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Devotions for Advent 2019

We long for peace - in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities, in our nation, in our world. As you wait and seek again the coming of Christ may these readings, prayers, and questions remind you of the ways the Prince of Peace is at work in the world even now. The title of this devotional comes from the hymn "Christ, Be Our Light," which calls us to be "signs of your kingdom come" in a troubled world. May this Advent be a time of renewal and commitment to work for and to live God's peace in the coming year. Peace be with you!

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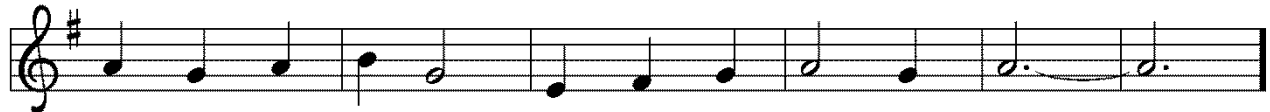
Christ, Be Our Light



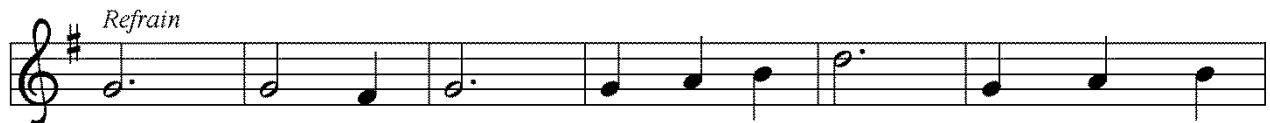
1 Long - ing for light, we wait in dark - ness. Long - ing for
 2 Long - ing for peace, our world is trou - bled. Long - ing for
 3 Long - ing for food, man - y are hun - gry. Long - ing for
 4 Long - ing for shel - ter, man - y are home - less. Long - ing for
 5 Man - y the gifts, man - y the peo - ple, man - y the



truth, we turn to you. Make us your own,
 hope, man - y de - spair. Your word a - lone
 wa - ter, man - y still thirst. Make us your bread,
 warmth, man - y are cold. Make us your build - ing,
 hearts that yearn to be - long. Let us be ser - vants



your ho - ly peo - ple, light for the world to see.
 has pow'r to save us. Make us your liv - ing voice.
 bro - ken for oth - ers, shared un - til all are fed.
 shel - ter - ing oth - ers, walls made of liv - ing stone.
 to one an - oth - er, signs of your king - dom come.



Refrain
 Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the



dark - ness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your



church gath - ered to - day.

Text: Bernadette Farrell, b. 1957

Music: CHRIST, BE OUR LIGHT, Bernadette Farrell

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Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 22, 2019

Isaiah 7:10-16 (NRSV)

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹²But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. ¹³Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Emmanuel by Frederick Buechner

<https://www.frederickbuechner.com/blog>

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth," the prologue to the Gospel of John says (1:14). A dream as old as time of the God descending hesitates on the threshold of coming true in a way to make all other truths seem dreamlike. If it is true, it is the chief of all truths. If it is not true, it is of all truths the one perhaps that people would most have been true if they could make it so. Maybe it is that longing to have it be true that is at the bottom even of the whole vast Christmas industry - the tons of cards and presents and fancy food, the plastic figures kneeling on the floodlit lawns of poorly attended churches. The world speaks of holy things in the only language it knows, which is a worldly language.

Emmanuel. We all must decide for ourselves whether it is true. Certainly the grounds on which to dismiss it are not hard to find. Christmas is commercialism. It is a pain in the neck. It is sentimentality. It is wishful thinking. With its account of the shepherds, the star, the three wise men, it smacks of a make-believe pathetically out of place in a world of energy crisis and space exploration and economic malaise. Yet it is never as easy to get rid of as all this makes it sound, because whereas to dismiss belief in God is to dismiss only an idea, a hypothesis, for which there are many alternatives (such as belief in no god at all or in any of the lesser gods we are always creating for ourselves like science or morality or the inevitability of human progress), to dismiss Christmas is for most of us to dismiss part of ourselves.

For one thing it is to dismiss one of the most fragile yet enduring visions of our own childhood and of the child who continues to exist in all of us. The sense of mystery and wonderment. The sense that on this one day each year two plus two adds up not to four but to a million. The leap of the heart at waking up into a winter morning that for a while at least is as different from all other mornings as the city where the great snow fell was a different city. "Let all mortal flesh keep silence," the old hymn goes, and there was a time for most of us when it did.

And it is to dismiss a face. Who knows what we would have seen if we had been present there in Quirinius's time. Whether it happened the way Luke says it did, with the angels and the star, is almost beside the point because the one thing that believer and unbeliever alike can be equally sure happened is an event that changed the course of human history. And it was a profoundly human event - the birth of a human being by whose humanness we measure our own, of a human being with a face that, though none of us has ever seen it, we would all likely recognize because for twenty centuries it has been of all faces the one that our world has been most haunted by.

More than anything else perhaps, to dismiss this particular birth as no different in kind from the birth of Socrates, say, or Moses or Gautama Buddha would be to dismiss the quality of life that it has given birth to in an astonishing variety of people over an astonishing period of time. There have been wise ones and simple ones, sophisticated ones and crude ones, respectable ones and disreputable ones. There have been medieval peasants and eighteenth-century aristocrats, nineteenth-century spinsters and twentieth-century dropouts. They need not be mystics or saints or even unusually religious in any formal, institutional sense, and there may never have been any one dramatic moment of conversion in the past that they would point to. But somewhere along the line something deep in them split starwise and they became not simply followers of Christ but bearers of his life. A birth of grace and truth took place within them scarcely less miraculous in its way than the one the Magi traveled all those miles to kneel before.

To look at the last great self-portraits of Rembrandt or to read Pascal or hear Bach's B-minor Mass is to know beyond the need for further evidence that if God is anywhere, he is with them, as he is also with the man behind the meat counter, the woman who scrubs floors at Roosevelt Memorial, the high school math teacher who explains fractions to the bewildered child. And the step from "God with them" to Emmanuel, "God with us," may not be as great as it seems. What keeps the wild hope of Christmas alive year after year in a world notorious for dashing all hopes is the haunting dream that the child who was born that day may yet be born again even in us and our own snowbound, snowblind longing for him.

Daily Prayers and Questions for Discussion/Reflection

Sunday, December 22

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Day for Advent 4A, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 19)

*What "keeps the wild hope of Christmas alive year after year" for you? How are you sharing that hope with others this Christmastime? How might you share this hope with others in the coming year?

Monday, December 23

God of our ancestors, you promised so many centuries ago to give us a sign. More than that you promised Immanuel – to be "God with us." Inspire us to believe, to trust, to hold on to this promise. Give us faith to believe, to trust that you are indeed with us in Christ. Give us hope to believe, to trust in the promise of Advent, the promise of your coming – in the Christ child, at the end of time, and even now in the love and grace that we experience in our daily lives. Empower us to share your promise through our words and actions at Christmas and throughout the year. Amen.

*As you reflect on the past year, in what ways and places and people did you experience the love and presence of God in your life? What could you do to improve your recognition of those ways, places, and people in the coming year?

Christmas Eve, Tuesday, December 24

Isaiah 9:2-7 (NRSV)

²The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

⁴For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying

in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you made this holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus’ presence and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 20)

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Third Sunday of Advent – December 15, 2019

Isaiah 35:1-10 (NRSV)

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
‘Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.’

⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.
⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Wilderness Rhapsody by Todd Weir

<https://bloomingcactus.typepad.com/bloomingcactus/2013/12/isaiah-35-wilderness-rhapsody.html>

"The wilderness will rejoice and blossom."
I did not expect that.
I thought the wilderness was punishment- my exile-
But I discovered I liked wandering in its stark beauty, so I decided to stay.

Mournful wind gusts in no particular direction,
Leaving me free to go any way the wind blows.

It is an aching beauty of blossoms tucked amidst the thorns,
Protected from mindless pluckers.

I watch the dusk sun take a bloody plunge off the end of the world,
And the night's cold comes so hard and fast, I can see my breath while walk on burning sand.

My favorite cacti is the Night-Blooming Cereus, which only blossoms one night a year.
Wilderness finds virtue in hiding its light under a bushel.
If you want to see the wonder you must care enough to endure.

It is the same in the human wilderness. Not all beauty flaunts.
Down in the church bowels where capital campaigns never reach, a voice says,
"My name is Bill W. and I'm an alcoholic." "Hello Bill."
One day at a time- that adds up to a new forever.

Ruth and Naomi are lighting the Advent candle,
One teardrop escapes the ocean of hurt,
While a quivering hand lights a candle of hope.

When my son started to walk and I realized my heart just grew feet,
and is going places where I can no longer protect it.

Please bloom, dear wilderness, in my cactus heart.

Courage by Steve Garnaas-Holmes

<https://www.unfoldinglight.net/> <https://www.unfoldinglight.net/>

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
“Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God,
who will come and save you.”
—Isaiah 35.3-4

You who sit by the bedside,
who stay late to finish the report,
who wrestle your tireless demons,
do not fear.

You who gaze at the x-ray,
who face another meeting at the school,
who care for the aging parent,
have courage.

You who lament our cruelty and greed,
who write letters about the climate,
who stand in silence outside the prison,
stay firm.

God is not far, nor careless, nor scornful.
God is here, here to accompany,
here to love, here to save.
Keep faith.

When you are weary God will strengthen you;
when you are afraid God will sustain you;
when you cannot go on, rest your head:
God will carry on.

In your weak hands, in your feeble knees
the Beloved is present, full of grace:
not the outcome but the presence, always.
Take courage.

Daily Prayers and Questions for Discussion/Reflection

Sunday, December 15

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your way; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Prayer of the Day for Advent 3A, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 19)

*In what ways have you seen blossoms in the midst of dry places of your life? When/where did you experience the loving presence of God during a painful time in your life?

Monday, December 16

O God, O God, O God, the world around us is dry and desolate. Our lives are permeated by hurt and heartache. We see the pain of violence and poverty and hunger all around us. Give us your vision, Lord! Help us to see blossoms in the desert, hope in place of despair, life even in places of death... Help us to trust that you can make this vision our reality, in time, Your time. Amen.

*Imagine again the time you experienced “blossoms in the midst of the dry places of your life... the loving presence of God during a painful time in your life”? Who needs to hear this story? Tell them. Soon.

Tuesday, December 17

Loving Creator God, you have filled the earth with amazing growing living things. We know we are dependent on the earth and its abundance for our life and nourishment. We pray for the systems of the earth. Where dry desert has crept over the land because of overuse or pollution, we pray for rest and restoring of the land. We pray for wise farming, restraint in taking from the earth, and care in all our ways of living that the earth may be honored and kept healthy. We pray for those whose lands have been overrun with hardship, where enough food cannot be found, especially because of injustice, war or exploitation. May the transforming ways of your kingdom come. Amen.

<https://ctm.uca.edu.au/children-and-families/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/11/Year-A-Advent-3-Dec-11-2016-Prayer-Isaiah-35.pdf>

*In what ways are you currently caring for the earth in your everyday life? What more could you do? Pick one action and begin today.

Wednesday, December 18

God of compassion, whose Son became poor for our sake: Help us to see the face of Christ in those who are poor, and in serving them to serve you. Give us generous hearts so that those living in poverty may have adequate food, clothing, and shelter. By your Spirit move us to affirm the dignity of all people and to work for just laws that protect the most vulnerable in society, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 79)

*Have you ever experienced food insecurity? If not, from whom could you find out what that's really like? What more could you be doing to care for hungry people?

Thursday, December 19

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infections and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

(https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Service_of_Prayer-in_Times_of_Violence.pdf)

*When have you experienced the violence of the world – personally, to a loved one, in the world? How did that experience change you? How can you work/are you working to bring peace to your home/your community/the world?

Friday, December 20

By your power, great God, our Lord Jesus healed the sick and gave new hope to the hopeless. Though we cannot command or possess your power, we pray for those who want to be healed. Mend their wounds, soothe fevered brows, and make broken people whole again. Help us to welcome every healing as a sign that, though death is against us, you are for us, and have promised renewed and risen life in Jesus Christ the Lord. **Amen.**

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 84)

* As we come to the end of this third week of Advent, what images of and hopes for peace will you carry with you? With whom could you share them?

Saturday, December 21

God of hope and new life, we grieve and you give us hope; we suffer and you offer relief, we are lonely and you stay by our side. Help us, each day, to trust your promise, to believe your good news, to allow ourselves to hope that your vision of a desert in bloom is truly our future. Amen.

*In what ways do you need to experience healing (physical, emotional, spiritual)? How does Isaiah's vision give you comfort, peace, hope? With whom could you share that good news today?

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Second Sunday of Advent – December 8, 2019

Isaiah 11:1-10 (NRSV)

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him,
and his dwelling shall be glorious.

The Spirituality of Advent, II – Melissa Bane Sevier

What is hope?

We talk about hope as though it is an easy thing to come by, but it's usually not that simple, is it?

How can it be that a lamb will lie down safely with a wolf, the leopard with the baby goat, the calf with the lion? What happens when the lamb and the kid and the calf get a dinner invitation from the wolf and the leopard and the lion? Don't you think they might worry about ulterior motives?

"Um, excuse me, Sir Lion. I mean, I don't want to seem rude or ungrateful for being invited to dine. However, may I ask why you are smiling so broadly, and exactly who – I mean, what – is on tonight's menu?"

That's exactly what's happening in so many places of the world right now. Each side is afraid to trust the other when they are invited to the peace table. They are afraid they are going to be eaten alive.

This can even be true in communities, families, schools.

All sides must have permission to hope. The weak need to be able to hope they will not be consumed by the powerful. The strong – and perhaps this is the more difficult type of hope – the strong need to be able to hope they do not need to consume another in order to prosper.

Isaiah told his people that they needed to give themselves permission to dream of peace, permission to hope for a better time.

What do you need to have permission to hope for this Christmas?

Hope that a torn up family could be reconciled? That you could survive Christmas with an empty place at the table? That the problem which plagues you so terribly right now could be a memory by this time next year? That you might enter a new year with more joy?

Listen to Isaiah. As Advent continues, the message intensifies. Give yourself permission to listen, to hope, to lean toward a different and better tomorrow.

<https://melissabanesevier.wordpress.com/2013/12/06/the-spirituality-of-advent-ii/>

Daily Prayers and Questions for Discussion/Reflection

Sunday, December 8

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming nurture our growth as people of repentance and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Prayer of the Day for Advent 2A, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 18)

*"What do you need to have permission to hope for this Christmas?" With whom could you share your answer? Go ahead and do it.

Monday, December 9

Living God, open our eyes to see the shoots growing out of the stumps in our lives. Help us to recognize the ways you are already bringing new life in places of desperation and death. Work through us to bring hope and new life to people who need good news. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen

*Where/when have you witnessed God bringing new life in the midst of death, hope in the midst of despair? How did you know it was the work of God? Who needs to hear that story?

Tuesday, December 10

We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life. Stir up in [us] the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

(Affirmation of Baptism Prayer of Blessing, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.236)

*Which of these "spirits" do you most need in your life right now? What could you do with that gift?

Wednesday, December 11

O Lord God, we live in a world filled with violence, some that we commit, most that we condone by our apathy. We live in fear of one another. We fail to value those we see as other. And into that world, you startle us with your vision of a world at peace – of lions and lambs and wolves all living together, of children and serpents at play, of your children loving one another as you so love us. May your vision

give us the hope and the courage to live into it. May our lives reflect your hopes and dreams for your beloved creation. Inspire us. Empower us. Today. Amen.

*In what ways does your life, your actions or inaction, contribute to the violence in the world, in our nation, in your community? What is one step you can take today to live into God's vision of a world at peace?

Thursday, December 12

God, our refuge and strength, you have bound us together in a common life. In all our conflicts, help us to confront one another without hatred and bitterness, to listen for your voice amid competing claims, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pastoral Care, p. 386)

*Does God's vision from Isaiah 11:6-9 give you hope that humans can "work together with mutual forbearance and respect"? Why or why not?

Friday, December 13

God of grace, we long for your peace in our world, in our nation, in our communities, in our homes, in our hearts. Work your peace in each of us, Lord, that we may be peacemakers for one another. Grant us hope. Grant us faith. Grant us peace. Amen.

*As we come to the end of this second week of Advent, what images of and hopes for peace will you carry with you? With whom could you share them?

Saturday, December 14

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

(Prayer Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 87)

*Which images and phrases in St. Francis' prayer stand out to you? How is God making you into an instrument of peace? What needs to change in your life to allow that change to happen more fully?

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First Sunday of Advent – December 1, 2019

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NRSV)

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² In days to come

the mountain of the LORD's house

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

³ Many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD!

The Things That Make For Peace (excerpted from "A Room Called Remember," 1984)

The following reflection by author and theologian, Frederick Buechner, was actually written for Palm Sunday. As we enter the holy season of Advent, our longing for peace is no less than it was for those who welcomed our Lord into the holy city of Jerusalem so many centuries ago. You can find Buechner's biography here: <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/>.

"Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord," the cry goes up. There is dust in the air with the sun turning it gold. Around a bend in the road, there suddenly is Jerusalem. He draws back on the reins. Crying disfigures his face. "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace." *Even today*, he says, because there are so few days left. Then the terror of his vision as he looks at the city that is all cities and sees not one stone left standing on another - you and your children within you - your children. "Because you did not know the time of your visitation," he says. Because we don't know who it is who comes to visit us. Because we do not know what he comes to give. The things that make for peace, that is what he comes to give. We do not know these things, he says, and God knows he's right. The absence of peace within our own skins no less than within our nations testifies to that. But we know their names at least. We all of us know in our hearts the holy names of the things that make for peace - real peace - only for once let us honor them by not naming them. Let us name instead only him who is himself the Prince of Peace.

"He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." That is our Palm Sunday hope, and it is our only hope. That is what the palms and the shouting are all about. That is what all our singing and worshipping and preaching and praying are all about if they are about anything that matters. The hope that finally by the grace of God the impossible will happen. The hope that Pilate will take him by one hand and Caiaphas by the other, and the Roman soldiers will throw down their spears and the Sanhedrin will bow their heads. The hope that by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the love of Christ, who is Lord of the

impossible, the leaders of the enemy nations will draw back, while there is still time for drawing back, from a vision too terrible to name. The hope that you and I also, each in our own puny but crucial way, will work and witness and pray for the things that make for peace, true peace, both in our own lives and in the life of this land.

Despair and hope. They travel the road to Jerusalem together, as together they travel every road we take - despair at what in our madness we are bringing down on our own heads and hope in him who travels the road with us and for us and who is the only one of us all who is not mad. Hope in the King who approaches every human he art like a city. And it is a very great hope as hopes go and well worth all our singing and dancing and sad little palms because not even death can prevail against this King and not even the end of the world, when end it does, will be the end of him and of the mystery and majesty of his love. Blessed be he.

<https://www.frederickbuechner.com/blog/2016/4/7/the-things-that-make-for-peace>

Daily Prayers and Questions for Discussion/Reflection

Sunday, December 1

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, and enlighten our walk in the way of your salvation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Prayer of the Day for Advent 1A, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 18)

*In what ways are you longing for peace at this point in your life? How might you begin to realize such peace in the coming weeks?

Monday, December 2

O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your church, peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 76)

*How does the image of beating swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, weapons into tools for growing food make you feel? Does that vision seem possible to you? In what ways are you living into a world in which weapons are unnecessary?

Tuesday, December 3

God of grace, we know that you hold out great hope for your people. We know that your vision for our lives and our world is one of peace and justice and love. We know that you desire to work through us to help the whole world catch that vision. But there is so much in this world that keeps us from trusting you, that turns us inward, that causes us fear. Grant us faith to seek your kingdom in this world even now. Open our hearts to love those people we most fear, to care for those we would rather ignore, to believe in those that seem beyond hope. Help us to catch your vision anew this Advent season and throughout the coming year. Amen.

*What do you think it means to “walk in the light of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:5)? What changes could you make in your life to seek out the light of Christ? How are you reflecting that light to others?

Wednesday, December 4

Gracious and holy God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to home, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 76)

*How does the image of people of all nations streaming to the house of God (Isaiah 2:2) make you feel? Joyful? Fearful? Hopeful? In what ways does your life reflect the truth that God's love and grace are for people of all nations and races?

Thursday, December 5

God of peace, how you must ache over the violence of your children! How your heart must hurt with every punch and stab! How you must be wailing over every gunshot and explosion! Forgive us, Lord – for the violence we perpetrate and condone and accept each day. Forgive us, for not working toward your vision of a world at peace. Forgive us for allowing our fears to give way to our hope in you. Forgive us, and then move us to action. Empower us to pray and act and vote the things that make for peace. Amen.

*How do you experience despair and hope traveling together (Buechner)? How do they inform one another? How can/do you use your own experience to inspire hope in others?

Friday, December 6

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and forever. Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer, <https://www.bcponline.org/Misc/Prayers.html>)

*As we come to the end of this first week of Advent, what images of and hopes for peace will you carry with you? With whom could you share them?

Saturday, December 7

"Their plowshares are beat into swords" by Walter Brueggemann

And now their plowshares are beat into swords – as are ours.

now their pruning hooks are beat into spears – as are ours.

Not only swords and spears,
but bullets, and bombs, and missiles,
of steel on flesh,
of power against bodies...

And you, in your indignation sound your mantra,

"Blessed are the peacemakers."

We dare to believe that are the aggressor,
and we are the peacemaker.

Yet in sober night dream, we glance otherwise
and think we may be aggressor,
as we vision rubble homes,
murdered civilians,

and charred babies.
And you, in our sadness, sound your mantra,
 "Blessed are the peacemakers."
We do not love war,
we yearn for peace,
 but we have lost much will for peace
 even while we dream of order.
And you, in your hope, sound your mantra,
 "Blessed are the peacemakers."
Deliver us from excessive certitude about ourselves.
Hold us in the deep ambiguity where we find ourselves,
Show us yet again the gaping space
 between your will and our feeble imagination.
Sound your mantra with more authority,
 with more indignation,
 through sadness,
 in hope... "Blessed are the peacemakers."
Only peacemakers are blessed.
 We find ourselves well short of blessed.
Give us freedom for your deep otherwise,
finally to be blessed,
 in the name of the Peacemaker
 who gave and did not take. Amen

For the bombing in Serbia/March 25, 1999

(from "Awed to Heaven, Rooted to Earth," 2003; <https://www.patmosabbey.org/abbey-blog---guest-book/ploughshares-are-beat-into-swords>)

*For what are you longing? Peace? Hope? Justice? Love? How might a deeper relationship with our Lord help meet that need for you and for those around you?