

Introduction

Anticipation.

It's a great word, isn't it? The excitement of what's to come. The fulfillment of a deep longing. The thrill of seeing the moment. Even with all of the excitement, there is one word associated with anticipation that doesn't sit well with many of us...

Waiting.

When you anticipate, you have to wait. The season of Advent is just that, a season of waiting and anticipation. For the Jewish people, it was waiting for the Messiah to come. And although we celebrate it in four weeks during December, for the Jewish people it was a much longer wait.

This devotional, written by ministry partners in our community, are reflections on diving into what waiting well and anticipating Jesus looks like. The moment where God finally comes in the flesh and dwells among us.

I pray that you can take space each day to read, and be still, as we anticipate the arrival of Emmanuel, God With Us.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Mike and New Ground Church



Please join us for our Christmas Eve service on December 24 at 5 pm

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December 1, 2019 -- Joy

*Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid,
for behold, I bring you good tidings of
great joy which will be to all people. For there is born
to you this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord...." Luke 2:10-11 NKJV*

Can you imagine being a shepherd tending your flock on the night that Christ was born? The night was pitch black, and probably their only light was from the glow of a fire they huddled around to keep warm. Then suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and spoke to them, and they were surrounded by a brilliant light. They were certainly frightened, but I would also imagine, curious.

The angel told them not to be afraid, that he brought, "... good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." Friends that means you and me. The great joy of Christmas comes through receiving God's gift of the Savior, Christ the Lord.

This joy lasts all year long. Not up until the last Christmas cookie is eaten, or the tree put back in its box, or stuck in a snow bank at the curb. This joy comes with knowing certain things are right between you and God. It is the realization of knowing you have a hope that holds fast, and anchors you beyond the uncertainties of this life. This lasting joy comes only to the one who has personally received God's gift of the Savior.

So why did God choose the shepherds?

The shepherds sitting in the darkness depicts the lost human race. It is a portrait of the darkness of sin and the shadow of death. Until we receive the gift of the Savior we will remain in the darkness. And should you die without Christ, you will have to stand before a holy God against whom you have committed many offenses. Scripture tells us, "*It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgement*" (Heb. 9:27). After death it is too late to repent. No amount of good works or good intentions on your part will help in the day of judgement.

But when you receive the Savior you are cleansed of your sins, moved into the light and given the hope of life eternal. Your name is written in the Book of Life, and on the day of judgement, Christ will stand between you and God the father. So the news that a Savior has been born who will deliver all who receive Him is truly "good news of great joy."

Where is your heart today? If you haven't received the gift of the Savior, won't you please take a moment this Christmas season, and welcome Him into your heart?

December 2, 2019 - Wait on the Lord = Trust

I am not generally a patient person. I don't pray for patience because I fear that God will give me something in my life to "practice" patience. It's kind of funny when you think it about it, and it must give God a big chuckle. Just because I don't pray for patience doesn't mean that He isn't going to use opportunities in my life to help me grow and build character -- especially patience!

I am reminded of a moment standing at the kitchen sink doing dishes with my grandmother. We were chatting and I was sharing how hard my life was and all the challenges I was experiencing. She smiled and looked at me and said, "Oh honey, the only thing you can take to heaven is your character." I looked at her and thought that was the dumbest thing I ever heard, and I replied, "Well, I have enough character and isn't it time for someone else to get some!" She kept on smiling and I guess she still is as she watches me continue to build my character.

As I reflect about character, it has much to do with waiting on the Lord and waiting requires patience. Isn't that funny how those two things come together? I am reminded of the verse out of Psalms 27:14 -- "Wait for the Lord; Be strong, and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord."

What does waiting on the Lord mean? I believe it simply means that I wholeheartedly trust in the goodness of God and rest in His timing. Well, that sounds simple doesn't it, but oh it is so hard to practice. It requires surrender and letting go -- not easy. I don't know about you, but for me surrender is hard, very hard, because I give it to God, but then I seem to take it back, and we have this dance of giving and taking back. It's an awkward dance. I always seem to be stepping on God's toes because I'm trying to take the lead. Yet He still dances with me.

It's a beautiful picture when I finally give up and truly lay it down, because my feet are on His and we sweep around the room in this beautiful dance of deep and profound love. It's as if there is this thin sliver of space between us where I am so connected to Him I can hardly breathe.

I go back to the conversation with my grandmother and now realize the beauty in her words. She must have known about this beautiful dance and how she desired for me to experience God's profound love for me.

So often we want to rush through life's challenges -- looking for the easy fix, and by looking for the easy fix, we miss opportunities to connect with our God in deep and meaningful ways. It's there in the struggle that we experience the depth of God's love and our connection to Him is so pure, because there is nothing in between us. It sounds weird, but there are times I deeply desire that connection, but in the desire

brings opportunity. Opportunity to wait, to be patient and to trust Him. And the dance begins ... oh, Grandma - you were so right!

Where is God calling you to wait?

Psalms 130:5 - "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope."

Father, may I always trust in your love for me, and as I struggle through life I may I be reminded of our dance of love. May I surrender all that weighs me down and show me the beauty of waiting on you. Father, my heart desires a deep and untethered relationship with you. Show me your ways, for my soul does wait upon you. Amen.

December 3, 2019 -- Jesus did not come to save our sins

For various reasons many of us tend to read scripture anachronistically. That is, we tend to read scripture within our own context first when we should be reading it within its own context. This has resulted in some improper interpretations of scripture, which throughout time have made their way into some of our traditions.

One such idea is that the primary reason for the incarnation is redemption. Although it is true that the incarnation provides for us redemption, it was a secondary result, among many other things, which occurred as an effect of Jesus revealing the Will of God.

A proper way to understand the Incarnation is to read it from the narrative perspective (using the Old Testament as context for the New Testament). Reading scripture this way provides for us a clearer understanding for what the purpose of the incarnation is.

Beginning with Genesis, we see that we were created with a purpose. We were created to know and be known. We were created to have an everlasting fellowship with the infinite Creator.

However, for various reasons we did not trust that God had our best in mind. So we set out on our own for certainty. And, in our rebellion towards God, a sacred trust was broken. It was not until we set out on our own that we realized just how lost we had become.

The rest of the Old Testament is our attempt at finding God, or maybe being found by Him. Each book, each story, each prophet, judge and king are commissioned in some way to bring God's people back to Him.

Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament Israel is attempting to accomplish the Will of God (for better or worse). However, they made things so complicated, that they would never be able to unravel the web and so if God were to ever come in communion with his creation it would be necessary for him to come to humanity.

That is the beauty of the incarnation. That God came to us in order that we might fellowship with him again. He did not need to do this, but it demonstrates just how



“FOR I HAVE COME
DOWN FROM HEAVEN
NOT TO DO MY WILL
BUT TO DO THE WILL
OF HIM WHO SENT
ME.”

much he loved us (John 3:16). It was the Will of God that He be known once again to his people and that this knowledge would spread across the world. This is why we call Jesus the Revelation of God. This is why we call him Lord.

We call him savior because he has rescued us from the chaotic world where we were once lost. We call him savior because he was sacrificed by God in order to pay the penalty for our disobedience in the Garden - the reason we became lost in the first place.

During the Christmas season we worship God as Emmanuel. Emmanuel literally means "God with us".

"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 (NIV)

December 4, 2019 - Be Still

You only need to be still. Do we know what that means in today's world? Where everything is instant. When we get frustrated because we want something and it is not immediately there.

How can we hear what God has to say to us if we are constantly running from one thing to another?

This verse comes to my mind when I think about all the challenges I have faced in my life. "The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still." Exodus 14:14

At this moment the children of Israel are standing at the end of the Red Sea. All they see is the sea in front of them and the army behind them.

Have you ever experienced a time in your life facing what the Israelites faced?

I am reminded of a time like this in my life. I was married, a stay-at-home mom, with four children. My husband had moved out because he was having an affair and it was looking like we would not be able to reconcile our relationship. One day he left with no word. He just got up and moved out of the state with his girlfriend. Leaving me and our four children; being a stay-at-home mom I had no job, no money and no way to put food on the table. I was panicked and afraid. I hadn't worked for over 10 years and **how** was I going to take care of my family? So many scenarios ran through my mind -- of course none of them good.

I felt stuck -- much like the Israelites. In those moments, I cried out to God in desperation to save my family. I needed help, I was proud and didn't want to ask for help. God humbled my heart and my ego to trust him. No easy task for me. I knew I had to surrender everything and in the still quiet moments, I trusted Him and his promise to take care of me. He brought many people in my life during this time to provide what we needed. For God to bring those people in my life, I needed humbling and complete reliance on his plan -- just like the Israelites.

Being still says I am faithful and obedient, and that I need, love and trust God at all times.

Where is God calling you to be still and will you let Him fight for you?

Father, may we set aside all that holds us down. May we stop looking for the quick fix and replace it with our deep desire to totally lean on you. Father, we want to claim your promise to take care of us and may we get out of our own way and trust you

completely. May we embrace stillness today and rest in your arms as you fight for us. Lifting this to you Father. Amen.

December 5, 2019 – The Deafening Silence of God

The Book of Malachi is so important to the story of the incarnation one is arguably incapable of understanding the significance of the birth narrative a part from the Prophet. Malachi is the last warning – the last Word, to the nation of Israel before the great 400-year silence.

Malachi not only provides the reason for why God becomes silent, but he also sets the stage for the next phase of God's communicative act – the Birth of Jesus. With the brief exception of Angels appearing to Mary (Luke 1:26-56) and Zechariah (Luke 1:62) God's word is not declared until the birth of Jesus.

After Alexander the Great conquered Israel (322 BC), they began returning to their Ancient roots. This “intertestamental period” (the time between the New and Old Testaments) saw great intellectual and religious progress. This period saw the creation of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament) as well as the re-establishment of temple worship and the religious order.

All of this meant that the Jews were very aware of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Primarily due to their narrow understanding of the Torah, the Jews believed the coming Messiah was that of a political leader who would overthrow the Roman Empire not a meek and mild-mannered peasant. This misunderstanding is also the reason why many desert Jesus towards the end of his life.

There was a very real anticipation for the coming of the Messiah – even among the religious leaders (despite their antipathy towards Jesus who they believed was just another fraud). Despite this anticipation, there is little doubt that there was also a little bit of uncertainty that God's Word would ever return to Israel - maybe even frustration. Perhaps it was out of this frustration that resulted in the abused that was cast upon Jesus.

This is what happens when we view God's silence as a punishment instead of a blessing.

In most of our lives there are things that we cast upon the feet of God only to receive in return silence. This deafening silence is oftentimes met with doubt, frustration and even at times anger. You might wonder if you have done something wrong. Perhaps you even think you're not “good enough” to receive God's blessed Word.

For whatever reason God saves his greatest work after long periods of silence. Consider the many times God was silent towards Abraham (many years at a time) only to receive an incredible blessing each time for his patience.

Consider that God waited to speak his Word to Moses until he was 80. God's Word finally appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush and serves as the moment where Moses received his call to bring Israel to the promise land.

From the Psalms of silence written by David to the old blind man who encounters Jesus only to be rewarded the gift of sight for his patience. God takes time to act in accordance with His Good and perfect Will.

Great things just don't happen. They are crafted. God has to weave the threads of history to make way for the great event in your life. Although His silence is oftentimes deafening, we should see it as a blessing. Because God is preparing history and the world for the greatness of His Word present in your life.

December 6, 2019 - Prayer of Refuge

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ..."
Ephesians 3:16-17

Father,

May I seek refuge in your loving, sustaining grace.

May I find strength in your presence in each moment of the day.

May I be glad and joyful of your divine and everlasting peace.

May my soul dwell in fearless trust in You.

May I rest in the comforting declaration of Your mighty presence.

May my soul rest within the refreshing blessings of God.

May you lift Your voice with thunderous power to cease my fear and despair.

May I be set high on the mountain protected by Your mighty fortress.

May I be a blessing and an extension of Your mighty works.

May I be still and know the beauty of peace that passes all understanding.

May I exalt Your name and praise Your might.

Amen.

December 7, 2019 - Learning to Live in the Quiet

I think I've forgotten how to live in the quiet.

Silence is such a rarity in my life that when I experience an elusive moment of quiet I often feel uneasy.

Anyone with young children will tell you, quiet usually means trouble.

Quiet means my toddler unraveled the toilet paper in the bathroom or found a book to chew apart. Quiet means my kindergartner found our tablet and is hiding in her room watching the "My Little Pony" movie on Netflix for the 50th time.

Sometimes quiet means my husband has taken the kids to the store to give me a rare few minutes to myself. In moments like this I often sit in the silence and just take it all in...for about a minute. Then, I'm looking to fill my coveted alone time with some noise.

Sometimes it's a TV show or music or a phone call with a friend. Or, more often, it's all of these things at once.

I'm a chronic multi-tasker. I don't say that with pride, but as a confession. Don't get me wrong, multi-tasking is sometimes a necessity.

But, where did I get the idea that the only way to live well is to get as much shoved into my day as possible?

And all that stuff often comes with a lot of noise. I think the noise keeps my mind busy even when I don't have to be.

I sometimes imagine what my life would have been like if I lived a hundred years ago. While in many ways life would be harder- especially for a woman - it would also be a lot quieter, I think. I would probably read more and be more physically active.

At least that's what I tell myself.

I think about what a day in my life would look like if I cut out all the technology. No TV. No radio. No computer. No tablet. No phone. No fan humming at night as I sleep.

I get jittery just thinking about it. I think that's why I find it so hard to enjoy any moments of quiet - true silence is foreign to me. Even when I meditate or pray, music nearly always accompanies me or the sound of my own voice praying aloud. Rarely do I sit and just listen without any sounds.

Without the noise, I'm stripped of all my connection to the world and I'm forced to be really alone with myself. And God. And, honestly, that thought terrifies me on days

when I feel overwhelmed with sadness about things happening in the world or with worry about the future.

I push away the unsettling emotions I'm afraid to confront.

I fill my days with constant doings and at the end of them I lay in bed feeling worn out recalling all the things I've done and all that has been left undone. I go to sleep. Wake up. Repeat.

I don't always feel like this, but it is accurate more days than not. And it's exhausting.

There's a great Wendell Berry poem that I often reflect on:

“When despair grows in me
and I wake in the middle of the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”

This advent season, I want to know the freedom of living in the quiet.

Wendell Berry, “The Peace of Wild Things” from *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*. Copyright © 1998. Published and reprinted by arrangement with Counterpoint Press.

December 8, 2019 - Imperfection

“Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.”

1 Corinthians 13:12 (NLT)

Our God has a wonderful sense of humor and he teaches us his truth in many different ways. I learned the lesson of being imperfect though knitting dishcloths. Yes, dishcloths. I started knitting dishcloths without really understanding why I was knitting, I just felt led to knit. So I did. I must have knitted 60 dishcloths. When on an early Sunday morning, I met my match.

This particular dishcloth was challenging. I dropped stitches, forgot to add stitches, and snagged the yarn. I must have torn this dishcloth apart at least three times.

God must have been laughing at the sight of me, and he said to me, “Why are you trying so hard to knit the perfect dishcloth? You can’t, because you are not perfect. But even though this dishcloth is not perfect it is still useful and has a purpose, and so are you. You are not perfect, but yet I have chosen you, you are unique and you have a purpose.”

Now when I look at myself I don’t worry about my imperfections. They remind me there is beauty and learning in those imperfections.

What beauty can you find in your imperfections?

Heavenly Father,

Awaken my soul and let it be flexible to bend with the wind and to find itself strong and resilient—yet one with the world. Let me find the deep beauty with all I encounter.

May I rest in the eternal place in my soul to be nourished, strengthened, and renewed. May I listen to my soul that I may interpret your whisperings. May the gentle light within my soul flicker with invitation to be still and open to the breezes of your voice.

May I draw upon silence to accept my imperfections and allow me to connect to your word and companionship. Let me embrace what binds me, learn from it, and transform it into a new rhythm of creating blessings in my life. May I sense eternity in silence so I may be rooted in your truth.

Amen.

December 9, 2019 – Not What I Signed Up For

“Humble yourselves therefore, under God’s Mighty hand, so that he may lift you up in his own good time. Leave all of your worries with him, because He cares for you.” -1 Peter 5:6-7

I was told to pray through Scripture. To pray for the qualities that Scripture teaches. I remember reading several verses like the one above on humility.

So I started praying for it.

I thought God was going to start shaping my character in incredible ways, and I was going to be excited when that change occurred.

And then nothing happened. This is not what I signed up for! A couple of months later, I remember tripping over someone’s foot in a basketball game, and ended up tearing a disc in my lower back. I was in bed and in out of physical therapy for one and half years.

I remember yelling at God several times about how messed up this was. "I’m trying to be more like You! I am faithful! Dedicated!" I waited and waited for God to heal, for God to do a miracle.

And it didn’t come. More pain, more discouragement, and more anger. Little did I know that God was giving me exactly what I was asking for, just not the way I thought it would happen.

When we anticipate hearing from God, or when we wait for God to speak into our lives, we have these ideas of what it should be. I’m sure many thought the coming of the Messiah was going to be much different than a lowly feeding trough where the animals hung out. But it was exactly what God wanted. And through all of those difficult times, God did answer my prayer, and I have lived more fully because of it.

Maybe today, you need to let go of how you think things should be. How God should speak. How God should answer this prayer, and listen to how He comes in the most unexpected ways, but exactly in the way you need it.

The Scripture says that we need to humble ourselves first. To surrender. *Then* God will lift us up in *His own time*. It might mean waiting longer, but God always knows what we need in the exact moment we need it.

God, help me let go. Help me to hold on to how I think you should answer my prayers.
Help me to let go of what I thought I signed up for, and to humble myself under your
direction, trusting that you will lift me up in your perfect timing. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 10, 2019 - He Left it Behind: A Christmas Psalm

He left behind...His eternal paradise, for the impermanence of time,

And the light of his glory,

Was sacrificed upon entering humanity's dark story.

He left it behind...he left it all behind.

He left behind...His heavenly riches, for searing poverty,

His kingdom, to be born out of the ordinary.

He was not surrounded by hordes of angelic beings,

But by simple shepherds, and three peasant kings.

He left behind...The Triune love he shared, for the emptiness of human despair;

And the Father's right hand, to be the son of man,

His divinity, so He could clothe himself in the decaying flesh of humanity;

And the warmth of the Father's eternal light,

To be embraced by a manger and a bitter cold night.

He left behind...Divine Truth, so that he could be called a liar,

He surrendered his flawless beauty, to undergo unbearable brutality

By sacrificing his life for an ungrateful humanity.

He left it behind...He left it all behind

He left behind...Life so he could die

But not as though he were a king.

No...he died alone.

Simply thrown

Away, like a peasant – like a wanderer in a foreign land.

But then he rose;
From the lowest place he rose;
From the darkest depths of the earth to the highest climes of the brightest skies;
From the poverty of humanity;
To the riches of eternal glory;
He ascended to the highest place;
Back to the Father's right hand;
Among the countless angels, his praises they sing.
Where he sits upon a throne fit for a king.

I'm not sure we will ever understand, this side of heaven, to what extent God loves us. Primarily because we can't possibly know what the Incarnation "Cost" God. However, we can have a glimpse into that cost because we know what Jesus left behind for the incarnation.

But what He left behind is only part of the story. The other part of the story has to do with his never-ending patience to pursue humanity for thousands of years. Every time we were given the chance to succeed where Adam fell short, we failed. Over and over again we failed.

If you're like me, you might ask yourself why God cares so much about us? What is it about us that makes us so special above and beyond anything else God may have created (think Angels, various animals, other life-forms, etc.)? Surely the creation of a humanity prone to rebellion and brokenness is not the best God could do - is it?

Again, I am left with the question what is so special about us? Why not leave us to our own demise and try again (just as was the case with the supposed fallen Angels)?

Even though we may never be able to answer the "why", there is no doubt that we are special to God. So special, in fact, that God descended to take upon himself our humanity. This means that every human being big or small, good or evil, believer and unbeliever alike, are equally special in his sight.

We are all called to follow the example set forth by Jesus. What that means is that sometimes it's necessary to leave the comfort of our own flesh, in order to take upon ourselves the humanity of another person. Taking their brokenness, perhaps even their suffering as if it were our own. Only then will we experience a small portion of the Savior's love for us.

December 11, 2019 - Peace on Earth

“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” Luke 2:14

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” ... a favorite Christmas song. There is a line in the song, “And in despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth I said. For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.” We are bombarded everyday with messages of hate, unacceptance, and ill-will. Sometimes it’s hard to shift through the negativity to see the good in the world. But, God sent His Son Jesus to make a way of return – to bring peace. Jesus is called the Prince of Peace because He brings peace to all who come to Him. Isaiah 9:6 says, “His name shall be called...the Prince of Peace.”

I am reminded of a walk I took early one morning. I needed some peace in my life and I decided to take a walk on the trail near my home. It was very early in the morning when I headed out for my walk in hopes that I could have silence and time alone with God. I set out on the trail, with my camera in hopes that God would reveal something to me that I could connect with Him.

As I’m walking on the trail, it was so noisy. Not people noisy, but all the birds and other animals were making a lot of noise. The geese were honking, the ducks were quaking, wood peckers pecking, and you get it a lot of noise. I stood in the middle of the trail and yelled and as loud as I could, “Would you all just shut up!” Whew, I let it all out! Then all of a sudden an image caught my eye up ahead of me. I thought to myself, oh no, someone heard me yelling. I lifted up my camera to see who might be ahead of me. Through the lens I saw an amazing gift, it was a crane. The crane was lumbering down the trail, walking all alone.

I thought to myself, “Oh, I need to walk faster so I can catch up to get a picture.” Sure enough, I caught up with the crane on the trail. We walked together down the trail in silence for about five minutes. It was incredible! It was a beautiful gift from God to have those moments of silence lumbering down the trail together. The crane then lumbered off the trail and I was left standing in awe of the beauty of the moment.

Peace on earth comes in small ordinary moments where we are the face of Christ in a world of turmoil. It doesn’t need to be grand sweeping gestures, but rather small moments that add up. Holding someone’s hand when they’re afraid, hugging a friend in a time of sadness, sharing laughter and joy over the birth of a child, or walking down the trail with a crane. Peace comes when we are intentionally present in each other’s’ lives.

Real peace is found only in Jesus. Peace begins with each us. How can you be a bringer of peace to the world today?

“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.” Psalm 63:1-4

Father, may I find solace in the silence where you wait for me.

May the roar of thoughts in my head be calmed as you whisper to my soul.

May my arms stretch out and rise in honor of the Holy Spirit,
that I honor you with my whole being.

May I embrace the silence so my soul is freed from the bondage of my fears.

May I bask in Your presence so that I can commune with you in silence.

Amen.

December 12, 2019 - Hope Anchored in the Word

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,
firm and secure. It enters the inner
sanctuary behind the curtain, where our
forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.

Hebrews 6:19-20 NIV

Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch Christian, and author of "The Hiding Place", which is an autobiography of her life with her family helping Jews, escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. On February 28, 1944, due to an informant, she and her family, including her father, brother, two sisters and a nephew were arrested. Her father died ten days later at a prison where they were first held. A sister, brother and nephew were released, but Corrie and her second sister Betsie were sent to Raven.

The women were made slaves of hard labor and endured cruel punishments. The conditions were unsanitary and those who did not die of starvation, or disease, were executed. Life in this camp was a living Hell for all, but those who knew God, held onto **hope** as their anchor.

Betsie died at the camp on December 16, 1944. Before she died, she told Corrie, "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." Corrie was released on New Year's Eve, December 1944. She was 52 years old and later learned that her release from camp was a clerical error. The week following her release, all the women her age were killed.

Believers in Christ can live and die with **hope** because the greatest enemy has been conquered. God saw to that when he made a promise to Adam and Eve. Christ is our deliverer. He gave us access to the Most Holy of Holies when he died on the cross. His blood sacrifice atoned for our sins while the temple curtain torn from top to bottom allowed us entrance to a place only the high priests were allowed.

In the face of life's greatest tragedies and most difficult circumstances, we can trust the Lord and persevere in the hope of the confident expectation that we are not alone or forgotten. The bible tells us, "... I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

"For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." Romans 8:24-25 NIV

To have hope, we must stay anchored in the Word.

December 13, 2019 – Remnants

“The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people.”

Zechariah 23:3

I was walking on the trail by my home and taking pictures, when I saw a leaf on the ground. Nothing revolutionary by any means. This leaf was dying and had lost all of its color. I stopped to look at it and pondered its beauty. It was at that moment when God gave me the word “remnant.”

I thought on that word for a moment, and thought, “Wow! What a powerful word.” The word remnant kept rumbling around in my mind for days, and God said to me, “Think of what you leave behind the words that you speak, the choices you make, and the prayers you lift up. Will those remnants renew or destroy?”

As we walk through life we leave remnants of who we are. Much like the leaves from a tree, a feather from a bird, or the lingering dew drops, we leave remnants behind us.

Just when you think you know or understand what God’s teaching you, he brings you right back to that moment in time where you thought to yourself, “Now I know what God’s been trying to teach me!” He doesn’t always give us the full understanding all at once. I was listening to a podcast by Dr. Charles Stanley, on “Making a Lasting Impression.” In the podcast, he talked about how the “power of influence and the power of our impact is going to be determined by the character of our life.” I thought to myself, “Oh, Father, you always have a way of reminding me of the truth.” God wants us to have a strong impact on others’ lives, especially as it relates to the remnants we leave behind.

I started thinking about my remnants and asked myself these questions, “Are my remnants the best of who I am for the world? Are my prayers remnants of my deep love for God? And, what will be my lasting impressions of the remnants I leave behind?”

What will you remnants be?”

Father, may my soul walk in awareness of you. May my heart come home to your peace that is boundless and free. May you speak through the whisperings of my heart. May I find redemption and be marked with the promise of the Holy Spirit. May I live my life worthy of all the blessings bestowed on me and consciously consider the remnants I leave. Amen.

December 14, 2019 - Instrument of Peace

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.”

-St. Francis of Assisi

The words in this prayer weigh heavily on me each time I read it. That first line in particular “make me an instrument of your peace” sticks in my head for weeks at a time, because I don’t always work proactively to be a peace instrument. Don’t misunderstand me, I think I’m a fairly peaceful person if you look at what other people do. I’ve never punched anyone, I don’t drink and drive, and I even pick up after my dog when they leave a deposit on someone else’s lawn!

Ah, but therein lies one of the great sins of American Christianity, the “as long as there’s someone worse than me I’m in the clear” line of thinking, a close relative to the “I do some good things so I’m in the clear” defense. I fall into those traps more than I care to admit. It’s such an easy line of thinking to fall into, because it allows me to justify my way out of taking action or refraining from action at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

When we’re in this season (Advent) of celebrating and anticipating the return of the Prince Of Peace, I’m often challenged by how little I work towards being an instrument of peace over the Christmas season. I sometimes grab the parking space close to the store, rather than leaving it for someone who might need it more. I get busy preparing a feast for my family and I fail to invite a neighbor who would otherwise spend Christmas alone.

How powerful of a testimony it is when Christians voluntarily take opportunities to offer peace to others, especially when it’s a peace that we’re not creating with mortal hands, but merely passing on from an eternal wellspring of a peace that supersedes our feeble understanding of peace. It’s a scary and oftentimes risky calling, but Jesus outright tells us in John 15 that the world may hate us because we belong to Him. Even so, we can rest in the assurance that whatever challenge the Spirit calls us to, He will be there with us.

So for me, that line “make me an instrument of your peace” is a challenge to how I interact in moment-to-moment interactions through my day. It’s asking me whether I’m in tune with the Spirit, and if I’m responding to those prompts as they arise. It’s a challenge that I believe honors our savior, and that’s worth chasing not just in the season of Advent, but all year long.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." - John 14:27

December 15, 2019 2019 - Prayer of Lament

"...my groans are many and my heart is faint." Lamentations 1:22

Father,

May I let go of all my insecurities that I may set my mind on God's kingdom.

May I let tomorrow take care of itself, so I can focus all my energy on trusting God.

May my path be illuminated in God's truth so I will know the way.

May I seek God's face and delight in His goodness.

May I be present and attuned to God's whispering in the stillness.

May I breathe in God's love so the roots of my soul are secure.

May I reach for your hand so that we may walk together this day.

May I experience communion with you, where words have no place.

May I find rest in God alone where You satisfy my heart's deepest desires.

May I sense the peace that passes all understanding so I can be present in each moment of the day.

Amen.

Waiting. Have you ever pondered that word?

Everyone has to wait for something. A traffic light, results from a recent medical test, family coming to visit, and the list goes on and on.

Waiting is a quiet moment in time. What was it like for Mary, the mother of our dear Savior, as she waited for the birth of her child? And for Joseph as he waited for the birth of his wife's child; one he had no blood connection to, but would raise as his own. An angel told him in a dream the child would be a King, a Savior for all his people, and that he, a simple carpenter, was to be a father to this child, and give him the name, Jesus.

Wow!!! So many things for a man to think about, how could a carpenter raise a King; a child of royalty? What if he did something wrong in raising this child? Was that possible? What about discipline? How does a simple carpenter discipline a King?

During the holiday season it is impossible to escape waiting especially in the grocery store checkout lines. I can't help but contemplate what all of these people are waiting for. Could it be the Jolly Old Elf from the North Pole? Who is this person? Would the Old Elf help them in their time of need, when depression, despair, and grief, crowd out the Joy of Christmas? Would he give them hope for the future?

I can remember when I was a little girl, 4 or 5 years of age. My hope at that age was not for gifts under the tree, but to wake to the sound of bells, and Santa's tiny reindeer pawing at the rooftop. I desperately wanted to see the Jolly Old Elf. However, I fell fast asleep that Christmas Eve, and never heard a sound until the next morning. Somehow, I had missed Santa and his reindeer. I was very disappointed. As the years passed, I learned my childish hope, was altogether in the wrong place. I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 13:11 that says, *"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me."*

As a teenager, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and today my hope is in a very different place. My Hope, as I wait this Christmas, is for the return of the Messiah, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Savior to all humanity, Emanuel, Prince of Peace, Jesus.

Whom are you waiting for?

May God bless you this Advent Season and fill your heart with Joy and Hope for the future. Merry Christmas.

December 17, 2019 - Surrender

As I continue my journey of self-discovery exploring my insecurities, fears, and resistance, I wrestle with God for control, and say to myself, "I am a strong woman, certainly, I can fix this." But it's in the moment of a visualization exercise in a leadership workshop God revealed to me his truth.

Our pastor reads the story of Bartimaeus, a blind man seeking healing from Jesus. He calls to Jesus several times, trying to have his voice heard over the crowd. Jesus stops and calls Bartimaeus to him. Bartimaeus sheds his cloak and goes to Jesus. Jesus asks him what he wants, and he says he wants to see, and because of his faith, Jesus heals him.

In the exercise we were to place ourselves somewhere in the story of Bartimaeus - anywhere we felt led to be. I chose Bartimaeus, and at the moment when he shed his cloak I was profoundly moved. Because that cloak was all he had. It probably had everything he owned. Yet he let it go so he could go to Jesus to be healed. It was at that moment I shed my cloak of resistance and surrendered all the darkness in my soul to God.

A thought came to me one morning while in the shower. It was that in my discouragement and frustration I must draw closer to God. I thought about that for a while and realized I wasn't drawing closer to him, but rather, pulling away. What I realized in that moment is when I feel discouraged, frustrated, angry or hurt I draw within myself and begin to close off the world so I can work through my pain. But that's not what God wants from us.

Isn't it funny how God just gives us a knock on the head (even in the shower) and says, "Draw close to me, I know you; you are mine." Wow! It's easy to be thankful and draw close to God in the good times, but it's in our life difficulties and challenges that he wants us to lean on him, and be thankful in the darkness of our life.

"What are you holding onto that you resist surrendering it to God? What is it that weighs down your soul and prevents you from drawing close to God?"

Father, may the heaviness of my heart rest in your assurance that I am precious and honored in your sight. May I remember and embrace the truth of your love and know I am a chosen child of God. May I always remember that no matter what path I choose, you are present, and when my path strays, may you light the way toward your truth. May I have faith to look beyond my present troubles and rest in your saving acts and marvelous, persistent grace. May I surrender all that holds me down and imprisons me. May I trust in you alone for you raise me up and set me free. Amen.

December 18, 2019 - Remembrance

It stinks to be forgotten.

We all have stories of it happening to us in one way or another. The most dramatic experience I had being forgotten was when my parents forgot me at church when I was a teenager. Having driven separately, they each thought the other had me in their vehicle, so I don't really blame them in retrospect, though I wasn't quite as understanding at the time.

Whether you got left at church, or weren't put on the text chain for your friends that go bowling, you know what that feeling of being forgotten feels like. It's not something that people enjoy, even when it happens accidentally.

It's amazing to be remembered.

In 2008 I went on a mission trip with my youth group to South Africa, and while we were there, I celebrated my 18th birthday. It was fairly uneventful, as we spent the day at a worksite hauling bricks and digging into the clay and mud to help build an orphanage. People were kind and wished me well, but the usual birthday fanfare of gifts and cake were absent. Only late in the evening after falling asleep did things turn for the better. My friends stayed up late to make handcrafted cards and thoughtful notes, and after being woken up from a furious pounding of the door did I find this humble gift that reshaped how I experienced that birthday. Simply by being remembered and celebrated, it turned out to be one of my favorite birthdays. Later that year I wrote this down in my journal:

"As I went to sleep in the early morning hours of my birthday, I couldn't help but smile in delight as I realized that even all this distance from home, I wasn't forgotten."

I wonder how Jesus feels about our mindfulness of him in the Advent season. It's so easy to forget about Jesus while we get busy with "things" like bringing kids to drama class, or navigating a busy grocery store, or making a meal over the holidays. When I get caught up in "things" and get a reminder that "Jesus is the reason for the season" I usually respond in one of two ways: get annoyed that people feel the need to remind me, or feel guilty that I haven't been mindful of Him in the Advent season. I assure myself that I'm doing enough as my family tries to inject some Jesus into our Christmas festivities by reading Luke 2, or singing Silent Night, but that leaves the other twenty-odd days of advent without much recognition. While I think that those moments of celebration are a good thing, I'm trying to remember it also honors God when we take a few moments in our days to simply think of Him and His goodness to us.

December 19, 2019 - Abide With Me - Journey of Life

"But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them." Luke 24:29

This is the story of the walk to Emmaus. As you recall two disciples were on their way to Emmaus and met up with a stranger they did not know -- Jesus. There is this beautiful irony in the disciples not knowing it when Jesus is walking among them, and then there is this scene of revelation when Jesus reveals himself in the breaking of the bread.

Often I get caught up in my own life that I don't see Jesus standing there beside me. When I share my burdens with him, he draws me closer to him with profound love and deep understanding.

The word abide carries a depth of understanding and sharing -- to bear patiently, endure without yielding, to wait for, to accept without objection. God encourages me to find ways to abide with others together in discipleship at home, church and community.

As I reflect on the story of the Emmaus walk, I am reminded of a time in my life when I had something weighing me down. This thing has been weighing me down for over 20 years. I would surrender it and take it back, and did this dance for a very long time. There came a day when I was overcome by the weight of it and called out to God for relief. He revealed to me that I needed to share the burden with my community group. Reminding me that much like the disciples on the Emmaus walk, my church community was there to walk with me and to help carry the burden. I asked for their help and to lift up my burden to God on my behalf.

This is a perfect example of what our table to table ministry is about. Abiding with each other to be like Jesus. Our lives are busy, complicated and messy. Often we ignore his presence, yet he is always there. I ask myself, "How did I miss seeing him?" God wants a deeper presence in our lives and in our communities, and if we open our hearts and feel it burn, we become like the disciples on the Emmaus walk, running in joy to spread the good news of God's love and mercy.

As you reflect about your walk with others will you be like Jesus, listening and engaging unobtrusively and sweetly?

Father, may I abide with others when they cross my path to be like you. May I be patient, endure without yielding, to wait for you, and to accept others without

objection. May my heart be sweet and full of love to share the walk of life with others. Amen.

December 20 - This is Church

The smell of varnish permeates the old theater as a small group of believers shuffle in for worship. Hushed conversations and the sound of a baby crying fill the small space.

She sits nervously picking at her fingernails hoping no one will notice the stain on her shirt or the scars on her forearms. She pulls her sleeve cuffs back over her wrists and takes a deep breath.

A boisterous laugh echoes through the theater causing her to turn her head. She sees a large, jolly man in khaki shorts and a flannel shirt talking to a young man about her age. She relaxes a little and watches as the band files on to the stage.

Nothing about this church is familiar. She remembers only the elaborate organ pipes that stretched from near the floor to the ornate ceiling in the church of her youth. Here there is no organ. Only guitars and drums and casually dressed parishioners.

Someone sits down a few seats away from her and she thinks about bolting. It wouldn't be the first time.

Her heartbeat accelerates. She stares intensely at her own feet and holds her breath. "When the music starts, I'll leave," she decides.

She hears a snuffle next to her and looks for the first time at her neighbor. He is an older man, hair fully gray. He holds a handkerchief in his hand with an embroidered purple daisy on it. It is wet. She notices tears slowly streaming down his face.

Her heart floods with compassion for him. Her own tears start to fall involuntarily.

Without a word she moves closer to him and lays a shaking hand onto his. The scar on her wrist is visible, but it doesn't matter to her anymore.

The man's shoulders fall and he lets out the grief he's been holding in too long. His sobs fill the theater just as the music begins. She puts her arm around him. His tears fall heavy on her shoulder.

This is church.

James 1:27a - "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress."

This advent season may we meet others with the compassion of Christ and be bold in our love for them. Amen.

December 21, 2019 - An Advent Psalm

You sometimes speak to us in the wind
And sometimes through a haunting dream.
Sometimes in a ring of fire
Your presence can be seen.

But more times than not
Your silence is placed upon our hearts.
Even though we did not deserve it.
You set upon us a spark.

When soon upon the pages of time
A glowing ember would rise;
That upon his lowly birthplace,
A blazing fire would ignite in his eyes.

So, you placed upon this earth
A Word spoken from your breath
And for the second time
There was a love only you could beget.

Jesus is often referred to as the “second Adam”. The idea behind this is that Jesus succeeded in all of the places where Adam failed. Through Adam’s failures we were estranged from God, but through the victories of Jesus we were reunited. Through the disobedience of Adam, we received death. But, through the victory of Jesus over the cross we received life.

In Christian theology it is said that Jesus contained within himself two natures. He was both fully God and fully human. You might have heard the expression Jesus was 100% man and God, but this is a misnomer. However, what IS important about this concept has to do with his experience of the human condition. The only attributes necessary for Jesus to be fully human is to participate in the human experience – from birth to death.

Typically, when we celebrate Christmas, we focus solely on the birth event. But there is more to this event than just Jesus being a baby. In the poem above there is a line that reads “A blazing fire would ignite in his eyes.”

From the earliest age Jesus had this burning desire to be about the business of his Father. This desire is demonstrated in a small passage Luke 2:41-52. The story is about Jesus at the age of 12. As the story goes, Jesus wanders off in order to hear the teachers in the temple courts. The passage goes on to say that everyone was amazed at the acumen he demonstrated.

From the time of his birth until his death, Jesus had a fire in his eyes to accomplish the Will of God. If we had only a small percentage of that passion, I suspect the Church would look much different today than it does currently. This advent season, find that passion for God's work that you had earlier on in your faith. Don't let redundancy and routine feed your complacency. Instead, take control of your life, your time, and your faith.

December 22, 2019 – This Is Not My Home?

“Your kingdom come, you will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” -Matthew 6:10

“This world is just getting worse and worse.”

“My citizenship is in heaven, not on earth.”

“This world is not my home, I’m just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

We’ve bought a lie. That we are waiting to go to some other place than this earth to another place somewhere else far away from this place. Many songs are written, theology books penned, and sermons preached on how this world is just going to burn and God will start fresh again, so we just need to wait until then.

It drives us to focus on ourselves. Make sure you read your Bible, pray, and go to church. But caring for the poor? Justice? Our bodies? The environment? These things don’t matter because the earth is not our home.

A quick summary of the story of the Bible: God walked with humans in a garden on *this earth*. God came as a pillar of fire and cloud *on this earth*, God resided in the tabernacle *on this earth*. God resided in the Temple *on this earth*. God came as a baby *here, on this earth*. Jesus prayed for heaven to *come to earth*. The Holy Spirit was sent to us *here on this earth*. Heaven *comes down to this earth* at the end of the story where God resides forever.

For as much as we have a posture of leaving this place, God is persistently coming *here*. We are not waiting to rise up and go away from his place, we are waiting for the *restoration of all things*. Where God comes and makes things right. Where there are no more tears, sadness, and death.

This changes what waiting looks like. We wait for a God who is going to show up here. He already has! In the meantime, while we are waiting for the restoration of all things, we are cooperative participants in the restoration project. We love God and our neighbor to the fullest capacity. We make disciples anticipating when Jesus returns. Waiting means living out the restoration project now, not hiding in a spiritual bomb shelter. This is what Jesus is praying for in his famous prayer.

How you living out this anticipation this season? What are the small things that contribute to the restoration of all things?

December 23, 2019 – Emergence

On a Sunday morning at the close of our service we sang the song, “Go Light Your Candle”, by Kathy Troccoli. This song always had significant meaning to me, yet I did not understand why. But the morning we sang that song, I understood, because it made me think about my life, and as I emerge and grow through this spiritual transformation, “How will I be a beacon of light in the world of darkness?” I found myself asking more questions than I know the answers to. “What is it that is holding me back from emerging to the new me?” This sounds like a simple question, but I realize now that it is not.

I couldn't name what was holding back until the day I received the news that I had a job. A long awaited job – ten months of waiting. I had been doing a lot of interviewing with no job offers. Needless to say it was discouraging, but I continued on with hope that there would be one employer who would want to hire me. It is in my discouragement that God said to me, “In your discouragement, draw close to me.”

I hung onto those words trusting that God has a plan for me. I had an interview for a temporary position for a job. The interview went well. I received a call a few days later and the company told the recruiter they liked me, but they didn't want to place me in the job I interviewed for, they had another job in mind and asked would I be interested.

When the recruiter asked me this question, I asked him if he could provide me with more details about the job. The recruiter didn't have a lot of details, and I told him I trusted the perspective of the people who interviewed me and accepted the position – a leap of faith to take something unknown and temporary. I was surprised at the peace I felt with this decision.

A few days later I went to fill out all the necessary paperwork, and I got turned around and walked into the wrong office door. It was the door to the president's office of the agency. He got up and greeted me and asked me who I was and how he could help me. I told him my name and he knew who I was and told me how excited and thankful he was for me to have this job opportunity. I equally shared with him how thankful I was for God's goodness. He shared with me a paper he had written about his vision for his company and how his staff was called to God's mission to help people find jobs. In this paper he talked about how fear holds us back and then he commented on the number of times in the Bible God tells us “fear not,” “do not fear,” and “do not be afraid.”

I thought about this overnight and I realized when I woke up in the morning – what was holding me back was fear. Now I could name it – and I am no longer afraid and fear no longer owns me. Hallelujah!

God is freeing me from the bondages I'm holding on to and all that is suffocating me. He is breathing new life in me with the gift of the cross. He is sweeping away all the darkness that clouds my soul, and is softening my heart to find forgiveness.

My soul is finding a place to rest, to be at home, and to belong. I am finding the rhythm of my soul again, and I can see the horizon and knowing of what God's purpose is for me.

"How is God calling you to be a beacon of light in a dark world?"

Father,

May I draw close to you in my discouragement. May fear no longer own me so that I may emerge out of the darkness and spring forth like a new bud. May the light of your love shine through with rays of hope and peace so I can blossom into the child of God you want me to be. May I become a beacon of light in a dark world to all I encounter. May your glory shine through me to witness your love and mercy. May I trust you when I walk by faith into the unknowing, and rejoice in the learning and wisdom you will give me. Amen.

December 24, 2019 - The Promise

Genesis 3:14-20

At Christmastime we are all wishing for something, or someone. Whether it is a special gift, or a relative coming home, or as simple as longing for snow. Some are even looking forward to school being out for Christmas break. And then there are the decorations, the music, and the wonderful scents of cookies baking in the oven.

These things bring us a false sense of joy and happiness, and unfortunately the feelings are not long lasting. They disappear soon after the New Year begins, like all of the holiday cookies, and decorations.

Christmas is so much more. What does the promise mean for us, you and me?

The promise is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, sent to earth from heaven to save the world from sin and despair. Genesis 3:14-20, speaks of the fall. It is here where we see the first promise. Adam and Eve were truly blessed to live in the Garden of Eden and could have had a wonderful life without pain or disease. They could have lived eternally in fellowship with God. But the serpent deceived Eve and destroyed their life in the Garden.

Thankfully it doesn't end there. God gave the harshest punishment to the serpent, because he was in the instigator, the tempter who lured the woman with the thought of disobedience. God's rebuke of Satan in Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of the coming Messiah, and this gave hope to Adam and Eve and the whole human race that the coming Messiah would destroy Satan and deliver men, and women from his dominion.

Although banished from the Garden, God showed Adam and Eve grace and mercy. He provided them with animal skins for clothing, and Eve was to become the mother of all the living. Eve's seed would be Satan's destroyer.

When Cain and Able were born, I'm sure Adam and Eve thought one of their son's would be their deliverer. Yet when Cain killed Able their hope was lost. How could the seed of woman save mankind when one was killing the other? God showed His grace once again and gave them a third son, Seth. It was one more chance for the fulfillment of God's promise.

The hope of the coming Messiah is found woven throughout the Old Testament, and the prophecies were taught and passed down from generation to generation. It isn't until we reach the end of the Old Testament that we can more fully grasp the greatness of the event of Christ's birth. It is through the reading of the history and

trials of the Israelites, and feeling the rise and fall of their hope for deliverance that we grow to understand the meaning of God's promise. Christ is the promise, the deliverer, the redeemer of the Jews and Gentiles, you and me. Without the birth of Christ we would not have any hope of entering into God's kingdom.

If you haven't already invited Jesus into your heart, please take a moment this Christmas and do just that.

December 25, 2019 - The Greatest Story (N)ever Told

Traditionally many of us turn to one of the Gospels to read about the Christmas story. However, the story doesn't really begin in the Gospels, but in Genesis. If we were to tell the real Gospel story it might look something like this...

In the beginning, mankind was whole – existing in perfect harmony with self and other. They were ruled by a kind and generous Creator who lavished his kingdom with the essentials for all that was beautiful and desirable. And God loved what he had made because it was good.

But mankind was not satisfied with what their Lord and King provided them. They had long desired to acquire knowledge and wisdom; for how could they know that what God had provided for them was best for them? So, they “ate from the tree of knowledge”; the very tree they were commanded to stay away from. Having relied on their own knowledge and wisdom they became wanderers, lost in a foreign land and unable to return to the bliss they once had. Mankind cried out to God for help.

And, God loved what he had made because it was good.

So, God established a covenant people – a light to illuminate the path home. But this covenant people continually rebelled, unable to relinquish control over to God. They were powerless to see God through the filth of their own depravity and disobedience. They became lost – wanderers in a foreign land. Out of their slavery, they cried out to God for help.

And, God loved what he had made because it was good.

So he established a nation. He established a kingdom that would allow his people to flourish in a land that was flowing with milk and honey – a beauty reminiscent of how mankind existed before. God provided land that would be sufficient for their needs and he would be their Lord and King.

But they saw how the nations around them lived and desired to have more. They desired to demonstrate their wealth and influence; and to have a political power to represent them. They were not content with what God had provided. They were not content with God as their King. So God gave them over to their desires and they became lost – wanderers in a foreign land. Out of their bondage, they cried out to God for help.

And, God loved what he had made because it was good.

So God sent messengers to his people – the prophets. They would help re-establish the relationship between God and his people. Now God's people were able to directly communicate with him. But they were not happy with what God had provided and desired more. So, they enslaved their own people and discarded the poor. They turned the house of the Lord into a den of thieves and robbers where they prostituted their own women. So God gave them over to their desires and they became lost – wanderers in a foreign land.

And, God loved what he had made because it was good.

So God became silent for 400 years.

Then God spoke! He spoke in a way that his people had not heard before. Surely now his words would not fall hollow across the hearts of his people. His words were like cries that can be heard from a tiny stable. Cries and gasps for air, like those of a newborn, which ring out as lonely echoes upon the quiet night's ether.

And, God loved what he had made because it was good.

So God sent the people his Word. But these were not entrusted to mere mortals. This time he would speak directly to his people. He would restore his people and give them hope for the future. And in so doing this he would save his people from their sins – they would be no more. Now he would establish his kingdom; for on this day, in the city of David, a child was born who is Christ the Lord.

It was indeed a very holy night, the night he became one of us. Immanuel- God. With. Us. That is the good news.

*F*OR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN,
UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN:

.....HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED

Wonderful, Counsellor,
THE MIGHTY GOD,
THE EVERLASTING FATHER,
The Prince of Peace.

- ISAIAH 9:6



Inviting You to the Table

Sundays, 10 am

5455 84th Street
Caledonia, MI 49316

