

A New Kind of Advent

The Week of Hope: First Week of Advent

Sunday, Nov. 29 (First Sunday of Advent)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9

Advent is a time of waiting, longing, anticipating, and expectancy. If that is what advent is about then it is only fitting that it begins to with hope. With hope we have a sense of longing and certainty that something will indeed happen. The people of Jesus' day were waiting, longing, and hoping for God to show up. For God to break in and restore.

The prophet Isaiah has a similar longing. "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down." He prays that God would rend the heavens. That God would open them up and come down just as He did in the past. The prophet is longing for God to make His presence known amongst His people to bring forgiveness and healing. He is looking for God to enter into their brokenness and restore. But this isn't some faint hope, but rather a sense of expectancy that God would come down.

I can't help but think that we are in a similar place this advent season. We are looking for God to enter into this season, not just of advent but this season of COVID. Without a doubt, all of us are longing to see an end to this virus and see things be restored. I pray that as we begin this advent season, that we will begin looking, longing, and expecting to season God enter into this season. May we not lose hope that God will indeed bring healing but may it arise anew within us. "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down." May we not stop longing to see God's presence in this time.

Wednesday, Dec. 2 (Mid-Week Reading)

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah and Elizabeth have been waiting for years. Hoping. Longing. Yearning to have a child of their own. These hopes seem unfulfilled as Elizabeth is barren. But God has something special in mind for Zechariah and Elizabeth. The child the angel was telling Zechariah about would be John the Baptist and he would prepare the way for Jesus.

You can't help but sympathize with Zechariah's skepticism. We'd probably feel it too. Why get our hopes up? Zechariah couldn't believe what the angel told him. As punishment for his lack of expectancy, he would be unable to speak until the child was born. Zechariah needed a sense of expectancy. He needed a confident hope that God would do what He promised.

As we go through this advent season and this week of hope. Let us not cease hoping and expecting. It is easy during this time to be discouraged. But let us remember that it is usually in the most hopeless of places that we are caused to look up and be assured of God's presence. Let us not grow skeptical but let us have a renewed sense of expectancy this season.

The Week of Love: Second Week of Advent

Sunday, Dec. 6 (Second Sunday of Advent)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5

The people of Israel at this time are longing to return home. They are in exile wanting to return to Jerusalem. Now God steps in and tells Isaiah to bring them these words of comfort. "Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem." God is assuring them that their time of exile is coming to a close. Later he tells them "Every valley shall be raised up and every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed." Not only is God giving them hope that their exile is coming to a close but He is also promising a time of restoration.

This promise of comfort is needed in this time. The second Sunday of Advent focuses on love. God in His love comforts us in our time of sorrow and need. We need this during this season of waiting. We need God to comfort us in His love. We need to know His presence in the midst of this time of uncertainty; assuring us that he will make the mountains low, raise up the valleys, and make rough places a plain. Assuring us that He will bring about a sense of restoration in this time which we desperately need His comfort. Where do we need to know His love for us? How can you find your comfort in the love of God during this season? How can we hear and take hold of the words "Comfort, comfort my people"?

Wednesday, Dec. 9 (Mid-Week Reading)

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:46-55

This is Mary's song. Mary has been told by the angel that she will carry the Messiah. She had left to go visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also expecting. And Elizabeth had said that the child in her womb leapt upon Mary's arrival. There was something special about this child Mary was carrying. In her song she announces what this child will do.

This child will scatter the proud and bring rulers down from their thrones but will lift up the humble. He will fill the hungry with good things but the rich will be sent away empty. Mary announces God's saving work that will happen through this child. The God who sees us in our humble estate. The God who chooses to comfort us in our brokenness. And maybe as we anticipate the celebration of the coming of this child, we need to ask how maybe we can bring comfort to those in need?

In the song "O Holy Night" one of the verses starts off with "chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother and in His name all oppression shall cease". Jesus came to lift up the broken, the oppressed, and the weary. Maybe we too can join in this work, especially in this time. In what ways can you lift up the needy and oppressed and bring this comfort during this season of Advent?

The Week of Joy: Third Week of Advent

Sunday, Dec. 13 (Third Sunday of Advent)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 35

Have you ever been in a desert? Then you know that deserts are often the least likely places where you'll find life. It's not a place with springs or streams or much water at all. They are dry and thirsty places. Yet, Isaiah gives us a different picture.

The people of Israel are awaiting a return from exile. And he gives the people a glimpse of what is going to look like. He gives them a picture of the joy that shall come. A joy that is so great that it will cause those with weak hands and knees to be strong and the anxious to not fear. The blind will receive sight, the deaf will hear, the mute will speak, and the lame will leap. This is a promise of redemption. It is a time of joy and rejoicing.

As we await Christmas this year, we may feel like we are in a desert. During this time, may we find joy in the promise of what is to come. May we find joy in the promise of a child. A child who will bring redemption, salvation, and restoration. As we wait, anticipate, and expect to see God enter into this world and our lives may we do so with great joy at the promised salvation of our God.

Wednesday, Dec. 16 (Mid-Week Reading)

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:67-79

God's promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth has finally come true. They finally have a child. As there is disagreement about what the name of the child shall be everyone looks to Zechariah. Now Zechariah is still unable to speak. After being asked Zechariah writes on a tablet "his name is John." It is then that Zechariah speaks.

He sings of God's redemption. He speaks of God's salvation for Israel and God keeping His promises to His people and of the forgiveness of sins. Zechariah proclaims that John will prepare the way for the one who will make these things a reality. Joy had so filled up Zechariah's heart that he could hardly contain himself. He had to praise God and rejoice.

Has God's salvation been made real in your life? Then rejoice. If the promise of God's salvation in Jesus Christ is real to you, rejoice and be glad. Yet, how often do we contain our joy? Do we leave the joy stuffed down somewhere deep within us? My prayer is that as we wait for Christmas to come that our lives may show the joy of knowing God's salvation. That we will announce it with our words and with our lives. Let's not keep the joy to ourselves.

The Week of Peace: Fourth Week of Advent

Sunday, Dec. 20 (Fourth Sunday of Advent)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Peace is not about the absence of conflict. It is about reconciliation. It's about working it out. This is what this shoot from the stump of Jesse will bring. He is going to bring peace. He is going to bring true peace. He is going to make everything wrong, right. He is going to bring reconciliation.

This is why He is filled with the Spirit of the Lord which allows Him to judge to give wisdom, counsel, and to judge fairly. This is also why we see some unlikely animal pairings. It's not often we see a wolf and a lamb dwelling together. Or a calf and a lion. Nor a cow and a bear. Yet, when true peace comes all creation will live in harmony. All tensions will be made right. All conflict will be reconciled.

As we wait to see things made right we know that our God is reconciling all things. This world is broken. This year has been far from peaceful. Too be honest this year has been chaos. People have lost jobs, loved and so many other things this year. Yet, God is going to restore all that seems wrong. He is going to bring order to the chaos. God is going to make all things right. Let us wait for it. Let us hope for it. Let us long for it. May we find peace in the God who is making all things right.

Christmas Eve: Thursday, Dec. 24

Scripture Reading: John 1:1-14

I enjoy how Eugene Peterson words it. Instead of saying the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, he says, "The Word became flesh and blood and move into the neighborhood." Why do I appreciate this picture so much? Because it gives us this picture of The Word moving next door. It gives a picture of the Word moving into and making His life in a community. It allows us to picture Jesus hanging out at a barbecue, helping a neighbor with a project, or standing outside on the sidewalk simply talking with the person next door.

We call this the incarnation; God becoming flesh. God comes and dwells with us, He moves into the neighborhood to restore, heal, and make new. This incarnation is very relational. These things that I mentioned above are very relational they are incarnational. Yet, this is how God chooses to meet us in Jesus. He does it very incarnationally. Maybe we need to learn to minister in the same way.

As we celebrate Christmas Eve, we remember that our God has stepped out of the heaven and He moved into our neighborhood. He sees the brokenness of this world, He sees the brokenness of our lives, and He moves into the neighborhood. He moves in to change, to transform, and to make new. My prayer for you this Christmas eve is that you will allow God to enter to the brokenness places of your life and maybe as He does this, you'll move out into the broken places in your community to bring transformation.

Christmas Day: Friday, Dec. 25

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-20

Finally, the one we waited for is here, but we find Him in a rather interesting place. Are we really going to find Him in a manger? Is He really going to be among the animals? Are humble shepherds really going to be the first to greet Him? That's not we'd expect. This isn't how we pictured it. Yet, this is what God was doing.

As we celebrate Christmas, we realize that God chose to send His Son in a very odd way. A way no one expected. It was a way that no one would have predicted. Yet, this isn't the last time God does this through Jesus. Throughout Jesus' ministry He does things in an odd sort of way. Rather than spending time with the religious elite, the Savior of the world is with tax collectors and sinners. Rather than spending His time with the wealthy and those of high stature, He is healing the sick and defending the cause of the poor. He announces a strange Kingdom in which the first are last and the greatest are servants. And the strangest things of all, the Savior of the world would go to cross and die. Yet, this is how God chooses to do things. In an odd and strange way. God's salvation doesn't come through our means but through His.

This Christmas as we see everything being a little different this year. As we may wonder what God is doing in the midst of all that is happening. May we remember that God works in the oddest and strangest of ways. Ways we could never understand or predict. Ways that leave us scratching our heads and wondering. Maybe during this time God is once again going to make His presence known among us in the strangest of ways. Maybe we'll see His Kingdom come in what is least expected.