



ADVENT 4

Sunday December 20

Isaiah 42:1-12; Psalm 24,29; **Ephesians 6:10-20**; John 3:16-21

I've been an Episcopalian all my life, sometimes faithful to my religion, sometimes not.

The same goes for my relationship with God. Sometimes faithful, sometimes not. By His grace, I was given a gift a number of years ago – saved if you will, from self-will! - and from that point on I have been nurturing my spiritual life. Right now, especially as the world struggles with the pandemic, systemic racism, and a myriad of other issues, it's comforting to me to read what Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians. More than comforting, it's a sort-of secret weapon to help me handle life's many challenges. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." (6.1) As it's put in the *The Message* (The Bible in contemporary language), "Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued..." Yes. Thank you God. I am reminded that I am never alone, that help is only a prayer away. Amen to that.

-Alice Bennett, Church of the Redeemer

Monday December 21

Isaiah 11:1-9; **Psalm 61,62**; Revelation 20:1-10; John 5:30-47

Psalm 62:5-8 "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

When we began 2020, we couldn't have imagined that we were about to live through the tsunami of chaos that this year has held. All too often, we have found ourselves divided and depleted because we have placed our hope in people and political parties and we forget that our hope and our rest come from God alone.

God has used this time to gift us with the opportunity to fall still and reflect on where we are and how we got here and how we move forward, together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we begin 2021, we do not know what lies ahead of us, but we can find comfort and the peace which passes all understanding in the unshakeable, truth that God alone is our refuge and salvation.

For Reflection: Today, let us examine our hearts and find where we are putting too much faith in humanity and the world and not enough faith in God.

-Jennifer Greenwood Taylor, Church of the Redeemer

Tuesday December 22

Isaiah 11:10-16; Psalm 66,67; Revelation 20:11-21:8; **Luke 1:5-25**

Luke 1:5-25 – The Birth of John The Baptist Foretold

God had been silent – no prophets for hundreds of years. One can only imagine that in those silent years many turned away from God. In this reading we are told that Zechariah, a priest, and Elizabeth were “righteous before God” (verse 6). Yet for all their piety and prayers for a child they remained childless, and now in their advanced age had abandoned all hope of having children.

Zechariah was chosen from all the priests to go into the Holy of Holies to offer incense and prayers to God. While in the sanctuary the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah and told him he and Elizabeth were to have a son, who they would name John. John’s mission was to turn people back to God, i.e. to repent. In response, Zechariah asked for a sign that this announcement was true. Gabriel immediately punished Zechariah by making him mute.

Two thoughts immediately come from this story. First, how often do we look for a “sign”; Please God show me a sign that *I am doing the right thing* or we at Redeemer (or St. John) want a sign that *we can continue as a spiritual community*. But don’t you see, by needing a sign we don’t believe. We all need to return to God and believe, that is repent. Second, was Zechariah really being punished? Perhaps Gabriel was doing Zechariah a favor. By losing his ability to speak Zechariah was forced to listen. Listening to God is the first step of repentance.

As we prepare for Christ’s birth may we listen, believe, and return to God.

-Bruce Carpenter, Church of the Redeemer

Wednesday December 23

Isaiah 28:9-22; Psalm 72; Revelation 21:9-21; Luke 1:26-38

Who is He trying to teach? Someone new to the faith or someone who has lived their whole life in the church? The answer, I believe, is both. I was raised and have spent my faith life at the Redeemer. I have many warm memories of our church and yet sometimes I still don’t always get it. What is He trying to teach me? Maybe that here is the place to rest and to leave your troubles.

“This is the resting place, let the weary rest. A place of repose, yet they would not listen.”

We don’t always listen. In this crazy world of pandemics, violence, deceit, your work, or unemployment it’s easy to become scared and continually worry, plan, and try to figure things out on our own. We carry all of these burdens on our shoulders day after day and don’t take advantage of the rest we are offered.

In belonging to a busy parish like ours you sometimes get asked to do something you don’t always want to do. Sunday school, Youth group, suppers, lawn work, fundraisers, Vestry, Alter Guild, etc. But I believe that by allowing yourself to say yes to participate in some of these church “chores”, you have to set down some of those burdens or weights that you carry with you to be able to do the task at hand. In doing so you actually come away feeling lighter, happier, and yes even rested. We are so blessed to have a Father that teaches us this every day, as if we’ve never heard it before, with patience and love. He has given us a corner stone, true and plumb and right with which to measure our lives by. He gives us rest. He teaches us all the same, the new, the experienced, the young, and the old. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!

-Margaret Cole, Church of the Redeemer

Thursday December 24

Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 45,46; Revelation 22:12-17,21; Luke 1:67-80

As a youth I recall reading a series of New York magazines which contained cartoons of a bedraggled, bearded man in a long gown carrying a placard with the notice: The End of the World is near. These ‘toons scared me in a big way and prompted me to consider what it would be like when the end was at hand. Would this event signal the second coming of our Lord and savior?

After much rumination I “end” indeed did represent the end and a new and better world would arise. Not through wars or devastation but through love and understanding would we witness a new beginning.

These thoughts then led me to think what it/could be like when Jesus walked down the center aisle of our church. Would some of us suddenly genuflect as he moved by? Would we fall on our hands and knees? Would we stand there dumbfounded with nervous shivers running up and down our spines? For me, I think I would fall in the awestruck class. Then it follows.....what would He say to all of us? I think His words would come from our Book of Common Prayer, [or the Bible, from which the Book of Common Prayer quotes extensively. -eds] the most important words therein. **THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT: THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, ALL THY SOUL AND ALL THY MIND. THE SECOND IS LIKE UNTO IT: THOU SHALT LOVEK THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF. ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS HANG ALL THE LAWS AND THE PROPHETS.**

That’s what the new world would be all about: love of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen! To love one another, to forgive our fellow man as HE forgives us, may these be our guiding lights in the new world.

-Sid Ranck, Church of the Redeemer