalmist said that his desire, his need, was like the intense desire of the deer, in the heat of day, for life sustaining water. Imagine being waterless in the midst of a drought, this is where our psalmist found himself. Desperate. Thirsty. Longing for God and the ability to worship God in the sanctuary. Without worship, his life felt hollow. This is exactly where many among us find ourselves during the Advent season.

The holiday season is the happiest of the year. It looks, smells and even tastes like Christmas. Christmas trees are everywhere. Shining lights surround us. Beautiful music plays in our ears. The town is painted red, white and green. The smell of pine joins the fragrance of baked goods to bless the air. Then the anticipation of receiving just the right gift is so thick that you can’t stand it.

It’s the most beautiful time, the best time of the year, right? Or is it? For some of us, it is the saddest, most depressing, most heart wrenching time of the year. The absence of that loved one that died last year is more prevalent. The father or mother who never showed up for Christmas dinner stings more. The lack of resources to bless your kids or friends with gifts is more embarrassing than you’d like to admit. All the brokenness that you feel seems to dominate your thoughts and dreams. You understand exactly what the psalmist meant when he said, “my tears have become my food day and night.”

As bad as the psalmist felt during this season, he had to check himself. He had to ask himself in verse 5, why are you so sad? “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” The psalmist had to remind himself to focus on the bright side and not the dark side. He had allow himself to look only at what wasn’t happening, instead of directing his attention toward what could be happening. In his moment of hurt, disappointment and even despair, he had to encourage himself to put his hope in God. This is what we must also do; put our hope in God. Not in family. Not in significant others. Not in money or in things, but in God.

No matter what is happening in us or around us, God is always worthy of praise. The psalmist had to make up his mind that he would “yet praise him” and so must we. Even if things are not perfect during this Christmas season, we must still hope in the Lord. The only one who can and will redeem the situations that ail us.

I challenge you to find two different things each day to praise God for over the next 11 days of Advent. Write each occasion (or reason) for praise on a slip of paper and place it in a mason jar. On Christmas Day, give this jar to someone who needs to “yet praise him.”

Tuesday – December 13, 2016

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” 19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. 20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. 22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.[a] 24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude 17-25

Jude warns his readers that false teachers will come in the last days who will not follow the ways of Christ, who will be divisive and not be filled with the Spirit of God. These false teachers shall be bearers of darkness instead of light. Usually there should be a clear distinction between darkness and light. People should be able to walk into a room and tell if the light is on or if it is off. They should be able to tell if your car lights are on or off. Likewise, when they walk outside of their front doors people should generally be able to differentiate between daytime and nighttime.

But what happens when people can’t tell the difference? There are times when night and day seem visually similar and when one can’t tell if the light is on or off in a room. However, as disciples of Christ, people should always be able to tell the difference between us and false teachers or false followers.

The writer of our text warns his reader that the “last days” will be difficult to discern, but not to be tricked. Jude tells us the key to discernment in difficult times; building ourselves up in the faith and praying in the Holy Spirit. If we remember to faithfully study God’s work and to pray we will have both the light and power necessary to not only discern, but to resist the devil and
false teaching. God’s word will build our faith and that faith will help us to ask God for exactly what we need, no matter what we face, including counterfeit teachers.

Ask God to increase your discipline to faithfully study his word. Ask God to increase your discernment as you continue to seek him in prayer.

**Wednesday – December 14, 2016**

1 The word of the Lord Almighty came to me. 2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.” 3 This is what the Lord says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.” 4 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. 5 The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.” 6 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the Lord Almighty. 7 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. 8 I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.” 9 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Now hear these words, ‘Let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built.’ This is also what the prophets said who were present when the foundation was laid for the house of the Lord Almighty. 10 Before that time there were no wages for people or hire for animals. No one could go about their business safely because of their enemies, since I had turned everyone against their neighbor. 11 But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the Lord Almighty. 12 “The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. 13 Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. [b] Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.” 14 This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the Lord Almighty, 15 “so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. 16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the Lord.

Zechariah 8:1-17

The United States of America seems to be in the middle of a moral crisis. Overt racism appears to have become acceptable and even normative once again. Gun violence is out of control, particularly in our major cities. Mass shootings occur monthly and sometimes weekly. Justice eludes us as numerous police killings and human trafficking are more rampant than ever. Far too many politicians are driven by hatred instead of serving people, many school districts are failing and scandals among the highest paid and highest ranked officials are a regular occurrence. In the midst of all this, most people spend the bulk of their time eating, drinking and attempting to be merry and commercialism is the way of the land, as is sex, drugs and alcohol.

With the state of our nation, we probably shouldn’t be surprised that people would rather watch reality television instead of attend church. Church attendance has declined significantly since the early 1960s when almost half of America attended a worship service at least once per week. Regular church attendance is now defined as attending once every 4-6 weeks, and even that is declining. In 2004, 45% of people attended “regularly” but in 2014 only 36% did the same. The hearts of America seemed to have increasingly turned away from God. Is that the reason for the state of our nation?

Americans seem to look more and more like the Israelites. Although they were the chosen people, the people who pledged their worship to Yahweh and Yahweh alone, the people who were cared for, provided for and blessed by God, Israel began to worship idols, engage in sexual immorality, and otherwise disobey the commands of the Lord. After warning Israel repeatedly, God disciplined Israel by sending them into exile. Even in the midst of their punishment, God gave the people of Israel hope—he would one day restore them. God promises Israel in our text that they would one day return to Jerusalem, which would be restored to its former glory, and they would live in peace. In fact, God would gather all the scattered Jews together and bring them back home.

Even in the midst of America’s darkness, there is hope today. Everything will change when Jesus returns. A day is coming when our elderly will be able to sit on their front porches and enjoy their neighborhoods. A day is coming when little boys and girls will be able to play outside until the streetlights come on. A day is coming when all the things that are plaguing our nation will be no more, for goodness shall be among us again. Zechariah reminds us to look forward to the day of Christ’s return, even in the midst of uncertain and unpleasant conditions in our nation.

What are we to do in the mean time? Verses 16 and 17 tell us exactly what to do; we are to be the change that we want to see in our nation. God calls us to be the light, even in the midst of the darkness. How can you be the light? Write down 2 specific things that you are committed to do.

**Thursday – December 15, 2016**

1 After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while
the ark of God remains in a tent.” 3 Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.” 4 But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying: 5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’ 8 “Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders[a] over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. ‘“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offsprings to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me[b]; your throne will be established forever.’”

17 Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

2 Samuel 7:1-17

King David found himself with some idle time. He had moved into his palace, hung all the pictures, organized all the furniture and made sure that everyone was on their posts. There were currently no wars for him to fight, because the Lord had allowed him to defeat all of them. So what was a king to do? During his time of rest, King David thought of the Lord and consulted with the prophet Nathan. King David made the mistake that many of us make he started making plans.

David came up with a good idea; he decided to build the Lord a house and Nathan co-signed. Although this may have seemed like a good idea, David was trying to do something for the Lord that the Lord didn’t ask for. Neither David nor Nathan consulted with the Lord prior to making their plans. While it may have been a “good thing” to build the Lord a house, it wasn’t a “God thing.” When Nathan finally consulted the Lord, he discovered that both he and David were wrong. The Lord’s will was different. What David was trying to do was actually the work that the Lord had planned for his son Solomon.

Had David persisted in building, he would not only have been stepping on the toes of his son, but also his legacy. This is why we must first consult God and wait to hear his reply. Secondly, this is why we must stay in our lanes and do ONLY what God directs us to do.

Are you in your lane or are you in someone else’s? Are you over-functioning in your church? Home? On your job? In your relationships? Seek God to make sure you aren’t trying to build God a house, when he is actually trying to build you one. (vs. 10)

Friday – December 16, 2016

1 Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. 3 Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. 4 How long, Lord God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. 6 You have made us an object of derision[b] to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us. 7 Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. 18 Then we will not turn away from you; receiv us, and we will call on your name. 19 Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

This psalm is a prayer for restoration. We are all humans. As a result, we all sin, have sinned and will sin again. But sinning is not the end of the story. Those in Christ know that forgiveness is ours if we confess our sins and turn from them (1 John 1:9). As great as forgiveness is, it doesn’t have to be the end of the story because we can also be restored. “Restore” is the Hebrew word, “shuwb,” which means to return again, to return to the starting point, to bring back again, to bring back home, to return, to reverse and take back. God cannot only forgive us, but he can return us to the place where we were before the offense occurred.

In our text, the psalmist begs for
God to go before his people again, with all of his glory, as he did for the generation that wandered around in the wilderness. He cried out to God to stand up for the present generation, as he’d done before. This prayer was a cry for renewed care and protection after sin that resulted in God’s discipline. Yes, Israel had turned to worshiping idols and they were disciplined as a result, but God did not forsake them. God did not discipline them because he hated them; he disciplined Israel because he loved them (Proverbs 3:12). Exile, discipline, was not the end of their story. Ultimately, God restored Israel and drew them back to himself. God brought them out of bondage, returned them back to their homeland and made their nation great again.

No matter what sin you’ve committed, God can restore you. There is nothing you’ve done that could make God forsake you, abandon you, or cast you away. If you’ve confessed and truly repented, there is one more step. Have you asked for God to take you back to the place you were before the sin was committed?

Saturday – December 17, 2016

23 And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? [a] 24 You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, Lord, have become their God. 25 “And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, 26 so that your name will be great forever. Then people will say, ‘The Lord Almighty is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will be established in your sight. 27 “Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you.’ So your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. 28 Sovereign Lord, you are God!

Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. 29 Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, Sovereign Lord, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever.”

2 Samuel 7:23-29

In verses 18-21, which precede our text, David praises God for his favor towards him. In verse 22, David begins to praise God for his favor towards the people of Israel. The favor of God wasn’t about David or Israel, it was actually about God and his reputation. Verses 23 and 27 tell us that God acted on their behalf so that his name would be made great. We are vessels used for God’s glory and God’s purposes. We must remember that it is not about us, but about God. God will do that which will bring him the most glory.

The word “glorify” means to dignify, to honor, to reveal, and manifest. When God is glorified we receive a glimpse of who God is and evidence of the vastness of his significance. It is as if God is unwrapping himself and hence revealing more of his identity. Israel wasn’t made God’s people because they were a worthy nation, but for God’s name sake. They weren’t redeemed because they deserved it, but for God’s name sake. Miracles, signs and wonders weren’t performed on their behalf because God owed them, but for God’s name sake. The world knew that God had chosen Israel as his people, so everything God did for them would be attributed to God. Everything that God did for David and the people of Israel was about his witness in the earth; “then people will say, ‘The Lord Almighty is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will be established in your sight.” (vs. 26) Every move of God on their behalf was so that others would come to know God and worship him.

God is unwrapping himself, little by little, in your life and through your life so that he will be exalted and glorified. God not only wants us to know him, but also everyone around us. God is using you, just as he used David and the people of Israel. As a result, God will allow good to happen in your life to make his name great, just as he will allow hardship, sorrow and pain. Ultimately, it is about what will bring him the most glory.

Remember, there is a bigger purpose at work than what is happening in the sphere of our individual lives. God is on mission to draw every man, woman, boy, and girl, every nation and tribe to himself. So the next time you get ready to ask God for something, first ask yourself: 1) will it allow God to reveal himself through me; and 2) will it help make God famous?

Sunday – December 18, 2016

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life[a] was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power[b] by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5 Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from[c] faith for his name’s sake. 6 And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:1-7

Paul was keenly aware of who he was and of his purpose. It was customary during his time for the writer of a letter to identify himself at the beginning, but Paul went a step further. Paul went on to explain why he not only had the authority to write the letter, but to speak the contents that would follow. We must be mindful of Paul’s past as a persecutor of the other disciples and followers of Christ whenever we read a letter written by Paul. As you can imagine, people were skeptical of Paul’s conversion and his newfound advocacy for Jesus’ messiahship. In spite of it all, Paul was crystal clear...
and he tells us such in our text.

Paul knew that he was called to be a servant of Jesus, an apostle, a preacher of the Gospel, and a missionary to the Gentiles. The word used for servant in our text is actually slave, a term that the Romans could understand, given the millions of slaves in that territory. Paul had voluntarily made himself the property of Jesus Christ, leaving behind his previously held freedom to live life on his own terms. When Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus road and commissioned him, he was then set apart as an apostle. In this encounter, Jesus provided Paul with specific revelation for him to share. When Paul accepted his apostleship, he left behind his task of proclaiming the law and took up the task of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, Paul wasn’t called to evangelize the Jews, but instead was sent to those who had previously been left out—the Gentiles.

What is remarkable about this text is the clarity and specificity of purpose that Paul articulated. He was not only certain of his call, but of the who, what, when, why and how of the call. He knew what he was set apart to do, what he was supposed to say and to whom. Are you clear about your call? Do you know your who, what, when, where, why and how? What is God calling you to do? Where have you been assigned in THIS season? For whom?

While working hard for the Lord is noble, it is only anointed when it is done within the will of God. We find ourselves perfectly within God’s will when the who, what, when, why, and how of the work are all aligned. Seek God today. Be sure that you are in proper alignment.

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[a]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[c] because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”[d] (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Our Gospel text provides us with an example of one called by God. Joseph’s “what” was nuts. God was calling him to father a child that he had no hand in conceiving. That is no small task today, so you can imagine just how crazy that sounded to Joseph back then. He was living in a time when being a “stepdad” wasn’t a viable option, nor was having a fiancé that was impregnated by an unseen “man.” Joseph was being called into a classic Jerry Springer episode, long before daytime drama existed. Our text tells us that Joseph was greatly challenged by his “what.” Joseph didn’t know what to do with this call of God. He wasn’t called to lead people out of bondage or to kingship, no he was called to father the messiah. Accepting his “what” required Joseph to believe that God could and would impregnate a woman, his fiancé to be precise. God was calling Joseph to accept something that he had never seen or even heard of.

Joseph was at a loss, so God sent an angel to provide Joseph with clarity on his assignment. The angel provided Joseph with his “why.” “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”.)

Joseph received his “why” because he was prayerfully considering his “what.” Don’t be afraid to seek your “why” from God. God can handle your questions or your need for clarity. Taking your questions to God is actually an expression of faith in God; you are showing belief that he holds the answer and will provide it. If the who, what, when, where or how of your call isn’t clear, take it to God; he’s the one calling out to you in the first place.
We often have our own idea about things. At times we learn that our idea is flawed, but at others it is just plain WRONG. What do you do if the Lord makes you a promise that not only sounds ridiculous, but that the Lord is slow in performing? This is precisely the place where we enter our text.

The Lord promised Abram in Genesis 15 that he would give him an heir despite his old age and his wife’s barrenness. Years and years went by and no child came forth. So Abram did what many of us do, he put his hand in the pot. He impregnated his wife’s servant and together they bore a son named Ishmael. Despite Abram’s manipulation, the Lord’s promise was without repentance, meaning God did not change. He would still have a son with his wife, Sarai. Although the Lord’s promise remained, Abram’s action brought him a great deal of hardship. Sarai despised Hagar and mistreated her and Ishmael, which distressed Abram.

Although Abram and Sarai had messed things up and God was going to graciously bless them anyway, Abram didn’t want Ishmael to suffer. He didn’t want his son to experience hardship because of his lack of faith and all that would result from it, so he interceded on his behalf and asked the Lord to bless Ishmael. Abram knew that his faith had failed and that his failure would impact someone else, his first son. He knew that Ishmael was born into his foolishness, so he prayed for him. Despite Abram’s departure from God’s perfect will and plan, the Lord agreed to bless Ishmael. God answered his prayer request affirmatively.

Have you considered the people, the ministries, and the organizations that have been impacted by your decision not to wait on the Lord. Have you interceded on their behalf? Who could be hurt by your impatience today? Go to God on their behalf. Ask the Lord to bless them despite your shortcomings, mistakes or side steps.

---

**Tuesday – December 20, 2016**

1 Then Hannah prayed and said: “My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn[a] is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. 2 “There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. 3 “Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. 4 “The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumble are armed with strength. 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. 6 “The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. 7 The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. 8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. “For the foundations of the earth are the Lord’s; on them he has set the world. 9 He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the lace of darkness. “It is not by strength that one prevails; 10 those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. “He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Abram and Sarai may have been the first biblical characters that had to wait on the Lord to have a child, but they most certainly weren’t the last. If Abram and Sarai are an example of “what not to do” while waiting on the Lord, Hannah is our “what to do” role model. 1 Samuel chapter one tells that Elkanah had two wives, Penninah and Hannah. Penninah who had children would tease Hannah because she was barren, which would make her weep and lose her appetite. Although Elkanah loved Hannah, his love was not enough to fill the void in Hannah’s heart and womb. Sarai and Hannah had a similar dilemma, but two different responses; Sarai attempted to manipulate the situation, but Hannah prayed. “In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” (1 Samuel 1:10-11)

Although Hannah desperately wanted to have a child and was taunted by her rival, she had to wait on the Lord’s timing. She spent each day, praying and waiting, waiting and praying, until the appointed time. She did not know if and when the Lord was going to respond, but Hannah recognized the sovereignty of God. She knew that God was in control, which is why she continued to go back to the Lord in prayer. God eventually answered Hannah’s prayer and gave her a son named Samuel, who she dedicated back to the Lord at the end of 1 Samuel chapter one. Today’s text is Hannah’s prayer and praise to God after he blessed her.

The Lord’s will shall prevail; for he is sovereign and in control. Submit your plans to the Lord and allow him to work things out. Hannah knew that whether she conceived or if she remained barren, was all up to the plan and will of God, so she sought him diligently. It is this recognition of God’s sovereignty that Hannah voices throughout our text that sustained Hannah in the waiting. She knew that God and God alone, exalts and brings down, gives life and brings death, says yes and no.

You may be seeking God for something today, but his answer may be “wait” or even “no.” Can you respect the sovereignty of God and praise him anyway?
This is the account of Jacob’s family line. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. 5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6 He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: 7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.” 8 His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him even more because of his dream and what he had said. 9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his father as well as his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Our text today is an example of when running your mouth goes very wrong. Joseph was born into a divided household with more drama than most reality television shows. His father, Jacob, was married to sisters Leah and Rachel, the former he was tricked into marrying and the latter whom he loved dearly. Jacob also had two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah. We’re talking four women in the same household, all of which had children with Jacob. From its inception, this was a disaster waiting to happen. So Jacob was born into a compromising position. He was the last born, born during Jacob’s old age and born to the beloved wife, Rachel. Both of these factors made Jacob love Joseph more than his other siblings.

Joseph’s family situation was not his fault. He had no control over who his mother was or over his father’s favor. He had no control over his brothers’ hatred of him or over the outward symbol he was given to wear as a result of his favor. Joseph’s misstep in our text was that he failed to control what he could control. Joseph knew that his brothers were envious of him and they not only wanted his favor, but also didn’t want him to be favored. Joseph added fuel to the fire by sharing his dreams with them, which caused them to hate him even more.

Joseph’s dreams revealed that he would rule over his brothers, that they would literally bow down to him. His dreams although revelation from God and accurate reflections of what was to come, suggested to Joseph’s brothers that Jacob not only favored Joseph, but so did God. Many could argue that Joseph should have been able to share his dreams with his brothers, but Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin carried around the pain of not being chosen by Jacob. Could they handle knowing that God favored none of them either?

There are some things that we need to keep to ourselves. Then there are others that we need to wait to share. There are also matters that only need to be shared with allies. Still there are others that we need to be diplomatic and very sensitive in how we share. First, to protect ourselves and second to protect the promise that the dream reveals.

When God speaks to us, we must seek God about who to share it with and when. Everything is not for everyone, at all times. The enemy has placed people on your path to serve as dream killers. They exist to literally cause you to abort the dream. Joseph’s brothers were already envious of him and his dreams only added the fuel of malice to the fire, which led them to harm Joseph by selling him into slavery. Joseph’s brothers were ultimately unable to kill Joseph’s dreams, but they definitely made the road to fulfillment a painful one for him.

Are you pregnant with a promise, dream, or vision today? Ask the Lord to show you your next steps, who has been assigned to help you, and who is in place to try to block you.
Mary was given scary and uncertain marching orders, but in the end she received them with joy. She could have been divorced, killed, or ostracized, but she didn’t run away from her assignment. Mary ran towards it. She recognized that this assignment was bigger than her and she focused on the nature of God instead of her inability to handle the assignment. In verse 51, she exalted his mighty deeds. In verse 52, she recalled his sovereignty. In verse 53, she spoke of his care for the least of these. Finally, in verses 54 and 55 she praised God for his care for Israel and her ancestors. Although this assignment would change Mary’s life forever, she was filled with so much joy that she praised the Lord in song.

The fact that God would trust us enough to use us should bring us great joy. Not only did Mary praise God for who he is, but she also thanked him.

Revelations 22:6-7, 18-20

God wants us to do what he says. Period. No matter how we language it or frame it, God wants obedience. In verse 7 of our text, John records the words of Jesus, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” These words convey the same sentiment Jesus spoke to his disciples prior to his departure in John 14:15, “if you love me, keep my commands.” Not, if you love me you will add to my commands or make them “better.” The ancient teachers of the law added so much to God’s word, which had already been spoken and recorded, thereby distorting the word of the Lord. This resulted in the creation of another set of rules and regulations that the people had to follow, which made fellowship of God more difficult.

By calling us to keep his commands or keep the sayings of the prophecy, Jesus is telling us to obey his word and watch over it and preserve it. Verses 18 and 19 of our text provide us with additional detail by imploring us not to attempt to add anything to or take anything away from God’s word. Jesus called us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything he commanded us. We must share the Gospel without adding our own ideas or removing those things that challenge us. Our responsibility to share the unadulterated Gospel is greater in light of Christ’s return, as verse 6 reminds us that Jesus shall return soon.

We must be careful in our attempt to serve the Lord that we don’t create barriers for others or become legalistic like the ancient teachers of the law. We don’t want to push people away instead of drawing them to the Body of Christ.

Is there anything that you are doing to make Christianity unappealing to others? Are you pushing people away from the Church instead of drawing them to Christ? Ask God to reveal anything that you are doing to deter others from giving their lives to Christ, from joining the Church or getting involved in your ministry.

Luke 1:46(b) -55

Mary was given scary and uncertain marching orders, but in the end she received them with joy. She could have been divorced, killed, or ostracized, but she didn’t run away from her assignment. Mary ran towards it. She recognized that this assignment was bigger than her and she focused on the nature of God instead of her inability to handle the assignment. In verse 51, she exalted his mighty deeds. In verse 52, she recalled his sovereignty. In verse 53, she spoke of his care for the least of these. Finally, in verses 54 and 55 she praised God for his care for Israel and her ancestors. Although this assignment would change Mary’s life forever, she was filled with so much joy that she praised the Lord in song.

The fact that God would trust us enough to use us should bring us great joy. Not only did Mary praise God for who he is, but she also thanked him.

Revelations 22:6-7, 18-20

God wants us to do what he says. Period. No matter how we language it or frame it, God wants obedience. In verse 7 of our text, John records the words of Jesus, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” These words convey the same sentiment Jesus spoke to his disciples prior to his departure in John 14:15, “if you love me, keep my commands.” Not, if you love me you will add to my commands or make them “better.” The ancient teachers of the law added so much to God’s word, which had already been spoken and recorded, thereby distorting the word of the Lord. This resulted in the creation of another set of rules and regulations that the people had to follow, which made fellowship of God more difficult.

By calling us to keep his commands or keep the sayings of the prophecy, Jesus is telling us to obey his word and watch over it and preserve it. Verses 18 and 19 of our text provide us with additional detail by imploring us not to attempt to add anything to or take anything away from God’s word. Jesus called us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything he commanded us. We must share the Gospel without adding our own ideas or removing those things that challenge us. Our responsibility to share the unadulterated Gospel is greater in light of Christ’s return, as verse 6 reminds us that Jesus shall return soon.

We must be careful in our attempt to serve the Lord that we don’t create barriers for others or become legalistic like the ancient teachers of the law. We don’t want to push people away instead of drawing them to the Body of Christ.

Is there anything that you are doing to make Christianity unappealing to others? Are you pushing people away from the Church instead of drawing them to Christ? Ask God to reveal anything that you are doing to deter others from giving their lives to Christ, from joining the Church or getting involved in your ministry.

Luke 1:46(b) -55

Mary was given scary and uncertain marching orders, but in the end she received them with joy. She could have been divorced, killed, or ostracized, but she didn’t run away from her assignment. Mary ran towards it. She recognized that this assignment was bigger than her and she focused on the nature of God instead of her inability to handle the assignment. In verse 51, she exalted his mighty deeds. In verse 52, she recalled his sovereignty. In verse 53, she spoke of his care for the least of these. Finally, in verses 54 and 55 she praised God for his care for Israel and her ancestors. Although this assignment would change Mary’s life forever, she was filled with so much joy that she praised the Lord in song.

The fact that God would trust us enough to use us should bring us great joy. Not only did Mary praise God for who he is, but she also thanked him.

Revelations 22:6-7, 18-20

God wants us to do what he says. Period. No matter how we language it or frame it, God wants obedience. In verse 7 of our text, John records the words of Jesus, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” These words convey the same sentiment Jesus spoke to his disciples prior to his departure in John 14:15, “if you love me, keep my commands.” Not, if you love me you will add to my commands or make them “better.” The ancient teachers of the law added so much to God’s word, which had already been spoken and recorded, thereby distorting the word of the Lord. This resulted in the creation of another set of rules and regulations that the people had to follow, which made fellowship of God more difficult.

By calling us to keep his commands or keep the sayings of the prophecy, Jesus is telling us to obey his word and watch over it and preserve it. Verses 18 and 19 of our text provide us with additional detail by imploring us not to attempt to add anything to or take anything away from God’s word. Jesus called us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything he commanded us. We must share the Gospel without adding our own ideas or removing those things that challenge us. Our responsibility to share the unadulterated Gospel is greater in light of Christ’s return, as verse 6 reminds us that Jesus shall return soon.

We must be careful in our attempt to serve the Lord that we don’t create barriers for others or become legalistic like the ancient teachers of the law. We don’t want to push people away instead of drawing them to the Body of Christ.

Is there anything that you are doing to make Christianity unappealing to others? Are you pushing people away from the Church instead of drawing them to Christ? Ask God to reveal anything that you are doing to deter others from giving their lives to Christ, from joining the Church or getting involved in your ministry.

Luke 1:46(b) -55

Mary was given scary and uncertain marching orders, but in the end she received them with joy. She could have been divorced, killed, or ostracized, but she didn’t run away from her assignment. Mary ran towards it. She recognized that this assignment was bigger than her and she focused on the nature of God instead of her inability to handle the assignment. In verse 51, she exalted his mighty deeds. In verse 52, she recalled his sovereignty. In verse 53, she spoke of his care for the least of these. Finally, in verses 54 and 55 she praised God for his care for Israel and her ancestors. Although this assignment would change Mary’s life forever, she was filled with so much joy that she praised the Lord in song.

The fact that God would trust us enough to use us should bring us great joy. Not only did Mary praise God for who he is, but she also thanked him.

Revelations 22:6-7, 18-20

God wants us to do what he says. Period. No matter how we language it or frame it, God wants obedience. In verse 7 of our text, John records the words of Jesus, “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” These words convey the same sentiment Jesus spoke to his disciples prior to his departure in John 14:15, “if you love me, keep my commands.” Not, if you love me you will add to my commands or make them “better.” The ancient teachers of the law added so much to God’s word, which had already been spoken and recorded, thereby distorting the word of the Lord. This resulted in the creation of another set of rules and regulations that the people had to follow, which made fellowship of God more difficult.

By calling us to keep his commands or keep the sayings of the prophecy, Jesus is telling us to obey his word and watch over it and preserve it. Verses 18 and 19 of our text provide us with additional detail by imploring us not to attempt to add anything to or take anything away from God’s word. Jesus called us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything he commanded us. We must share the Gospel without adding our own ideas or removing those things that challenge us. Our responsibility to share the unadulterated Gospel is greater in light of Christ’s return, as verse 6 reminds us that Jesus shall return soon.

We must be careful in our attempt to serve the Lord that we don’t create barriers for others or become legalistic like the ancient teachers of the law. We don’t want to push people away instead of drawing them to the Body of Christ.

Is there anything that you are doing to make Christianity unappealing to others? Are you pushing people away from the Church instead of drawing them to Christ? Ask God to reveal anything that you are doing to deter others from giving their lives to Christ, from joining the Church or getting involved in your ministry.

Luke 1:46(b) -55

Mary was given scary and uncertain marching orders, but in the end she received them with joy. She could have been divorced, killed, or ostracized, but she didn’t run away from her assignment. Mary ran towards it. She recognized that this assignment was bigger than her and she focused on the nature of God instead of her inability to handle the assignment. In verse 51, she exalted his mighty deeds. In verse 52, she recalled his sovereignty. In verse 53, she spoke of his care for the least of these. Finally, in verses 54 and 55 she praised God for his care for Israel and her ancestors. Although this assignment would change Mary’s life forever, she was filled with so much joy that she praised the Lord in song.

The fact that God would trust us enough to use us should bring us great joy. Not only did Mary praise God for who he is, but she also thanked him.
for all that he had done for her. Mary was truly thankful for salvation (vs. 47), for being chosen by God, despite her flaws and lack of status in society (vs. 48), and for all that God had done for her (vs. 49). Mary didn’t focus on the challenge of her call, she focused on the one who was calling and the blessings he had bestowed upon her.

How did you respond the last time God gave you a hard assignment? Did you throw a temper tantrum like a three year old? Were you paralyzed with fear? Did you ignore it, hoping it would go away? If you didn’t embrace it with joy and thanksgiving, ask God to give you Mary’s heart. Ask the Lord to help you to respond differently next time he calls.

Saturday – December 24, 2016

7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” 8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. 9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:7-10

It’s Christmas Eve! The anticipation and expectation is so great that you are about to burst at the seams. The shopping is done. The meal prep has commenced. Your loved ones have made it into town. Christmas carols fill the air as the lights from the tree dance on the walls of your home. The celebration of the birth of our Lord and savior is upon us. Yes!

All Advent long we have anticipated Christmas. Although Advent is ending, the celebration is not over. The Christmas Season, the twelve days where we celebrate the birth of Jesus, is just beginning. What will you do with those twelve days?

Will you rush through them, removing any evidence of Advent or Christmas from your home and minds or will you truly celebrate the Christmas Season? After Advent, we are to spend twelve days celebrating the birth of Jesus and its significance. Yes, the decorations should remain up. Yes, the Christmas carols should continue, but there is more. Let’s spend some time focusing on why Jesus came and what happened as a result.

Isaiah 52:7 says “how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” We are called to be bearers of the good news, of the Gospel. Just as messengers brought the news to the Jews that they could return to Jerusalem from exile, we have been saved to bring the good news to the world that the Messiah has already come and secured the victory on their behalf.

Can you imagine how excited the people of Israel were to learn that their bondage was over? That they could shake the shackles of oppression off? That it was now safe and permissible to go home? We possess that same message today. For the lost, dying, brokenhearted, disgruntled. For the one who feels forsaken, left out, and forgotten. For the castaway, abandoned, and ignored. For the one that has been victimized, taken advantage of, and abused. For the thirsty, hungry, and naked. We possess the good news that “to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.” (Isaiah 9:6-7) We possess knowledge for our dark and dying world that the one who can bring them out, over, and through has come and desires a personal and intimate relationship with every man, woman, boy and girl, no matter their circumstances. Their wait is over.

The question is, will you carry this message? Do you have the courage to take the message of Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, resurrection and soon return into the world, your world? Can you share this with your family, friends, co-workers, classmates, and to strangers? Just as the people who saw the messengers coming with the message of freedom and restoration were filled with joy in our text, so will our world be when they learn that you are carrying a message of liberation, freedom, reconciliation, peace, hope and love. Won’t you tell the world that their captivity is over? You have the antidote for the world’s pain, are you willing to share it?
Min. Sheila Spencer
Director of Christian Education and Faith Formation
Assistant to the President of Disciples Home Missions
Telephone: (317) 713-2634
E-mail: sspencer@dhm.disciples.org

Wilma Shuffitt
Ministry Associate
Telephone: (317) 713-2639
E-mail: wshuffitt@dhm.disciples.org