



Advent Reflections
2020

Advent Week 1



Reflect on the poem below. How does it make you feel? Where do you most need hope? In what ways does the Christmas story bring you hope? How can you bring hope to others this season?

Hope: An Advent Poem (by Luke Schumann)

This is the season
we are in need of most
at the moment, for now
is at last the time when
Hope seeps in
and sticks out
like an unmatched sock. This

is when our theology
can be found in its purist form, for it is
preached not as fact or stat
or system, but instead
as its true identity:
metaphor, art, narrative, and poetry,
in prophecy of the coming Savior;
the One who restores
and turns all our tragic stories
into songs of redemption.

And when hatred, violence,
and oppression are seemingly
the only things
that are tangible in this world,
Hope yet steps in as a most-
welcome guest, as a
considerate concept,
as an abstract thought
still finding its form,
as a familiarity we still
have yet to meet.

And yet we know
in our deepest fibers that this
is not some unfounded hypothesis;
Hope is not something we merely
long for, a hypothetical
idea that has the potential
to plot-twist.

Hope is instead a stronghold.
Hope is real and living,
breathing life into
our next day,
sustaining us in our brokenness,
greeting our despair
with a knowing grin. Hope
is more real than the
suffering in this world—
even if it's much less prominent—

and Hope is what enables us
to long and strive for more
than what we have in front of us.
A world where all are loved
and cared for. A world where
peace endures and the line is blurred
between enemy and brother.
A world where joy is at the forefront
of our fixtures. This is what hope does.
This is what hope promises.
This is what hope ignites.

Practice for the week:

In the Jewish Scriptures, the words for *hope* and *wait* are the same. Sometimes we are able to hope in God; at other times we can only wait and refuse to give in to the darkness. Take some time this week to identify any situations that feel hopeless to you. Whether you sense God with you or feel a void or doubt about God's presence, light a candle as a symbol of your commitment to hope/wait. Watch the flame as it produces light and warmth. The longing we have in our hearts for this world to be set right will come to pass. Until then...we wait.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)*

Advent Week 2



This week our Advent theme is Peace—experiencing peace in the present moment. The wonder of Christmas is that Jesus is born into our reality. God is here and now, in us, around us and with us in this very moment. Reflect on the poem below. How does it make you feel about God? How does it make you feel about yourself? In what ways do you need to experience God's presence as more "here from there"? How can you be a peace-giving presence to others?

Descent (by Luci Shaw)

Down he came from up,
and in from out,
and here from there.
A long leap,
an incandescent fall
from magnificent
to naked, frail, small,
through space,
between stars,
into our chill night air,
shrunk, in infant grace,
to our damp, cramped
earthy place
among all
the shivering sheep.

And now, after all,
there he lies,
fast asleep.

Practice for the week:

This week try to practice being and reveling in the present moment using this 4-step practice. Take a few moments of quiet to center yourself and then:

1. **Accept** that God is present with you. God is love and God just "is." You don't have to force this or make it happen. Just accept and welcome God's presence as already here.
2. **Let go** of analytical thoughts as they arise. Don't analyze yourself or God. Let go of any negative feelings about the past or fears about the future.
3. **Absorb** God and reflect that love back to God as if you are each a part of the same rhythm.
4. **Be**: remain in this posture not worrying about who, what or how you are, but that you are. Just be.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" which means "God with us." (Matthew 1:22-23)

Advent Week 3



Reflect on the poem below. In what areas of your life do you find it challenging to receive or give love?
How might love “lived out loud” be stretching and discomfoting to you?

Love (by Lindy Thompson)

When I was small, love was small, too.
Not small as in limited,
but small as in contained, tidy, not far-flung.

I knew exactly whom I loved and who loved me,
and it felt a certain way without variation –
safe, warm, pleasant.

I could draw love –
crayon hearts around my family, my friends, my
pets.
Very defined, very good, very straightforward.
That was love when I was small.

I am no longer small,
and neither is love.
Love bears but a vestige of what it once looked
like to me.
Love is now wide-ranging,
all-encompassing,
challenging,
and occasionally downright uncomfortable.

The One for whom we wait this Advent season
began as a baby.
Responding to a baby is easy.
Adoration of an infant is understandable.
It happens all the time.

But this Savior, for whom we wait,
grew up,
and we must grow up with him,
and our love must be wide-ranging
all-encompassing,
must evolve from a feeling to an action,
in order for us to be the hands, feet and voice
of the Love that so relentlessly sought
the least, the last, and the lost.

As we prepare ourselves anew
for the fresh inbreaking of God incarnate,
let us not be dismayed by the stretching and
discomfort
that come with love lived out loud.

It isn't small, and it isn't tidy,
and it isn't always comfortable,
but love that goes beyond itself
to those on the margins
is what the baby in the manger grew to embody.

Go, tell it on the mountain!
Love is big,
and God has drawn a heart
around
everyone.

Practices for the week

- 1) **Receive love:** Read Matthew 19:13-14 and imagine you are one of the children coming to Jesus, despite the disciples' objections. Climb up into Jesus' lap, feel his embrace, and hear him bless you.
- 2) **Give love:** Think of someone you find hard to love, and find a way to reach out to bless them (e.g., send a Christmas card or email, call them, make cookies for them, etc.).

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (1 John 4:7-9)

Advent Week 4



Read the passage below from the final stave in Charles Dickens' novella "A Christmas Carol. Scrooge has just woken up after being visited by the Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. As you read, imagine yourself as Scrooge – try to feel what he is feeling and let the story awaken your own emotions.

"Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down!" cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here -- I am here -- the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be! I know they will."

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there: perfectly winded.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in!" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and frisking round the fireplace. "There's the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered. There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present, sat. There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits. It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs.

"I don't know what day of the month it is," said Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!"

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell! Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"Eh?" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day?" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day."

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can...!"

Practice for the week:

Each day this week, as we approach Christmas, take a moment to allow joy to rise within you. Consider each day a new beginning—a new opportunity for the parts of your life that seem dead to be reborn. Reflect on the wonder of Jesus' birth into your humanity, and the invitation it represents for you to experience Divine Life, in which anything is possible.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

(Luke 2: 10-14)