



Journey of Hope 2022

An Advent devotional
By members of Aldersgate United Methodist Church

Preface

HOPE

That little flicker of light called hope—
All around us lie hardship, chaos,
Anger, disillusionment, and evil.
And all that will save us
Is that small light of hope
Based on faith—
That strength based in faith will carry us
That right will ultimately prevail
That love always is there with us to the end.
Hope gives us strength
Hope gives us endurance.
Faith is the birthplace of hope
And hope is faith in action.

Day 1

HOPE REVEALED

As a child, I was known to take the Sears “Wishbook” and leave it open on my parent’s bed – open to strategic pages: G.I. Joe, Major Matt Mason (*there’s a blast from the past!*). At a certain point, I began to wonder about Santa Claus, no longer relying only on a letter or a visit to sit on his lap. I was covering all the bases. A good hint never hurts!

On Christmas Eve, I couldn’t sleep – for real! I mean stomach-hurting, nervous, imagination running wild with anticipation laying in my bed until sun up. You can imagine how I felt on the night that all hope was lost and I knew that Santa Claus wasn’t coming.

Wide awake in the bottom bunk, I heard a noise and opened my door to see what it was. My room opened just across the hall from the living room – where the tree and presents were. The lights from the tree shining in my eyes, I saw my father standing there in his pajamas.

“Daddy?” I asked. “What are you doing?”

As a father and a grandfather, I can imagine the sheer panic that would course through my body in that situation. I never knew my father to be a quick-thinking sneak, but on that night, he was. “I heard a noise,” he sputtered, “I think we might have scared Santa Claus off. You better go back to bed so he can come back.”

You talk about a sleepless night! How would you sleep if you knew you’d be the ONLY KID IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH NO TOYS the next day?

The next morning my dread was ended and my hope returned. The hints worked. The G.I. Joe Headquarters was MINE!!!

I’m fortunate. That’s the most hopeless time I can ever remember. The hours before morning were physically painful. My longing was palpable. There have been days since then when life seemed bleak but I always knew things would get better. No matter what I was facing, hope was always there.

I think it is because I finally have assurance of God’s love for me. Hope has been revealed to me in many ways: the love of family and friends, an upturn in a situation, a revelation of God’s presence in struggles.

I searched for the word “hope” in my favorite Bible app. I found something interesting. A good deal of the verses had to do with pain and longing and the hope that comes in spite of that. Take Psalm 42 for example. We might know it for its opening verse, “As a deer pants for the water . . .” Read further and you see that the author is questioning his faith. “Tears have been my food,” he says. Over the course of Psalm 42 and 43 (which some believe were really one Psalm) we hear a chorus: “Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed? Why are you so upset inside? Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God.”

I feel silly comparing my childhood fears to the fears of the Psalmist. The 58-year-old Earl has greatly different fears than the 8-year-old Earl. While the G.I. Joe Headquarters is never equal to the assurance of salvation and the comfort of God’s love, it’s an “outward and visible” hint to an “inward and spiritual” truth. And a good hint never hurts.

Day 2

TRUST

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your path straight.

Trust brings us comfort. As a child, we trust in our parents to love us and care for us and it brings us comfort. When we are married, we trust in our spouse to be there for us "for better or for worse" and it brings us comfort. As parents, we trust in our children to make good choices and it brings us comfort. Maybe you have seen this in your life or maybe life has not given you such a clear path. However, as Christians, when we put our trust in God we have the comfort that God will lead us through everything we encounter in life. What does trust in God look like in your life? How do you share that to help others find trust in God?

EXPECTATION

Expectation: The act or state of looking forward or anticipating. *Dictionary.com*

Sometimes we have to remember that the Old Testament, was Jesus's bible. Jesus often quoted from the prophesy in the book of Isaiah. Though written over 700 years before the birth of Christ, the passages quoted below created a sense of *expectation* among the Jews that their Messiah would eventually arrive to save them.

42:1 But here is my servant, the one I uphold;
my chosen, who brings me delight.

I've put my spirit upon him;
he will bring justice to the nations.

2 He won't cry out or shout aloud
or make his voice heard in public.

3 He won't break a bruised reed;
he won't extinguish a faint wick,
but he will surely bring justice.

4 He won't be extinguished or broken
until he has established justice in the land.
The coastlands await his teaching.

7:14 Therefore, the Lord will give you a sign. The
young woman is pregnant and is about to give
birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel.

15 He will eat butter and honey, and learn to
reject evil and choose good.

9:6 A child is born to us, a son is given to us,
and authority will be on his shoulders.

He will be named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

7 There will be vast authority and endless peace
for David's throne and for his kingdom,
establishing and sustaining it
with justice and righteousness
now and forever. (*Common English Bible*)

What the Jews did not expect was that instead of a knight on a white steed who would save them from their enemies, the Messiah would come into the world as a helpless baby born in the most humble of circumstances. In doing so, God gave *hope* to all humankind that, no matter our worldly circumstance, we are worthy of salvation and God's deepest love.

As we wade through the secular "Christmas Season," may we, as the faithful, gain respite from the hubbub, greed, and anxiety by living in the joyful expectation that the world is changed forever by one little God-sent baby twenty-one hundred years ago. It is worth the wait.

Christ is born! Hallelujah!

Prayer:

Great and gracious God,

As we prepare for the onslaught of commercial "Christmas," help us focus on keeping the main thing the main thing.

In Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.

OBEDIENCE

Hope Springs Forth from Obedience

“I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her... ‘[God] has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.’” –Luke 1:38, 52-53 (NIV)

As we wait with a holy expectancy for the birth of our Savior, Immanuel, I encourage you to take a block of time and read the entirety of Luke 1 slowly. One pattern that emerges from the opening chapter of Luke’s Gospel is hope springs forth from the soil of obedience. When the angel appears to Mary, she is told God is going to do the miraculous through her. Her response isn’t to focus on why the miracle can’t happen, but to say, “May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38). When Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, Elizabeth declares Mary blessed because of her faith in God. Upon hearing words of blessing from her cousin, Mary bursts out in a powerful song of praise to God and hope for what God will do through the Child she carries. Similarly, Zechariah is obedient, after his initial disbelief, by insisting on his son having the name John. At his birth, Zechariah bursts into song as he declares God’s goodness and his hopeful anticipation of how God is going to use John to prepare the way for the Lord.

These beautiful songs of hope and praise come after the obedience of Mary and Zechariah. Their obedience was not a way for them to get something they wanted from God. It was quite the opposite; God interrupted life going according to plan and called both of them to participate in His larger plan of redemption. May you ponder in your heart this Advent how God might use your obedience to stir up hope in others.

Day 5

DREAM

As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 1:20 .



Dreams can be comforting, hazy, scary, and downright mystical. In Matthew, the Bible mentions dreams 5 times in the early life of Jesus that were pivotal in the story of his birth. Initially, Joseph is told in a dream not to abandon Mary because she is pregnant. Over the course of the next few years, Joseph is instructed in dreams regarding the safety of the child, Jesus. As far as we know from the Gospels, he obeys the dreams with little question. What would it look like if we stepped into our dreams with that kind of assurance? Dreams for ourselves, our family, our church, and our community. Advent is time for looking deep into ourselves for our most extravagant hopes and dreams of their culmination.

Day 6

UNCERTAINTY



ANTICIPATION

When I was young we lived far from the city, so it was sort of a big deal to go to the movies. In those days, we even dressed up for the occasion! As I sat in the theatre, legs dangling, gazing at the gold décor and red velvet drapes before the previews started, I would hug myself tightly, actually trembling in excited anticipation. All the happy events coming up in my life would fill me with thrills; birthday parties, Christmas, sleepovers, vacations, all the things I just couldn't wait for. The theatre brought those happy feelings out. Anticipation. At least half the joy of childhood!

Years ago, I lived in a Benedictine monastery as a volunteer. The first Advent I was there I was a little disappointed by the lack of Christmas decorations in the buildings, nor any signs of the Holiday at all! The Sisters told me that, in the Roman Catholic tradition, Advent is observed very much like Lent. Austerity, fasting, penitential prayer and silence is observed right up to Christmas Eve and then the Holiday is celebrated until Epiphany on January 6th.

Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting, longing, yearning for Christ's arrival on Earth. Imagine Mary contemplating what was happening to her, wondering what was to come. So humanity waits expectantly for the greatest of miracles, God taking on human flesh. The Creator of all that was, is or will ever be, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal stooped low to walk among us. He became like us in all ways but sin. Subject to human feelings, hardships and pain, he chose to experience life as we live it. Why? Only because He so loved the world.

During this Holy Season, I invite you to meditate on the greatest miracle in all history, the Incarnation of God in the form of that tiny, helpless Babe in Bethlehem. Feel expectation for the event that changed life forever. Tremble with anticipation.

Lord Jesus, come. Amen

HOPE FULFILLED

When we were living in California, my parents came for a visit. My dad and I had always dreamt of seeing a whale up-close and personal, so we reserved 3 tickets for a whale watching tour and off the coast of Southern California we raced, our hearts full of anticipation. For the first hour and a half, “Crickets,” yes, crickets even in the ocean! But in the next minute, there she was, signaling her nearness with the gush of water from her blow hole. Suddenly, she was so close that when her physical body surfaced, she nearly plunged into our boat as she ducked and swam, surfaced and played, along-side our boat, drawing all eyes and hearts to embrace this magnanimous jewel of creation.

I have to admit; for the first hour and a half of this trip, and not even seeing a wave that resembled a whale, my hope of seeing a whale faded with every passing second. And just as suddenly as my hope for ever seeing a whale disappeared, it appeared just as suddenly as it left. It took my breath away. Suddenly, this trip was everything I wanted and more. Every promise made by our captain came true.

Looking back, I am not sure why I ever doubted. Afterall, the captain of the boat was a wise, seasoned veteran of the sea: This was his life’s work and his purpose was not to disappoint. He shared that he spent his whole life studying the migration patterns of whales. That bit of information did not readily sink in because the longer I anticipated seeing a whale, the more I forced myself to believe that I *would not* see a whale... But, suddenly, there she was. And my wave of doubt was immediately upended with hope in the form of one of God’s most spirited, lifegiving creatures; a gray whale dancing and flirting with our boat; singing her song of hope into our lives. My hope bounced back with the remarkable buoyancy of the whale herself.

Job was tested for everything he was worth. For all that Job experienced, even Job discovered the resounding power of hope. In Job 6:11, he asked, “what strength do I have that I should still hope? What prospects that I should be patient?” (NIV) For Job and for us, all hope would be lost if there were no prospects in which to look forward. And get this: Even Job’s “prospects” eventually brought jaw dropping, heart pounding tears of release, as well as nuggets of hope’s gain back into his life. In the end, Job recognized that he did not have the power to help himself, but that the power to even taste a morsel of hope, came straight from God. And those morsels tasted good.

Maybe you have experienced a similar pattern while waiting for something to happen.

- Wait for something to happen.
- It does not happen in your time frame.
- The longer you wait, the more your hope fades.
- Finally, something happens that turns your discouragement into nuggets of belief that diffuse doubt and invite us into unexpected holy crawl spaces cascading with sparkles of hope and joy. Your jaw drops. Your heart pounds. Your tears flow because hope draws near. Your belief in God is once again recognized and embraced.
- And you know there is no match for the hope that God reveals in the moment. Are you breathless yet?

This is my prayer for you this Advent: May God reveal the power of hope in a jaw dropping, heart pounding, tear flowing kind of way. That your prospects may be full of the hope of Jesus. That God’s hope will be revealed in your very life. Just for you. Amen.

Day 9

JOURNEY



From the Journeys that would take place after Jesus' birth, we could follow the little Shepherd Boy. He journeyed beyond what he could see to find a pathway to new hope
Journeys can mean many things—a trip, a time in life, or even a situation beyond our control.
Our lives are a reflection of all our journeys, sometimes bringing mountains to climb. With God's help we can find new and wonderful beginnings. No matter the journey "I CAN DO EVERYTHING THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH" Philippians 4:13

DOUBT



“How can I be sure of this?”

This was Zechariah’s response to the angel, Gabriel, when it was announced that Elizabeth would have a child named John. Zechariah was left mute until he saw what the angel had told him come to fruition. Until he was called on to name his son what God had instructed. He was not able to bask in this unexpected pregnancy, this miracle. Yet, he remained faithful. He suffered the consequences of his doubts

and “got back on that horse” of discipleship and service.

Doubts also expose our weaknesses that we try so hard to hide from others. Peter was so bold. So bold. He was to be the Rock of the new church. Yet, when Jesus called him out onto the waters and he saw the winds and waves, down he went in a sea of doubt. He was called out by Jesus. And, while it is never explicit, I’m betting that experience never left his mind.

Zachariah’s words to the angel Gabriel echo my own words so much of the time. “How can I be sure?” Doubts can overwhelm me. They can keep me from pursuing something that feels God-given. They foster fear and uncertainty. Doubters are called faithless, unbelieving. That shakes me to my core.

James wrote (1:6b) that whoever doubts is like the surf of the sea, tossed and turned by the wind. And that is exactly how it feels. Just when you think you have your feet under you, here comes another wave to lift you up and plop you down. Unceremoniously. Not much grace in that, is there?

How do we overcome these doubts? In Jude 1: 20-22, the writer states, “But you, dear friends: build each other up on the foundation of your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep each other in the love of God, wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will give you eternal life. Have mercy on those who doubt.”

And there, my friends, is the balm for our doubt. Building each other up, keeping each other in love. Paying attention to our brothers and sisters. Acknowledging our weaknesses and loving beyond that with love of God. And, learning to love ourselves and how very beloved we are in the eyes of God. Giving ourselves grace and mercy even as we doubt. The sea will grow calm. And we will learn to walk upon the waters together.

Day 11

SMALL

“Miss Lark!” Little Kyle ran to me across the playground, his small hands cupped together in front of him. Kyle had just turned five and had a knack for finding treasures on our playground. When he reached me, out of breath from excitement, his hands opened to reveal a tiny green tree frog.

After nearly twenty years in after school child care, I was accustomed to little surprises like this one. Together, we examined his find, Freddy, Kyle called him and discussed what would happen if Kyle took him home in a box, which was his plan. In the end, he reluctantly agreed to release Freddy near the trees so he could live a long and happy frog life. He didn’t forget Freddy though, talking to him daily under the trees for a few weeks.

Our lives are made up of little things. Chores, routines, habits and interactions are the minutiae that form our days. Mother Teresa said, “The Lord likes small things best, especially those done with love. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”

I believe God speaks to us in small things. The flight of a redbird across our path, a wildflower poking through concrete, the smile of a stranger in the grocery store, a courteous driver allowing us to merge on the Parkway, all those little everyday sights and events that make up our daily lives could be seen as whispers of the Divine.

And now to reserve my spot in Nerd-dom, I quote Gandalf the Gray from Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings”: “Saruman believes that it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I have found that it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keeps the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love.”

This Advent, as we prepare for Jesus’ birth, let us be aware of the small things and perform small acts of kindness and love to the glory of God.

Lord, give me eyes to see and a heart to treasure all the daily small signs of your Love. Amen.

Day 12

WAY

As I ponder the question of what to write about my “WAY” in life I have to wonder where to start!!

I can begin when our family lived in New Jersey during WW!! and how the war affected us. My older brother joined when he was 17 and during the Battle of the Bulge was captured and spent 4 months in a German prison camp.

After the war our family was moving from Bloomfield, NJ to Verona, NJ just up the trolley car line from Bloomfield - so I took the trolley at the beginning of my Sophomore year for 3-4 months.

That year was 1946 - and I didn't wait long to get with the age group I was in - a bunch of guys together called ourselves the “Eight That Rate”.

My other need was a girl to date - so I asked Rosemary DeWitt to go to a movie with me - she said yes so on October 24, 1946 we had our first date - that date proceeded to our marriage on August 30, 1952. That is after Rosemary finished college and I had one year to go at Va Tech.

After our first daughter Kathi was born in September 1954 I spent about 9 months in Korea serving with the UNNSC which had troops from Switzerland and Sweden. My job was to give them housing and utilities.

Returning from Korea our family moved to Dayton, OH where I worked for Frigidaire for close to 2 years - our first son Thomas was born in June 1956.

I changed jobs in the fall of 1956 to go to IBM in Owego where we were starting to work on a major contract with the US Government on the Saturn Apollo program building what was called the Instrument Unit.

Prior to transferring to Huntsville in 1962 our daughter Kim was born in Endicott in December 1958 and son James was born in January 1960.

So our move to Huntsville was a dramatic one. - which started a long trip to the moon - our family sat in a playroom downstairs on a B/W TV as the men landed on the moon.

Moving to Virginia with IBM in 1974 I worked in Gaithersburg, MD and finally moving to Manassas, VA when I decided to retire in 1985.

Rosemary was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and for the last few years she used oxygen to help her breathe. I lost her in early 2018 after 65+ years of wedded bliss.

In the Fall of 2021 our daughters asked me to move across the state line to Georgia to live with Kathi & David. So in October 2021 I moved to their farm of 14 acres where David is able to create pottery as he has for many years.

Since then I have pondered why am I still here!! So the question of “Way” comes down to after 92 years where else do I need to go to complete my “Way”? If you can give me a honest opinion to that question I will be very willing to listen:))

Day 13

WITH

Have you heard the phrase, “ Do you want to come with?”

♥ Whenever someone says a phrase like this, you know that it is going to be good!!

♥ Do you want to come with- a walk

♥ Do you want to come with- get an ice cream

Do you want to come with- spend time together

As you can see the word WITH has a very positive connotation.

As we prepare our hearts and souls for the Advent season, think about the significance of the word WITH in your life.

Isiah 7:14 we learn about Emmanuel- God WITH us.

We are told that God is WITH us and that we are NEVER alone. 🙏

I, like many of you, face struggles.

But, through all of these struggles, I KNOW that God is WITH me. 🙏

How do I know that God is with me?

It is the smile from the person walking by, It is the sweet compliment from a stranger, It is the precious looks of love from my granddaughters. 😊

God is everywhere!

God is WITH us!

This may sound all well and good, but I am here to tell you that it is REAL!

For those of you who don't know me, my husband has a diagnosis of Young Onset Alzheimer's Disease.

Pete was officially diagnosed at the age of 55.

Needless to say, this news rocked our world. We were both forced into early retirement. And with early retirement we also had to give up some of our hopes and dreams for our “Golden Years.”

Instead during our retirement, we stay at home a lot. We keep a very simple routine, which makes things so much easier and less confusing for Pete.

Even with all of these changes in our lives, I can tell you that without my church family, my blood family and my friends; I would not be where I am today! ♥

It is through the prayers of others that I feel God WITH me!

Without our Savior, Jesus in our lives, we would not be living the joy filled lives that we are today, despite all of our struggles!

God is WITH us!!

Does this mean that we smile and laugh all the time?

Absolutely not!!!

But in my time of sadness and grief, I FEEL and KNOW that God is WITH me.

During this time of Advent take time- pause - and - reflect on all the small signs that God is WITH you!

Not just me, but YOU. ♥

SING

Psalm 33;1-3

Take a moment with me today and think of all the music you hear and the songs we sing at Christmas. Music is truly everywhere- in your playlist, in the background at stores, TV commercials, movies based on Christmas carols, I've even played party games using Christmas carols. It is an essential part of the Christmas spirit and traditions like Burl Ives singing Have a Holly Jolly Christmas, Jimmy Durante's Frosty the Snowman, Bill Haley and the Comets' Rockin Around the Christmas Tree, Handel's Messiah, Dr. Suess' Mr. Grinch, and the list can go on and on.

Now take a moment and try to imagine Christmas WITHOUT the music. I know, right? You can't. It just wouldn't be Christmas!

This is the power of God's gift of music to us. The Psalms are full of singing praises to God. The first organization of the Jewish people's Temple included 288 singers and musicians [1 Chronicles 15 and 25:7]. Why? Whole battles were won by the singers in the armies of God's people [2 Chronicles 5.]

And remember Mary sang a song after she knew her baby would be the Messiah. So much of our praise is expressed in song-as commanded by God.

So how can we not celebrate Christmas without the songs of this season? Today, as you go about your day, sing a song to the Lord. Sing a song that lifts your heart. How about Angels We Have Heard on High? The Gloria from The Messiah? Away In A Manger? No matter what song it is, Christmas songs praise God and express the true meaning of Christmas.

It's Christmas...SING!

HOPE DEFERRED

Hope deferred? Just what everyone wants to hear about at Christmas. While we're at it, why don't we have a message on the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem? Or a devotion about the perversion of the Jewish authorities and their alliance with the Romans? No one wants to talk about this stuff at Christmas. We want lights and presents and cookies and matching pajamas. We don't even mind waiting for Christmas through the season of Advent because we know, without a doubt, that it's coming. It's literally on the calendar...same day, every year. Hope isn't deferred, it's just delayed.

I don't like the word "deferred." It is associated with one of the most painful memories of my life. In 2009, after 4 years of undergrad, 3 years of seminary, a 30 page dissertation, and 10 years in ministry, I sat before the Board of Ordained ministry for an extensive full-day oral interview. Their conclusion? "Deferred. Maybe next year."

Living in the deferred has a way of teaching us things, things we might not learn any other way. To live by faith and not by sight. To trust in the Lord, your God, with your whole self. To take one step at a time. The often quoted passage "Thy word is lamp unto my feet" is often thought to be a bright beam illuminating our way forward. Not so. A lamp in those days was nothing more than a candle. And while a candle realistically can be seen from about a mile away, the actual light that it emits in open darkness is only good for navigating a few feet in any direction.

I had to learn in the hope deferred how to trust and how to move forward if only a step at a time. Because I was deferred, my eventual ordination meant something deeper. I felt more convicted about it, more connected to its meaning.

In your Advent this year, there may be certainties like December 25. And hopefully it comes with cookies and presents. But there may be uncertainties as well. It may come with anxiety and doubt because something in your life has been deferred. That's okay. Embrace it. There may be something the Lord seeks to teach you that you can't learn any other way.



Day 16

GIFT

It's About the Cross



It's not about the manger
Where the baby lay
It's not about the angels
Who sing for him that day

It's not about the shepherds
Or the bright and shining star
It's not about the wisemen
Who traveled from afar

It's about the cross
It's about my sin
It's about how Jesus came to be born once
So we could be born again.....

The beginning of the story
It's wonderful and great
But it's the ending that can save you
And that's why we celebrate..... Excerpt from It's
About the Cross, Songwriter: Jamie Statema

Day 17

PEACE



The peace of the earth be with you,
The peace of the heavens too;
The peace of the rivers be with you,
The peace of the oceans too.
Deep peace falling over you;
God's peace growing in you.

Day 18

LIGHT



The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.

Isaiah 9:2

This world - our world - has had some darkness. Anxiety. Loss. Disappointment. Grief. Loneliness.

Much hope and joy come from these words. Candles are lit. Friends called. Family gathered. Quiet is relished. Spirits are revived.

Light came to us. Looking like us. For us. May we live that this light shines forth through us. May we seek this light. Every minute. Every day.

Amen and amen.

Day 19

JOY

For the past few months, our Pastors have talked to us about the Fruits of the Spirit. They have encouraged us to remember the list individually. Joy is one of the fruits of the spirit and it is the second one listed in Galatians 5:22-23. When I think of joy, I think of a deep peaceful feeling that only Christ can provide. The birth of a baby or a person becoming cancer free. Not the kind of joy when you find a \$20 in the wash or an up-close parking space.

In the Bible, the words “joy”, “rejoice” or “joyful” appear some 430 times. God wants us to have Joy in our heart.

I know that the holidays can be stressful and very busy. Try very hard to keep Joy in your thoughts and actions and show it to the people that you see during the Christmas season.

There is a wonderful Christian song that goes - *I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. (Where?) down in my heart (where?). I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart to stay.* It is a catchy song. Maybe you will find yourself singing it.

I hope and pray that the wonderful people at Aldersgate have a Joyful and Joyous Advent season.

LOVE

Love is a big word. It's easy for me to get swamped by it; to be intimidated by its big-ness; to see it as a mountain that's too hard to climb. After all, don't we think about big, God-sized actions during Advent each year? That is, we remember and celebrate that "... God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." God who came to dwell among us in human form. Emmanuel. (*Matthew 1:23*) God with skin and muscles and bones and a heart pumping real blood. Incarnate. (*John 1:14*) So somehow, this only son, Jesus, was one of us, who arrived because of love and through love.

I also think about the greatest commandments, like "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (*Matthew 22:37-39*). It's out of love and through love that God spoke, created us, formed us in his image, and breathed life into us as his masterpiece. His poem. His workmanship. *Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:7, and Ephesians 2:10*.

Wow. This love thing. So I pause, take a breath, ponder Love a while longer, and walk around it, seeking a more approachable ascent. And I find a path that seems more walkable. To start down that path, I remember that God is the originator and source of Love. Not me. I am only the willing (or sometimes unwilling) conduit.

My next step is to remember that Love is a verb. It's an action. It's me being obedient to nudges from the Holy Spirit. It's me being willing to carry another's burden. It's me being present with someone who doesn't need me to say a thing. Willing, available, present.

It's the small stuff.

One Hope of Advent is that we will catch a glimpse of the miracle that is Love. That people around us will see evidence of God because of the fruit of Love that they see forming in us, and experience the outpouring of God's love because we show up, in small acts of obedient love. That we are conduit.

"When many small people, in many small places, do many small things, they can change the world" (*Eduardo Galeano*). Especially when those small things are done in Love. I propose, however, that when you act in Love, that none of it is "small stuff". In what ways are you being invited to love during this season of Advent?

Day 21

WAIT

Not yet...

Soon, but not now

Time slips from my grasp

keeping completeness

just out of arm's reach.

I want to be whole now.

God, grant me patience NOW!

This waiting feels like

a partially filled glass.

I fight the urge to lament

the emptiness of what is still in the future.

Lord, how I need to focus on

the fullness you bring.

I am not waiting on an empty promise.

Relief will be delivered.

Tracking or not,

I know my salvation will come.

HOPE IN TOMORROW

Dare to Hope

Smooth white snow - rough black bark
Twinkling lights - sky so dark
Songs of peace - winter death
Icy winds - baby's breath

Newborn skin - prickly straw
Mother's breast - manger trough
Heaven's King - helpless babe
Sin's dark night - Christmas Day.

Look up, O heart, rejoice and sing
Join the angels' song
Greet the newborn baby king
Bow before his throne

Nighttime dark - angels bright
Shepherds bow - strange star's light
Mad king rages - wisemen seek
Mary ponders - hear God speak

Look up, O heart, rejoice and sing
Join the angels' song
Greet the newborn baby king
Bow before his throne

What a difference a night can make
That night unlike any other
When Jesus cried the earth was changed
Through him we dare,
Through him we dare to hope

BEGIN



In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
The Word was with God in the beginning.
John 1:1-2

We all admire a beautiful garden. A gardener plants with expectation, with hope, that what they do in planning their garden will result in beauty. There are so many things out of their control - weather, bugs, etc. But, oh! The possibilities if everything goes right!

Much like a gardener, we greet each day with an expectation that if everything goes right, it will be a good one. Right? But, again, so much of our day is out of our control.

Henri Nouwen wrote, "The paradox of expectation indeed is that those who believe in tomorrow can better live today, that those who expect joy to come out of sadness can discover the beginnings of a new life in the center of the old." (from *Out of Solitude*)

Advent is a time for us to meditate on possibilities, on beginnings. We look to that ultimate beginning - The Word - Jesus - for our joy and expectation of new life.

Day 24

ORDINARY



Day 25

BEAUTY

Beauty is found wherever we look
In landscapes, in music, in nature
And even in books

Beauty they say
Is in the eye of the beholder
So it is subjective at best
There are no rules there are no tests

It is as simple as a leaf
On a tree
Or a babbling brook
Or a horse running free

Artists create beauty
Through paintings and more
To find the beauty
Just open the door

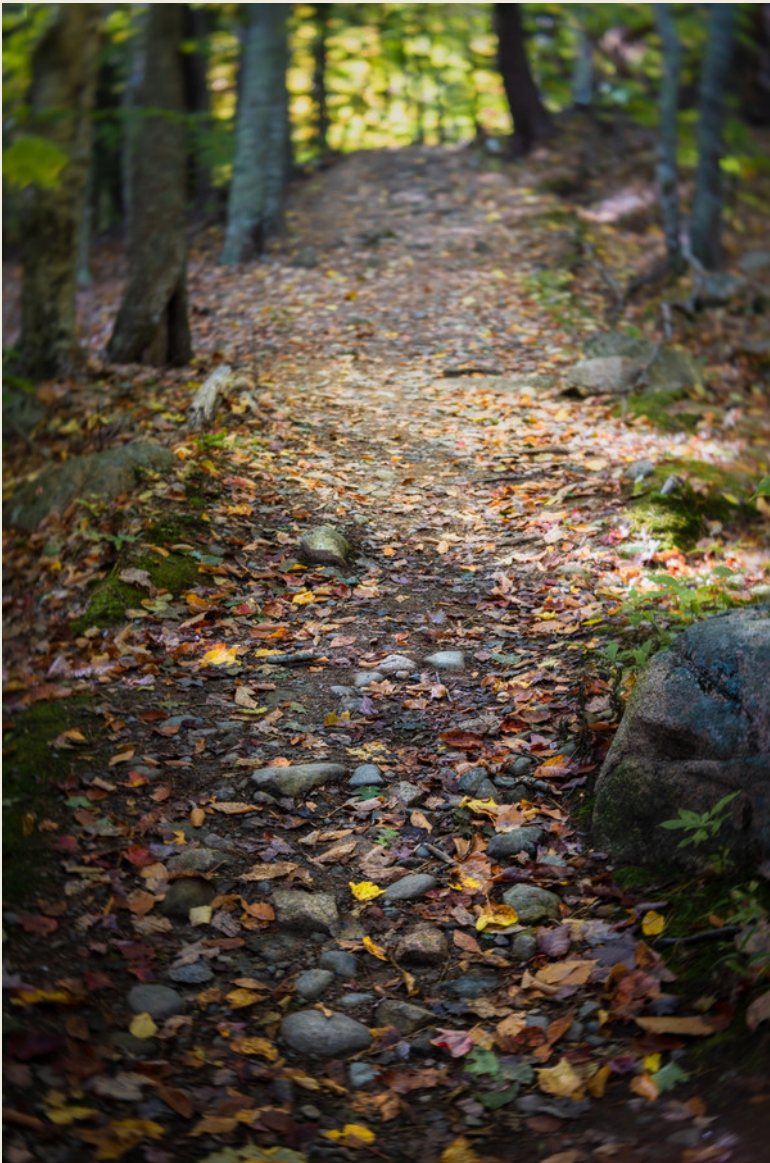
You can find beauty
In all walks of life
It can be soothing
Even end strife

Michelangelo created beauty
By painting the Sistine ceiling
To view it gives one
A wonderful feeling

In beauty we have hope
That brings serenity
And beauty will last
For infinity

So open the door
To beauty and more
The feeling you get
Will cause you to soar

FOLLOW



Rather, this is what I required of them: Obey me so that I may become your God and you may become my people. Follow the path I mark out for you so that it may go well with you.

Jeremiah 7:23

Jesus spoke to the people again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me won't walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

It seems simple. Follow. We've done this since we were small. We've taken hands and trusted while crossing a street. We lined up to go to the bathroom. We follow each other on Instagram.

But this kind of follow? This following takes us to the unknown, scary and, sometimes, unnatural. It asks us to give up all control and be what we cannot be without following. It requires commitment. Every day. God promised those that follow that all would go well. Jesus came along and promised it would not be easy. But totally worth it.

In Advent, examine all that you follow. Is it time to re-route? This is a time to reconsider our path. And choose to follow the babe in the manger.

Day 27

ADORE



I've come to realize I misuse the word Adore. Misusing the word takes away the original meaning. It is not that I adore ice cream or other inanimate objects. The dictionary defines Adore as love and respect (someone) deeply and worship or venerate (revere). This definition fits more with the Christ Child. I love Advent and all the smells, sights, sounds, lights, and excitement of the season. There are multiple advent wreaths in my home and office.

But what about after Advent when all the shiny is put away and the advent wreaths go back in the box? Do I put Jesus back in the box? Do I still adore the Christ Child? What would my life look like if I strived to revere, worship and love the rest of the year?

I admit adoring a baby is easy. Can we adore the grown Jesus? Can we still adore the Jesus that gives us hard commandments like loving our neighbor? This year I strive to keep adoring Jesus. Let's be fully present in worship, devotion and living out our faith.

"O Come Let us Adore Him, O Come let us Adore Him, Christ the Lord."

Day 28

PROMISE



Have you ever stood on a mountain top and thought about God's promises to his people? As I stood on top of the Swiss Alps this fall it got me to thinking just how many promises did God make? The bible records around 7,487 promises God made to humankind. Promises to love us, be with us, comfort us, give us peace, meet our needs, forgive us, answer our prayers, give us eternal life and the list goes on and on. But many of God's promises are Covenant promises which means it is a two-way contract between us and God. For instance, "Obey my voice and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you." (Jeremiah 7:23). But, while God is a miracle worker, promise keeper and we have hope in God's promises, we too have a responsibility to God. He calls us to be an active participant in these promises with him. We live in a fallen world that needs to hear the hope and promises of God. So, my question to all of us "What are we doing to fulfill our covenant to God?" We need God, but God also needs us. God is counting on YOU and me!!!

CHRISTMAS



Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace



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2	Trust	Kim and Cliff Burson
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4	Obedience	Will Locke
5	Dream	Margaret Todd
6	Uncertainty	Earl Todd
7	Anticipation	Lark
8	Hope Fulfilled	Belinda Freeman
9	Journey	Mary Ellen Davidson
10	Doubt	Margaret Todd
11	Small	Lark
12	Way	Dick Daily
13	With	Susan Black.
14	Sing	Jay Byham
15	Hope Deferred	Tim Tatum
16	Gift	Debra Bocking
17	Peace	Dixie Sims
18	Light	Margaret Todd
19	Joy	Karen Cotton
20	Love	Cliff Whitmore
21	Wait	Cory Berry
22	Hope in Tomorrow	Dennis Clements
23	Begin	Penny Smith
24	Ordinary	Cliff Whitmore
25	Beauty	Barbara Winkles
26	Follow	Margaret Todd
27	Adore	Lydia Locke
28	Promise	Karin Larsen
Xmas	Hope in Today	

Gratitude

This Advent devotional booklet would not have been possible without the members of our church community who volunteered a submission. As you will see, each is special and unique.

The pastors and staff, particularly Belinda, were supportive and helped incorporate the booklet into the Aldersgate Advent experience.

However, this project would never have seen the light of day without Earl Todd. He kept it (read: me) on schedule and put it into book form beautifully. HIM.

My hope is that each devotional enhances your personal Advent experience and brings you closer to the peace offered by the Christ Child.



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