

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Sunday, December 6th

“Shifting Hope”

Isaiah 40:4 *“Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain”*

Could you imagine the degree of seismic shift that would happen if Isaiah 40:4 came to fruition in a literal sense? How would the world as we understand it change if the mountains and valleys were level? How would things like water and wind move? How would this impact climate or human behavior (if we would survive)? What other questions does this raise in your imagination? This is such a dramatic verse! If all of the land was flatten then there would be no darkness for us to hide in. Creation itself would be transformed in a physical way to say something profound about the glory of God. This verse is at play with imagining the power of God in the world. How can we imagine the power of God in our lives? Perhaps we have some mountains that need to come down--pride, self-righteousness, greed, etc. Perhaps we have some dark valleys that need light-- addiction, depression, illness, etc. God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to say that even if the ground beneath our feet quakes and shifts to hold hope in what God is doing in the world. Change is an opportunity for us to realize something new in God. We need not be afraid.

Lord, help me to embrace the shifting ground beneath my feet and hold steadfast to hope. Shed light on the darkest valleys of my life and bring down any mountains that stand in the way of me being a better Christian. In your glory, I pray, Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Monday, December 7th

“Confidence”

Psalm 27:1 *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*

Some Christians, particularly in regards to the pandemic, have mistaken confidence in God as meaning that they have some sort of special protection in the world. To be confident in the Lord is not to be without fear. It is not to be ignorant of the realities of danger in the world around us. Instead, it is about a bond we share with God that is rooted in love. God wants a healthy relationship with us that will set us up for a life living in God’s love and not living in the fears of this world. A relationship grounded in fear is not healthy nor is it loving. We wouldn’t encourage a loved one to be in a relationship dominated by fear of their partner because we acknowledge that that type of relationship is abusive so why would we encourage a relationship with God rooted in fear? God does not seek to be our abuser but instead our salvation. Our relationship with God should fill us with light, hope, and strength. If God is our stronghold, we can face whatever comes our way. The psalmist recognizes fear but says that fear will not dominate--confidence in God prevails! God will offer loving guidance through whatever adversities to come.

God of love, thank you for being a stronghold in my life. I acknowledge that fear is real but does not have to have a hold on my life. Lord, help me to lean into my faith for guidance and strength. Give me in confidence to face any fears! Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Tuesday, December 8th

“Unity”

Acts 11:12 *“The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between us and them.” NRSV*

In this verse, Peter shares a vision with fellow believers that are like him that helps them to realize that the promises of God were for all people. While we may make distinctions between ourselves as human beings, God does not! What distinctions do we make that inhibit us from seeing the image of God in other people? Right now we are facing a divide in our country that is deep and volatile. People cannot see past their own opinion. We only see distinctions and we only see the space between *us* and *them*. This is not the way of the Spirit. Even if we have lived our whole life in one way, as Peter did--never eating anything unclean--it is not God’s will that we keep our heels dug in. It is not a disappointment to God to sacrifice something of ourselves in order to create a bridge between us and another. In fact, Thomas Merton, author of *Seeds of Contemplation*, discusses a type of liminal theology where the space between us is the space in which the truth of God dwells. None of us can hold the objective truth of everything in the world or perhaps of *anything* in the world. We all have a fragment of truth but it is in the space between our fragments that we find the wholeness of truth in God. It is God that binds us and so it is in God we need to build bridges between us and others instead of distinctions and divisions.

Holy Spirit, guide me toward unity with others by helping me to release my grip on the distinctions that separate us. Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Wednesday, December 9th

“Oneness”

Malachi 2:16 *“For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.” NRSV*

It is not divorce itself or the people of divorce that God is against. It is the violence of separation that is problematic. Marriage is a symbol of oneness and divorce violently severs that. It is the dismembering of each other that God has disdain for! Certainly, God does not want us to be bound in a marriage where there is abuse or that lacks love. There are legitimate reasons for people to divorce so this verse is not to pass judgement. Using this verse to shame one would be to miss the point that Malachi is trying to make here. He states that we all come from one God and so we need to put forth more effort in getting along. 1 Corinthians tells us that while we are many members that we are one body in Christ. When we go against each other then we bring harm to ourselves. Malachi describes how the people of God have violated God’s trust like a cheating spouse and how they were only concerned with what they wanted and not with the welfare of others. They are hurting themselves and each other! When love is not at the center of our relationships or lives then we violently dismember each other. God seeks to unite us in the covenant of love.

Gracious and loving God, forgive us for dismembering the body of Christ in our inability to love one another as you first loved us. Guide us in your Oneness, Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Thursday, December 10th

“Questions”

Habakkuk 2:1 *“What’s God going to say to my questions? I’m braced for the worst. I’ll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon. I’ll wait to see what God says, how God will answer my complaint.” MSG*

When I was a kid, I quickly learned that a good way to prepare to ask my parents a question was to first make them breakfast. It made it easier to ask when I put some preparation into it and set the table for listening to their response. It is hard to be vulnerable and to ask tough questions. Habakkuk is wrestling with difficult issues and is questioning God. Everyone has questions for God and we do not need to shy away from coming to God with whatever is heavy on our hearts. However, make sure you are in the proper position to ask and hear God’s response. Maybe it won’t be over a home cooked breakfast like me with my parents or on top of a lookout tower like Habbakuk but be sure you are ready to hear what God has to say to you and be ready to embrace it. Habakkuk’s name means to “embrace.” So like Habakkuk, we must embrace God’s will in our lives. God gave Habbakuk a vision and told him to write it down, wait, and then remember. Whatever questions you have, commit to preparing yourself in the way of God and you will get a response and remember through it all that God is for you! We can brace for the worst in life when we embrace that God ultimately has the best intentions for us.

Heavenly Parent, hear my questions and prepare my heart that I may hear the answers. I will wait on You, Amen.

## **Advent Devotional 2020**

Friday, December 11th

“Goals”

Philippians 3:12 *“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” NRSV*

“Where do you see yourself in five years?” I don’t believe any of us would have answered that one with any type of accuracy for 2020. We all share in some sort of collective disappointment that is this year. Yet, the question raised is important because it demonstrates an ability to create a vision for the future. To be a person of the Christian faith is to be a person with hope and vision for the future in the way of Christ. Christ has made us His own and in that has paved a way for how we should live. Now, we do not automatically achieve this way of life by proclaiming that we are Christian but we set ourselves upon the path. We get the prize at the end right now, which is salvation, but we are still expected to embark on the journey. We press on to make the faith our own. The question becomes not, “Where do I see yourself in five years?” but instead, “Where do you see yourself in Christ?” How can the faith transform you? You might be surprised at where you end up once you press on in this goal to becoming more like Christ. And to be like Christ is not to erase your uniqueness but instead to find it in the way of Christ!

Jesus, help me to press on toward my goals in life and faith in a way that I can embrace the fullness of who I am in you, Amen.