

Devotions – December 11-17, 2016

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Sunday, December 11, 2016

EXPECT

Text: Matthew 11:7-9a

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings’ houses. Why then did you go out? To see a prophet?”

After the disciples of John the Baptizer left Jesus with the answer to John’s questions “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus turned to the crowd and put three questions to them. All three asked the same thing, “What did you expect when you went out to see John?” This gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent reminds us that all too often what we expect to see or experience is key to what we actually see and experience. As people of God what is it we expect? As Advent people, we are invited always live as expectant people of hope.

Let us Pray: *Lord, pour out your Spirit upon us today that we may live in expectation of your love, grace, and presence each moment of our lives and seek to see the world as you would have us see it. Amen.*



Monday December 12, 2016

PREPARE

Text: Isaiah 40:3

A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

“Are you ready for Christmas?” On November 29th I attended a clergy gathering. One of those present asked the question that I have heard so many times over the years that I couldn’t begin to count. “Are you ready for Christmas?” The one asking the question added a list of things that usually happen in churches at this time of year. How are the Christmas Program plans coming? Is your church having a bake sale? What about decorating? The list went on and as it did I realized that, as a retired pastor, I saw things from a different perspective than this younger pastor did. Still the question remains for all of us. What do we need to be truly ready for Christmas?

One of the themes of Advent is that of preparation. It is a time for each of us to ask what we need to be ready to receive the Christ. The truth is our Christ comes daily. I am reminded by this question that we are called to live each day as Advent people. Ready, prepared to receive the Christ who comes to us each day.

Let us Pray: *Gracious God, help us daily to prepare for your coming and to joyfully welcome you into our daily lives. Empower us to share your joy, your love, with all whom we meet today. Amen*



Tuesday December 13, 2016

WAIT

Text: Isaiah 40:30-31

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

The first service had taken longer than expected. Mary and I were visiting Mbagala Lutheran Parish in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which is the companion congregation to Immanuel, our congregation. The church had been packed with worshippers, the music was great, Pastor Kimambo led the worship, I preached with an interpreter, we celebrated communion. Gifts had been presented to us and from our congregation to Mbagala and the service lasted about two hours and forty-five minutes. As we moved out to the courtyard for the conclusion of the service, those who had been waiting there (more than 400 people) filed into the sanctuary for the second service. They had been waiting in the sun, after taking public transportation and walking to the church, for about forty-five minutes! No one complained about the delay. I was humbled by their patience and their joy in coming together to worship.

Wait and watch, we are told by the Advent message. I pray for patience for me, and for you as we wait for the Lord.

Let us Pray: *Lord we come before you this day asking that you lift us up and empower us with your presence. Help us to be willing to wait on you with joy and thanksgiving. Bring peacefulness and joy to our hurried lives. Amen.*



Wednesday December 14, 2016

WATCH

Text: Luke 2:8

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”

The year was 1974 and my family moved from Chicago to a place on Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation. I had never seen a deer before. One of my goals in this new life I had been forced into was to see a deer. Every moment in the car, I watched for deer. One day, a friend I had made who had lived there all his life, pointed through his windshield at the sky. "Look an Eagle." he said.

"Do you watch for eagles?" I asked. "No, I just watch," he replied.

As I reflected on that day I learned a great lesson. I realized that all too often I had watched for God to be revealed as I envisioned; I began to watch for God to be revealed as God chooses. I am not always good at this, but I continue to practice to watch for God to be revealed to me anew each day.

Let us Pray: *God, the shepherds were watching and you revealed yourself to them in a glorious way. Help us ever to watch and welcome you as you reveal yourself to us in ways we cannot expect. Help us to see your face in one another and in all whom we meet this day. Amen.*



Thursday December 15, 2016

WONDER

Text: Micah 5:2

***But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah,
who are little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.***

One year at the Sunday School Christmas program I was chosen to read these words from Micah. I don't remember what grade I was in but I was quite young. My mother rehearsed this verse with me time after time to make sure I could pronounce Bethlehem, Ephratha, and Judah correctly and could say this verse with all the dignity a young child could muster. The day of the program came. I stood there and looked at the people in front of me. I spoke, I don't know how loud or how well. My mother and father smiled. To this day, when I hear these words read I remember that day. I did not know who Micah was, or why he spoke these words but I knew they were important. Something seen as little and unimportant would become the source of the ruler. God indeed chooses often to be revealed to us in ways that may not seem large or important. The message is there for all to hear.

Let us Pray: *Gracious God, we give you thanks that you reveal yourself to those who may seem insignificant or unimportant. Help us always to see you in the face of all whom we meet. Fill us with wonder at the power of your love and empower us to reach out to the hopeless, the homeless, and all in need, knowing that in so doing we reach out to you. Amen*



Friday December 16, 2016

FAITH

Text: Luke 1:26-30

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

"Do not be afraid." These words are told to Zechariah by the angel who tells him he will have a son and name him John. "Do not be afraid..." Mary is told by the angel who says she has found favor with God and will conceive and bear a son to be named Jesus. "Do not be afraid," those words or another form of that message comes to each of us today for we are called to live by faith. It is not easy to face uncertainty without a touch of fear entering in and yet God blesses us with the assurance we are to live by faith that casts out fear. Hear well the message of this season, which reminds us we live not alone but with Immanuel, God with us.

Let us Pray: *Almighty God, there is much in our lives that can produce fear. Help us raise our eyes and our vision to you and to hear the message of faith, "Be not afraid." Empower us to trust in you daily with all aspects of our lives. Amen.*



Saturday December 17, 2016

REJOICE

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Giving thanks, praying constantly, rejoicing - all good and uplifting things for followers of Jesus Christ. Still there are times in life when these are difficult to do. Three days before I was to enter seminary my father who was 57 years old was operated on for cancer. It turned out to be inoperable and six weeks later we gathered at his graveside for the committal service. My mother sold our home and moved in with my oldest brother until she could decide where to live. I struggled through All Saint's Day, Thanksgiving and then came the season of Advent and Christmas. One of my classmates knew the struggle I was having as we lived in adjacent dorm rooms. "Come and pray with me," he said. "I don't know if I can pray right now," I replied.

“Then I’ll pray for both of us.” Each evening we would get together and talk and then he would ask me to join him in prayer. Little by little this and the support of the rest of our community of faith began to make its mark on me. He rejoiced for me when I couldn’t rejoice, he prayed for me when I struggled to pray, he gave thanks when I couldn’t see anything to give thanks about.

“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances.” This is not only the task of each one of us as individuals; this is a task of the community of faith, the church. As expectant, faithful people of God let us rejoice, pray and give thanks with one another and on behalf of those who cannot.

Let us Pray: *Gracious God, you are the giver of all good gifts. You are the redeemer of the world and the hope of the hopeless. Empower us always to share your love and the joy of your grace with all people, and in our rejoicing to be willing to lift up those who cannot rejoice.*
Amen

