

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Sunday, November 29th

“Strength”

1 Corinthians 1:6: *“just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you.”*

It is easy to have deep afflictions in regards to our faith but do we have *strength* in our testimony? When someone asks me if I am religious, I tell them “I am faithful but *religious* feels like too big of a commitment.”

In order to be “religious” one’s devotion must be absolute and their ethical grounding has to be incredibly strong. I have found very few people that fit this description because it is near impossible to implement a true Christ-like ethic. But if we exercise those spiritual muscles then we can gain that strength to be a living testimony of Christ. Being strong and following the ways of the Lord are practices that need to be routine. Let’s consider sabbath-keeping as a practice. Once a week, it is a good spiritual practice to not “work”. Our bodies, hearts, and minds need a break. How we individually do this practice is self-determined but I have found that rest and stillness can develop into spiritual strength. A runner does not continually run to stay in shape but they take breaks and apply their strength when they perform. Christians need breaks from the struggle between the world and God’s wholeness. Occasionally, we just need to rest and regain our strength so that we can share Christ’s light.

Lord, give me rest so that I can be strong when you call on me to testify to the grace and peace of Jesus. Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Monday, November 30th

“Give Thanks”

Psalm 79:13: *“Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever.”*

God is generous to us and blesses us with an abundance, but it cannot be squandered or misused. As stewards of this world we have to respond with faithfulness and generosity as ways to give thanks to God.

I am sure by now that you have almost finished all the leftovers from Thanksgiving. But of course, this year’s celebration probably looked different from years passed and the food preparation and guests were probably not like normal. But we find ourselves in the midst of the disappointment of the last year while still trying to grasp a sense of nostalgia from holidays past. Our joy and hope must remain as our focus because, despite the turmoil of the world, we have so much to be thankful for in this life. One of the most powerful lessons I have ever learned was to not look at a situation based on a snapshot. We can always find something wrong with a picture or a moment but we must learn to appreciate the whole story that God has placed before us. Each day that we have is another blessing on our journey and our act of thanksgiving to God is to live faithfully and honor our Creator with all that we do.

In thanks, we lift up our praise to You, Holy God. Let us find hope in the story that you have made for us while we turn our thanks into action and service. Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Tuesday, December 1st

“Team Effort”

Micah 4:7: *“The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation.”*

What makes a good team? It has always been said that “1+1=3” when working with other people and that “teamwork makes the dream work”.

Churches work together as a team towards a mission of service, growth, and praise. What individual congregations do is a blessed expression of Christ in the world. For years, it is amazing to me that church does not mean that people have to be stuck inside four walls to be a congregation. A friend of mine in the Midwest that started a church named “Sweaty Sheep”. Every Saturday morning a group of random runners of differing speeds gathered for a morning workout and then joined together over recovery refreshments and studied Scripture together: That was their church. Together, they also organized park clean-ups and meals for the less fortunate where they used their understanding of service to become part of the community. Each congregation must discern their own expression of the Holy Spirit working in their midst. The Church must not just conform to what tradition expects but it must be authentic to where the Spirit is leading them. It is a beautiful thing when we see faithful disciples working together to seek the Spirit’s calling.

Lord, help us to seek wherever You are leading us. May we work together and discern for our communities how to express the Spirit’s work within us. Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Wednesday, December 2nd

“Followers”

Luke 21:37: *“Every day Jesus was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives.”*

Jesus was a solitary man but he yearned for community. Everything that he did was to bring people together and to heal the world of its ills.

There is a stark contrast between the following that Christ had when he was alive to the following that Christ has today. Estimates say that hundreds, if not thousands, of people followed Jesus throughout his life but the truth remains that he had about 70 close disciples, 12 apostles, and of the 12 there were 3 close friends of his. Today, there are 2 billion people that claim Christ as Lord.

One of the things that brings me enormous comfort is knowing that God had this all designed. One of the most beautiful parts of God’s plan is that the stories and miracles that are the foundations of Scripture were told to his disciples are still being shared and remembered until today. Jesus’ stories are timeless and are meant for individuals and for billions all at once. Whether we are in solitude in the garden or are teaching and learning with the masses, Jesus’ words and prayers meet us where we are and that gives us everything we need.

Jesus, I am one but a part of billions. Speak to me and speak to us as we learn from you and encounter your Words in any moment and place in our lives. Amen

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Thursday, December 3rd

“Chosen”

1 Thessalonians 1:4: *“For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that the Lord has chosen you.”*

Choices are difficult. The biggest and most important choices for us have already been made by God.

When I was a kid, the most important choice of my day was what color of popsicle I was going to eat. As a teen, my most difficult decision was picking the right book from Borders Bookstore. As an adult, I make important decisions almost on a daily basis. The thing about all those choices is that I missed the mark many times. I ate the purple popsicle (gross!), I bought a book I never read, and I chose to do the wrong thing more than once as an adult. There are, however, choices that I continue to make that lead me back closer to God’s plan for my life. I can take a road less traveled or may wander off course but God is there to connect the dots and reveal what has already been divinely chosen for me. Whatever choices we make, we have to understand that we are defined by our future, not our past; this future is God’s design. We can never fall too far from grace and will always be beloved by God. Even beloved children make mistakes and make the wrong decision but ultimately we find that brightly lit path that leads us towards God.

Father, help us to choose the path that leads towards You. Make your light known to us as you bless us and guide us to choose You and Your will. Amen

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Friday, December 4th

“Authority”

Mark 11:27-28: *“As Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?”*

As disciples, Christ gives us the authority to be his hands and feet in this world. That sounds great but how do we translate that into our lives? Do we just take an interpretation of Scripture and run with it without any restrictions or do we discern what God’s Word means in our current situation? I would suggest the latter. It’s strange, I have met people that have lived by the first option and their life is extremely difficult because they do not consider the Gospel in context. It’s easy to live without abandon but to consider the task that Jesus has given us is a hard journey. The things that Jesus commanded; the truths that he exposed; the examples that he shared; all points us towards a life that challenges life as we know it. But it’s not difficult for no reason, Jesus gives us the authority to push social limits and live out the Gospel. The priests and elders of Jesus time wanted people to follow their lead and not ask questions or challenge their authority. In reverse, Jesus commands us to ask questions and be people that bring peace and hope into the world. Do not rest when commanded to act, do not rest when given the authority of Christ’s will.

Thank you for giving us the ability to go into the world, make a difference, seek faith, and be hopeful disciples of Your Gospel. Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Saturday, December 5th

“Zeal”

Acts 11:21: *“The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord.”*

The Great Awakening in the mid-18th century was a remarkable and transformative time for society in America. The Christian Church saw one of the greatest times of growth in such a short amount of time. It's important to note that there was a lack of enthusiasm and participation in the century before. People were so caught up in the social dilemmas of the day and thought that religious zeal was a distraction from building a better society. But what they forgot is the principles in which their ancestors, our ancestors, came to this land on. The Pilgrims and Puritans wanted religious liberty and sought to live a life according to the Gospel as they knew it. I feel that we are in a time where we are struggling as the Church and need another Great Awakening. Our world is caught up in social dilemmas of our time and does not always keep our eyes on God. The beautiful and hopeful part of this is that God is at work within the Church. Christians in America and around the world are responding to the needs of this world by faithfully following the commands of Christ. It is important for us to seek the same zeal that the early Church had in the book of Acts and the zeal of our courageous ancestors. It is a hopeful time for the Church because we are at a place in time where the world needs Jesus' teaching and the Church can deliver that word into the world.

O God, help us to have the zeal of your Gospel so that we build your Church and to share your kingdom with our neighbors.  
Amen.