



ADVENT 3

Sunday December 13

Isaiah 13:6-13; Psalm 63:1-8(9-11)98; Hebrews 12:18-29; John 3:22-30

Wait, for the day of the Lord is near. The prophet Isaiah's tone is stern; the setting of these verse is stark; and the descriptive language is peppered with words like destruction, pangs, agony, anguish, wrath, desolation, and iniquity.

Is this what we as Christians are supposed to be watching and waiting for? Well, the answer is actually both *yes and no*.

A perfect storm of adverse conditions looms over our postmodern, American lives: **a pandemic of systemic racial injustice; a pandemic of global proportion called Coronavirus; a pandemic of climate change; a pandemic of extremely deep political division; and a pandemic of privilege.**

On the day of judgment, some people will be **assigned** to heaven; and other people will be **consigned** to hell. But what if *this is* hell?

God's people who are black, brown, members of the LGBTQIA community, elderly, poor, sick, or otherwise disenfranchised – have waited a very long time to see legitimate change. If human being could save the world all by themselves, then the world would surely have been save already. They can't, so it hasn't.

When Christ Jesus returns via the Second Coming all things will be made new. So if the day of the Lord will facilitate the world in its current form being torn all the way down so it can finally be rebuilt from scratch the right way, then I joyfully wait and watch for that day with great expectation, exhilaration, and anticipation.

-The Rev. Arthur Jones, III

Monday December 14

Isaiah 8:16-9:1; Psalm 41, 52; **2 Peter 1:1-11**; Luke 22:39-53

I have been a Sunday School Teacher for many decades. To teach the children about the coming seasons of Advent I would bring out the Advent Wreath with its three purple candles, one pink candle, and one white candle. This prop is what we use to help spark a discussion about Advent and what it is. The four colored candles on the wreath symbolize; Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace. The candles are traditionally lit in that order during the four week season of Advent. The white candle is in the middle of the wreath and is lit on Christmas Eve, and this candle symbolizes the birth of Jesus.

This year there is no Sunday School and in effect there is no Advent wreath to share with the students. So, when I was asked to write my reflection on the Advent readings assigned for the week of December 14th, I said yes.

I don't know why I said yes in honesty because writing is not my forte. Thinking back to college when I had to write my thesis in order to graduate, I just remember being very overwhelmed. The paper almost did me in, to the point where I went to my professor and said, "I can't do it; I just won't graduate". The reply was, "you can do this and there was no other option". With a lot of tearful prayers and a very talented typist who edited my whole paper, I did it! So why did I say yes? Knowing how fearful I am of writing, especially for others to read.

The first thing I did when approaching this assignment was I read the scriptures roughly 4-5 times. I also took notes while reading, which really helped me gather all of my thoughts. Then I realized that the scriptures never mentioned what I knew about Advent; specifically the Advent wreath and its symbolic candles. It wasn't until I read 2 Peter's reading that stated, "It is more than just having faith, you have to learn to know God and do what he does: Patience, Love, Joy, and Peace". After reading this scripture (over and over) I had no problem writing this assignment. From doing this assignment it gave me back my confidence in my abilities to write and it truly made me see how foolish I was about being fearful of others reading my writing.

From the readings themselves I learned that Advent is more than the Advent wreath; it is "The Preparation".

-Betsy Schumacher, Church of the Redeemer

Tuesday December 15

Isaiah 9:1-7; Psalm 45; 2 Peter 1:12-21; Luke 22:54-69

As I read from Isaiah, I think about the miracle of the birth of Christ foretold in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before the son of God came into the world. I remember discovering when I was nearly an adult, that the birth of Christ was prophesied in the Old Testament. Christ **IS** the word made flesh. How amazing! At Christmas, I think about the joy at the birth of Christ. Yet the cross looms large.

It must have been hard to be alert, to be ready for the first coming of Christ. In 2 Peter, written after the death of Christ, there is reference to waiting for the second coming of Christ. We continue to wait, we must be prepared, and it is still hard. I am hopeful that I will prepare my heart, my mind, and my actions this Advent season. I pray that I can proudly proclaim that Christ is my savior and that I will not deny him as does Peter in the Gospel reading.

-Jennifer Joyce, St. John Lutheran Church

Wednesday December 16

Isaiah 9:8-17; Psalm 119:49-72; 2 Peter 2:1-10a; Mark 1:1-8

O Lord how long will you tarry?
Have we not suffered enough?
You have scattered us.
What must we do?
Will you not come soon?
You made a promise long ago.

Jean Neiley, St. John Lutheran Church

Thursday December 17

Isaiah 9:18-10:4; **Psalm 50**; 2 Peter 10b-16; Matt 3:1-12

Psalm 50 - The Acceptable Sacrifice

Oh, the Holidays! What a wonderful time to fill my home with beautiful symbols of peace and joy.

Several years ago I decided to “downsize” Christmas. Decorating had become a chore, unpacking all the “stuff” and finding just the right place to display it. I’m embarrassed to say I followed the 80/20 rule (80% Santa and 20% Jesus). The Nativity scene was definitely a keeper though. I felt a sense of tranquility while setting it up...until I turned around and saw The Pieta nearby. My first thought was to pack The Pieta away until Easter. Clearly it was “out of place” amid all the cheer. I looked at the crèche, then back at The Pieta, and felt an overwhelming sense of grief and sacrifice.

“Mary, did you know that your baby boy would someday...?”

Psalm 50, for me, is a reckoning with God:

⁵“Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”

⁶The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge.

Material gifts are not true sacrifices since everything I have comes from God. He expects a spiritual relationship based on holiness and truthfulness. Advent is a time to prepare for the coming of Christ through faithful actions and reflect on how I behave when no one is watching. It is a time to celebrate the joyful birth of Jesus, but more importantly it is a time to right my relationship with God and recognize the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made for me. The Pieta stays.

-Rose Carpenter, Church of the Redeemer

Friday December 18

Isaiah 10:5-19; **Psalm 40, 54**; 2 Peter 2:17-22; Matt 11:2-15

Psalm 54 “Answered Prayer for Deliverance from Adversaries” is very meaningful in today’s world. I think of adversaries as the enemy. I found an interesting quote by Gift Gugu Mona: “Forgiveness is the best way to disempower the enemy”. The enemy has not put God first. This Psalm is asking God to share his strength with you to walk away from controversy and to let the truth unfold. The enemy will be cut off if you don’t “fan the flames” of evil doing. In this way, justice will be served and you will know in your heart that you did the right thing. Feelings and expressions of anger are not healthy and are not God’s way. Remember the Lord will be at your side as you follow his lead.

Felice Dunas wrote “Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” So relieve yourself of anger and you will be the better person in God’s eyes.

And just some thoughts about keeping “Christ in Christmas.” The season of Advent is an important time in our Church. Unfortunately, our preparations and celebrations have been hampered this year due to the Pandemic. This holy season should be one of simplicity and a remembrance of the reason for the season. Large get-togethers, gift giving, an abundance of food and fellowship may not happen this Christmas but God’s presence will remain and perhaps new traditions will be borne as we celebrate Christ’s birth.

-Diane Siebecker, Church of the Redeemer

Saturday December 19

Isaiah 10:20-27; Psalm 55; Jude 17-25; Luke 3:1-9

Today’s lessons are hard to read. They contain God’s judgment on a sinful people (Isaiah), they reflect the betrayal by a friend (the Psalm) and they promise that some will suffer if they do not repent (Luke.) We might be tempted to skip these readings altogether. In each reading, however, there is at least a seed of hope. Isaiah makes plain that the burdens of the enemy will be removed; the psalmist urges us to cast our burdens on the Lord for God will sustain us; and John the Baptist makes his appearance in Luke, with his voice crying in the wilderness. Jude encourages us to increase our faith, keep ourselves centered in the love of God, and count on the mercy of Christ as we prepare for, and live into eternal life.

The Rev. Melinda Artman