

HOPE AND JOY!

ADVENT DAILY DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

2021

**cover by Mary Braudrick and
authored by members and friends of**

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

8 S. Midland

Nampa, Idaho

11.28.2021

ADVENT CONSPIRACY BINGO

from the Stewardship Team

Here is a “game” you can work on throughout Advent. It suggests ways you can worship fully, spend less, give more and love all. Identify ways that resonate with you. As you complete them, return to the front of this booklet to **X** them off. Hope, joy & peace be with you!

WORSHIP FULLY	SPEND LESS	GIVE MORE	LOVE ALL
Read a devotion in this booklet	Research companies that are Fair Trade & buy from them	Make a recipe book or photo album. Share memories	Donate the money you saved from spending less
Turn off the radio in the car & spend five minutes thanking God	Make a Christmas budget then stick to it. Don't compare yourself to others	Swap favorite books with friends, then meet up to discuss them	Invite someone to attend worship with you
Set up a nativity scene & read the Christmas story from Luke 2	Find one area where you can pull back on spending time (parties, decorating,.....)	Get a blank journal and write notes & prayers to your children and grandchildren	Pray for people around the world who are in need
Call a friend and ask how they are doing. Then LISTEN	Donate gently used clothes, toys, and books to a local organization	Give the gift of hospitality. Invite a new family/single person for dinner or games	Volunteer with a local organization
One evening, unplug from all tech & social media. Have quiet time.	Pray for people on your list before purchasing anything. Engage your heart.	Buy a gift that relieves a burden: babysitting money, help with yard work, a meal, etc.	Be the person with the extra dose of patience this week. Offer grace.

11.29.2021

PEACE

Melanie Forrey

John 20:21 "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'."

I recently met with a group of 3- and 4-year-old people to talk about peace. In preparation for our session, I had learned how to say “peace be with you” in American Sign Language so that we could communicate peace to one another during our socially distanced reality. This is a simple, yet powerful, combination using the signs for “become” and “quiet”, followed by “with” and “you”. This translation lends tremendous depth to our understanding of peace, especially when considering the peace Jesus has given to us and sends us out with to others.

As they normally are, these young people were several steps of comprehending good relationship ahead of most of us, and when asked what they think 'peace' means, several of them said "to be quiet, you know, like peace and quiet". Peace, the children understand, is not some far away feeling of calm, but is a quietness that we become. Peace, we understand through the words and wisdom of Jesus, is a way of being with each other that hushes our rash, human, and hurting responses to the world and each other with gentle love and holy presence. Peace is what we yearn for this season of Advent. Peace is what arrives in the wonder of a precious child. Peace is what we become through the gift of Jesus, a quiet place to rest during the raging storms of life. Peace be with you, beloved, this day and every day.

Prayer: God of peace that surpasses all understanding, you ease our fears and suffering, and make calm the chaos that surrounds us. Help us become the quiet presence of hope and joy for each other that you have always been for us. Amen.



11.30.2021

HOPE

Sharon Jones

Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope."

Hope, looking ahead and knowing God's will shall be done.

H – is for helping others, health, honesty with yourself and others, happiness, hospitality, and hearing what God is telling you.

O – is for openness to new ideas, offering to be there when needed.

P – is for patience, praise for God's love, prayer time, play time, peace and purpose.

E – is for encouragement and eternity.

Hope is putting our faith in God to help us through these trying times.

Prayer: (words from an old hymn) O God, our help in ages past; our HOPE for years to come; our shelter from the stormy blast; and our eternal home. Amen.

Psalm 16:11 "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

"Saying Christmas is at risk due to supply chain problems leads me to believe that you don't know the reason for Christmas." This statement has shown up daily on Facebook recently, and I have mixed thoughts about it. I find myself caught in that tension between working to keep Christ as the center of my Christmas AND AT THE SAME TIME feeling stressed about all the other things that I love during December – the baking, the cards and letters, the gatherings, being outdoors in the cold and snow, the decorations, but (this year especially) the gifts. This spring I ordered a birthday gift online; it arrived 5 months later than promised. This experience led me to start feeling nervous about holiday shopping way back in August!

Much as I would love to take a deep breath and just make my brain stop thinking about the logistics of my to-do list, I know it won't be that simple. So I devised a Plan B that seems to work for me. Every day during Advent, I commit to taking five brief "joy breaks", one related to each of the five senses. Here is the beginning of my list. I am open to your suggestions, as long as they don't involve shellfish or snakes!

Sight – Pause to gaze upon something lovely, like my Christmas tree lit up after dark; watch a squirrel playing in my back yard; sit outside in a lawn chair looking at the sunset.

Smell – Go to my spice cupboard and inhale the aroma of cardamom or saffron; rub my fingers over an evergreen bough to release the forest scent; enjoy the smell of ground coffee or freshly baked bread or Swedish spiced wine.

Touch – Pet my cat; stroke the plush fleece of my Green Bay Packers throw; grab a handful of snow and squish it through my fingers.

Taste – Let a tiny piece of homemade toffee slowly dissolve on my tongue; eat some pickled beets or pickled herring; enjoy steel-cut oatmeal with dried fruit.

Hearing – Let the voices of Nat King Cole or Dean Martin sink me into nostalgia; listen to the wind chimes or the rain; savor the sounds of food (sizzling bacon, perking coffee, the frothy noise of beer being poured.)

Over 40 years ago, an advertising team created a commercial for bath products. Confronted by the noise of traffic, grumpy people on the phone, crying babies and barking dogs, the actress calls out *"Calgon, take me away!"* and is immediately transported into the sensory serenity of a bubble bath, a space where nothing from the outside world can sneak in. That's what I try to achieve with my Plan B. Let me have snippets of time during my day when a smell or sound can transport me to a place devoid of the crush of the world and empty me, leaving room for the God of hope to fill me with joy and peace.

Prayer: Lord of sight and smell, of touch and taste and sound....visit my senses, allowing me to offload some clutter from my busy mind and make room for you to fill me. Amen.

12.2.2021

THE SAME

Mary Braudrick

Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

One of Merriam-Webster's definitions of "the same" is: "...someone or something that has not changed: something that is exactly like it was at an earlier time." In this scripture we are being reassured that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday (the past), today (the present), and forever (the future). He is unchangeable. He is firm. He is steadfast. And his love is enduring and everlasting. Wow.

I don't know about you, but this verse brings me great comfort, especially in these days of uncertainty. Changes always await us, but instead of being overwhelmed with worry about what might be (or is, or will be), we can choose to place our trust in Jesus to walk with us. We metaphorically place our hand in Jesus' hand and our hearts in his loving care. We remember daily that he is our savior, our unfailing forgiver, our gentle healer, our tender comforter, our strong deliverer, and blessed grace-giver who never, ever changes. Additionally, we remember often our baptism, the forgiveness of our sins and the promises of Christ's presence in our lives as we live out our baptism. His is a precious presence that will never cease.

Since March of 2020, so much has changed in our world. Very little has remained the same. People dear to us have died, pets have died, many sad things have happened and our hearts are feeling so heavy most of the time. I can honestly say that this current year of 2021 has been for me a most challenging one. There have been stressful health issues and family matters, days requiring great flexibility, and the struggle to accept age related limitations...and on and on. The struggles are real and endless. BUT, through it all I have felt the boundless, steadfast and unchanging love of Jesus holding me up and giving me strength as I needed it. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I thank you for your holy, unchanging presence in my life. It is this alone that gives me the strength to live each day. In thanksgiving, may I live a life of gratitude and grace. Amen.

12.3.2021

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Pastor Meggan Manlove

Isaiah 9:2 "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined."

The house I moved into in 2011 has great closets. I do not consider myself a hoarder, but those closets have filled up over the years. They filled up so much so that, when my mom stayed with me this past October, I took her up on her offer to help me purge. The biggest surprise to me was how many candles I have--taper candles, scented candles in jars, tea-lights. You name it, I might have some version of it. This could be a holdover from growing up in rural South Dakota and the electricity going out during lighting storms, or living in a basement in gray Moorhead, Minnesota, my last year in college (talk about a lot of darkness). My collecting of candles may have more to do with growing up in a church tradition that uses lots of candles. I remember giving a tour of Trinity's sanctuary to a community member and her remarking on the vast number of candles. When you add up the altar candles, eternal flame, paschal candle, and chime/prayer candles, you see that there is in fact an abundance of candles.

There is something so hopeful and beautiful about candlelight, especially in the evening. As we in the northern hemisphere experience longer and longer nights, it is natural that we join candlelight with the hopes and expectations of our faith. Those hopes and expectations are wrapped up most directly in

the birth of Jesus, but they also are reflected in the overwhelming beauty of the natural world, a piece of music or visual art that moves us, and in small and large acts of love we witness. I am going to try to light my candles throughout our expanded Advent and give thanks for all the ways light and hope are breaking into the world.

Prayer: Loving God, the coming of your light into our world brightens weary hearts with peace. Call us out of darkness and empower us to proclaim the birth of Jesus. Amen.

12.4.2021

HIS PRESENCE

Lorenna Ellis

Last year was an intense year for me on a number of fronts. Of course the pandemic began. I also got married, moved across the country, found a new church family, began a new role with my ministry, and gained a new in-law family. With so much change, there wasn't enough time to 'feel' it all. Yet somewhere around March it caught up with me, and I was pretty sad. I tried to pinpoint the issue. I realized I was missing in-person friendships. You see, I had been connecting with close friends digitally, and I had been slowly trying to make acquaintances in person, but this left me in limbo without any close friends in person. It's a lonely stage of moving to a new city, especially during a pandemic. When I finally located these painful feelings, I felt I was already at the end of my rope. Jesus' teaching came to mind: *Matthew 5:3 "You are blessed when you come to the end of your rope; with less of you there's more of God and his rule."* I cried out, "God, can you do something, give me some in-person friends...somehow?!" I began praying earnestly for God to do something.

In April, I got word from a friend back east who needed somewhere to stay near Los Angeles for a few days. I said, "YES! Please come stay with us!" (It was an answer to prayer that she was coming to work in California at all! But that's a different story.) She stayed with us several days, and I was so very happy! A few days turned into a week, and her departure was delayed again; she ended up staying several weeks. It actually became a challenging situation for our friendship. At that time and possibly because it was challenging, my and my husband's one-on-one times with God became more vital and rich; I realized how much I had been 'missing' God, and was feeling detached. I was reminded how willingly God responds to our needs, and is intimately involved in our lives. Jesus, "God-with-us", moved toward me in love when I needed the gift of presence.

In this season of Advent, we may experience sadness and longing, but especially when we cry out to Jesus, he does give his presence to us through an unexpected circumstance, a person or story, or a simple awareness that he is close at hand.

Prayer: Jesus, help me to locate my own needs. Let me bring them to you so that I might receive the gift of your presence, and in turn offer your presence to others during this Advent season. Amen.

12.5.2021

DELIGHTED

Sarah Henthorn

Psalm 149:4 "The Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory."

As I write this, it is the end of a long week. I am weary. It feels like I've been weary for a while now. My weariness was interrupted today by a conversation with a student. A ten year old boy came up to me this afternoon and asked, "you know how some people have legs?" "Yes," I said, unsure where this was going. "And you know how some people have dark hair on their legs?" he asked, hardly able to contain his excitement. "Yep," I said, with a confused look on my face. "I'm beginning to

get that too!” he exclaimed. He pulled up his pant leg to proudly display the (rather non-existent) leg hair and then ran to show the next person.

This friend took time to delight in something that is so utterly normal that most of us wouldn't notice it. Not only did he find delight in the ordinary things of life, but he invited the rest of us to share his delight. What a gift this was to a weary heart.

I wonder if God isn't a little bit like this little boy. During Advent we remember that God comes to a weary world and transforms it by his very presence. Perhaps the God who spoke in the beginning declaring, “It is good!” draws near to let us witness God's delight. Maybe the incarnation is an invitation to join in God's delight. Maybe, God has hairy legs too...and that is something to smile about.

Prayer: Lord, please open my eyes to what delights you and help me to share in your joy. Amen.

12.6.2021

NO ROOM

Diane McGeoch

Luke 2:5 – 7 “Mary was engaged to Joseph and traveled with him to Bethlehem. She was soon to have a baby, and while they were there, she gave birth to her first-born son. She dressed him in baby clothes and laid him on a bed of hay, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

We were on a trip to Seattle many years ago. We had called and reserved a room at a Courtyard by Marriott in Tukwila, near the Seattle airport. We were tired when we arrived, only to find out that we were at the wrong hotel. There was another Courtyard nearby so we were directed to that one. When we got there, somehow there had been a mix up; our reservation was lost, and they were full. We tried a nearby Hilton; they were booked. We were getting more frustrated and tired. I recall trying a Best Western and after that my memory blurs. This was in the days before internet booking. I cannot remember the hotel we stayed in; it was not a nice one, but we were thankful for a room after a very long day. I do remember how frazzled we were after the long search for a place to stay. Many of us love Advent and Christmas and surround ourselves with familiar traditions. There may be many rituals we live into that we've used year after year. There can be warmth in the presence of family and loved ones. This part of the Christmas story has the opposite. A cold night, closed doors at the inn, only a stable for the newborn baby Jesus. We need to honor and listen to this part of the story. This season can have mixed emotions. We may be getting together with family and friends, and yet we may be lonely or there are lonely people among our gatherings. We get preoccupied with the hustle and bustle of the season and, instead of joy, we feel frazzled and tired.

Experiencing these tensions is part of what Advent is all about. These tensions help us grasp the deeper meaning of this season – the waiting for a Savior who arrives in a stable. A king who lays his head on a bed of hay. A mother and father who have doors closed to them because there is no room at the inn. This was an unlikely setting for the Messiah whose arrival had been predicted many years before he was born. This Savior did not arrive as anyone expected. This is the Savior who is going to turn the world upside down. We live into these tensions of warmth and cold, joy and sorrow; anticipation and dread, togetherness and loneliness, sometimes all at once, or spread over time. We can remember how Christ's birth took place, Jesus coming into all of this, God coming into our midst.

Prayer: Lord, when my Christmas season feels frazzled, or takes an unexpected turn, help me to remember that Mary and Joseph experienced something similar. Remind me that, as you were with them, you are also with me. Amen.

12.7.2021

GOD'S GREAT TIMING

Elizabeth Schnabel

Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

I don't usually read devotionals. I know it is a good way to get to know God. Recently, when driving to work, I have been praying to God as a daily routine. And it has made me feel closer to him. This year and last year with COVID-19 and moving and family dying, it's been a struggle. So having time to talk to him about problems has been great. I have usually been asking him what he would like me to do in life. When I had questions about work, I've been getting raises to stay there. So I have been finding out that God works in mysterious ways. He always does! Recently I got some unexpected time off from work, which I did not like at the time. I was leaving for vacation in two days and would've liked to work. But through that time off, God let me use the time to get ready for my trip. I did not think I needed that much time, but it was helpful. So I'm finding blessings in disguise even though it doesn't feel like a blessing to me at the time. During the busyness and fast pace of Christmas, unexpected times that we find we don't like may be a little blessing from God that we needed but did not know it!

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for your timing. Thank you for your blessings in disguise. We know that your plans are for a purpose and sometimes we don't know what that purpose is. Please help us to understand why things happen and help us get through it. Amen.

12.8.2021

GOD WITH US

Don Tiller

Isaiah 41:10 "...for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

As many of us are, I am a dog lover. When I came back home from Washington DC, I brought two dogs with me. Shortly after we got here, my roommate's friend stopped by with a small puppy. He said he couldn't keep it and was going to have to take him to the shelter if he couldn't find a good home for him. Well, you know what happened. I told my roommate that it was okay with me if **he** did the training. My roommate is now long gone, and I have an aging "puppy" with no training!

I am down to just one dog, Rosco. He is starting to show his age now, and I have been thinking about him and his history here with me. I realized that he was third in the pack from the beginning so didn't get as much attention as he should have. He wasn't properly trained and has always had selective hearing. He was not an overly affectionate dog and was a loner most of his life. Now that he is top dog, the affection is coming (from both of us). I regret that I didn't spend more time with him as he grew up but hope to make it up to him. He has a thing he does when he joins me in bed. He literally plops himself down against my back and stretches out to the fullest. When he does this, I get a rush of warmth and peace that comes over me. I know that it is love being given to me unconditionally.

I remember reading about a child that was learning about God, and how He was always there and would not let anything happen to us. The child said that was wonderful, but sometimes she just wanted someone to touch! I must admit that I have thought that myself at times. I think of the many times I strayed from my path in a direction of my own choice. I didn't think of how I should be acting. I had selective hearing. Unlike with Rosco, God was always there for me, unconditionally. I am reminded of the many times that I have felt that tingling and sense of peace run through my body. God is here and does touch us in many ways. We can't see Him, but our faith tells us that he is there.

Prayer: Father, I pray that I will always remember you are here with me and always love me. Amen.

12.9.2021

I DON'T KNOW

Tammy Torrey

Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong! Be courageous! Do not be afraid! For the Lord your God will be with you. He will not fail or forsake you."

Since the death of my husband, Bob, about a year ago, I am keenly aware of what I don't know.

I don't know how to drive the tractor to manage the weeds in the pasture.

I don't know how to repair the many sprinklers needed to keep the lawn thriving.

I don't know how to shut the water or the electricity off.

I don't have an interest in financial investments.

I don't know how to keep the chemicals in the swimming pool balanced.....and on and on and on.

Yep, there is so very much I don't know.

And yet there is much that I do know.

I know I am stronger than I believed.

I know I can learn what I need to know.

I know I am surrounded by people who love me.

I know there are many people who are willing to help me (if only I could ask).

And above all, I know that I am a beloved child of God. And that God will journey with me as I wrestle with the things that I don't know and rejoice with me over the things that I do know.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your ever faithful presence. Amen.



Matthew 7:12 "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you."

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines compassion as the "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it." Where, in this world ravaged by disease and natural disasters, do we experience compassion?

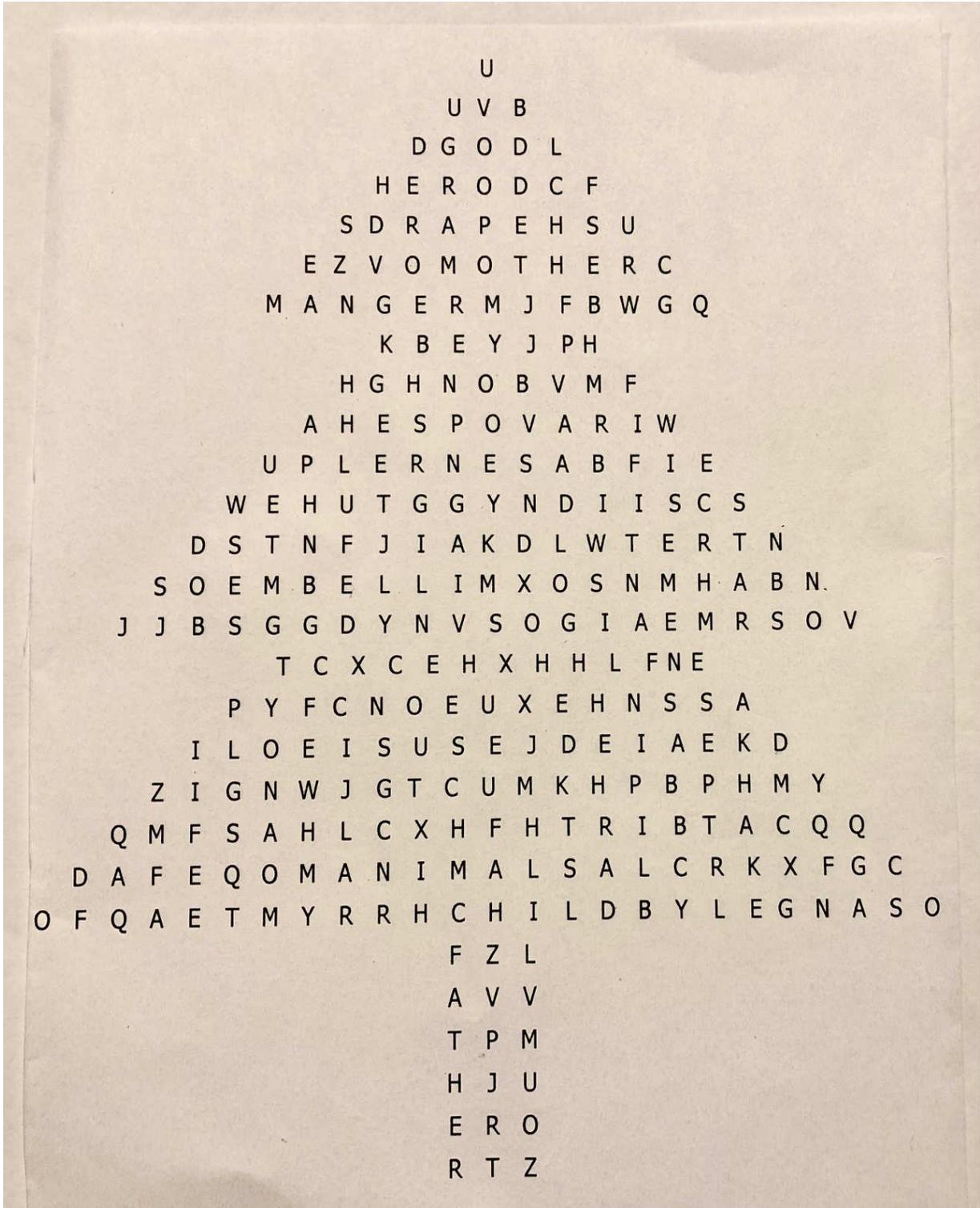
A few weeks ago, Apple TV released a film of the Broadway play, "Come From Away". This powerful celebration of humanity begins on one of the darkest days in American history, September 11, 2001. After the terrorist attacks in New York, the United States closed its airspace. Hundreds of aircraft in flight had to be diverted to airports in other countries. The remote island of Newfoundland, Canada, has an unusually large airport in the town of Gander since jumbo jets used to require a fuel stop when crossing the Atlantic. Because modern airplanes can travel longer distances without refueling, the Gander airport now has very little air traffic. The islanders of Gander, Newfoundland, were stunned when they heard the news of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 9/11. Soon after hearing the initial news reports, Gander's air traffic control was notified that several planes would need to land immediately due to the closure of US airspace. The mayor of Gander declared a state of emergency, and the locals sprang into action. They didn't know how many aircraft would be diverted to their island, how many people would be on the planes, or how long they would need to stay. However, the islanders understood that the incoming planes would be filled with scared people stranded in a foreign land. The townspeople of Gander and the neighboring villages prepared shelter, clothing, food, and incidentals for the arriving "plane people." Thirty-eight planes carrying over 7,000 passengers landed in Gander on 9/11, essentially doubling the town's population. For five days, the locals of Gander provided more than shelter and food to the "plane people." They compassionately cared for the passengers' mental and spiritual needs by providing worship rooms for people of all faiths to pray and friendship and companionship to those who were afraid, anxious, and lonely. Locals also faithfully cared for animals quarantined in the holds of the planes. For five days, the islanders rarely slept as they worked around the clock to care for their unexpected guests. It was an exhausting labor of love for the people of Newfoundland.

A few years ago, I was on a European cruise, and I was paired with two couples to play a game onboard. The couples were from Gander, Newfoundland. I asked them if they were present when the planes arrived. All four of them were in Gander that day. One of the young men told me that he was a college student in 2001. He said neighbors called neighbors to let them know of the incoming planes and the need to prepare. Locals brought supplies from their homes to help. Shop owners donated merchandise. The young man told me that the next five days were exhausting but overwhelmingly rewarding. He said the ability to help these strangers in need provided the most joy and personal enrichment he had ever experienced in his life.

As the planes left Newfoundland in September 2001, both the islanders and the passengers felt changed and were profoundly impacted by their time together. Upon returning to New York, one passenger was asked by his dad, "Were you okay while you were stranded?" After pondering the question, the passenger reflected, "How do I tell him that I wasn't just okay. I was so much better?" Seemingly small acts of compassion can change someone's life, as it did for this passenger. "Come From Away" is a true and moving story of how the people of Newfoundland freely shared love and compassion with 7,000 stranded strangers. The islanders shared all that they had without any desire to receive something in return. Instead, they embodied compassion and lived out the message of "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*" May we all find ways to share compassion with our family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. Amen.

Prayer: Lord, help me to notice the needs of those around me; give me the desire to alleviate a bit of the burden that weighs them down. Amen.

12.11.2021 CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH Sheila Anderson



WORD LIST: ANGEL ANIMALS BABY BETHLEHEM BIRTH CHILD FAMILY FATHER FRANKINCENSE
GIFTS GOD GOLD HEROD HOMAGE INFANT JESUS JOSEPH MAGI MANGER MARY MOTHER MYRRH
SHEEP SHEPARDS SON STAR WISE MEN

Luke 2:17-18 "The shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story expressed astonishment."

We can imagine the shepherds were shocked and afraid at seeing a multitude of angels in the night sky. These guys were working, minding their own business, when the peaceful night was interrupted with a brilliant light and the voice of an angel saying, "don't be afraid. I bring wonderful news. The child God promised was born tonight. Go to Bethlehem and see." Suddenly, many angels filled the heavens and sang together, "Glory to God in the highest. And peace to his people on earth." The shepherds, we are told, did go to Bethlehem to see the baby. However, this event was so amazing they did not return to their sheep quietly. These herdsmen told everyone they could that God's promise had been fulfilled.

What's your Good News? *(was asked of the Sunday School children)*

My birthday is coming! I got to play at the park near my house! I made the team! My grandma came to visit!

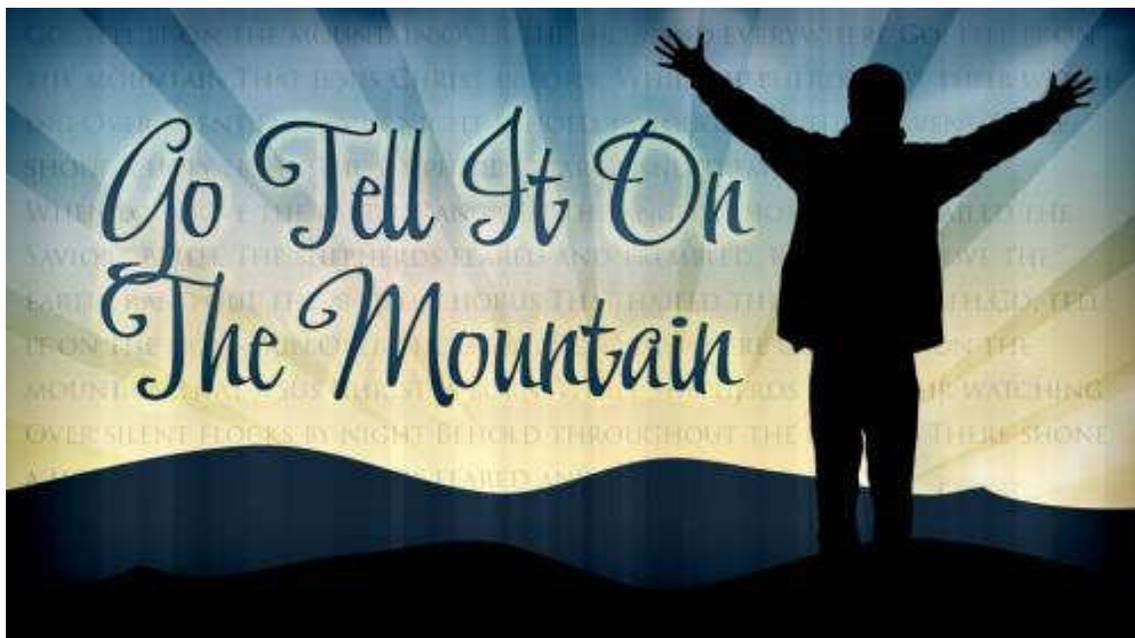
The youngest children were gently reminded that this baby born a long, long time ago came to save each of us. And that is really, really good news!

How are you going to tell others that baby Jesus was born to save us? *(the Sunday School children were asked)*

I can run and tell my family! I will shout it! I could text everyone on my contact list! I can tell everyone by posting on Instagram!

The news of Jesus' birth is so wonderful, we must go tell it!

Prayer: Lord help me to share the good news. Amen.



Matthew 5:15-16 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."



The annual candlelit Saint Lucia's Day procession on December 13 is perhaps one of the more beautiful Swedish customs, with girls and boys clad in white full-length gowns singing songs together. Lucia is an ancient mythical figure with an abiding role as the bearer of light in the dark Swedish winters. Saint Lucia's Day originally occurred on the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year in the old "Julian" Calendar, and became a festival of lights in Sweden.

The Lucia tradition can be traced back to the martyr Saint Lucia of Syracuse, who died in the year 304. She was a young Christian girl who was killed for her faith. The most common story told about her is that she would secretly bring food to the persecuted Christians in Rome, who lived in hiding in the catacombs under the city. She would wear candles on her head so she had both her hands free to carry things. Lucy means "light", so this is a very appropriate name.

On the morning of December 13, the chosen girl portrays Saint Lucia, putting on a white robe with a red sash and wearing a crown of candles. Tradition has it that Lucia is to wear "light in her hair". Other girls are also dressed in white and carry a candle, too, as her handmaidens. "Star boys", who like the handmaidens are dressed in white gowns, carry stars on sticks and have tall paper cones on their heads symbolizing Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The children enter a darkened room, bringing light and singing the song of Saint Lucia. Other Christmas carols follow. Then special baked buns, Lussekatt (Saint Lucia Buns), made with saffron and shaped like curled-up cats with raisin eyes. These are served, along with gingerbread cookies (pepparkakor) to conclude this very popular Christmas tradition.

*The night treads heavily around yards and dwellings, in places unreached by sun, the shadows brood
Into our dark house she comes, bearing lighted candles, Saint Lucia, Saint Lucia.*

Prayer: Be our light in the darkness, O God, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

SAFFRON BREAD (for St Lucia Day)



5 oz milk
½ cup sugar
6 Tbsp butter
¼ tsp salt
½ cup warm water
1 envelope yeast
1 ½ tsp sugar
1 ½ cup flour

1 egg
2 – 2 ¼ cups **more** flour
¼ tsp ground cardamom
1 Tbsp saffron tea (made from 1 tsp saffron threads steeped in boiling water, then strained)
Glaze – fresh orange juice + powdered sugar

[Takes about 5-hours time, start to finish] Put milk, ½ cup sugar, butter and salt in mixing bowl; place in microwave to melt the butter and dissolve the sugar; stir well. Cool to 100 degrees. At the same time, dissolve the yeast in warm water with 1.5 tsp sugar; proof yeast, letting it foam and grow. Add 1.5 cups flour to the milk/butter mix, ½ cup at a time. Add yeast mixture. Beat until you have a smooth, wet dough. Cover and let rise 1 hour. Stir down. Add egg, cardamom, saffron tea and more flour (½ cup at a time) to make a stiff dough. Knead in the last of the flour. Place in clean, greased bowl, turning greased side up. Cover and let rise 1.5 hours. Shape into “S” shaped rolls, with raisins in the curves. Cover and let rise 1 hour. Bake at 350 degrees until golden brown. While still warm, glaze with a thin mixture of fresh orange juice and powdered sugar.

12.14.2021

WHERE IS GOD LEADING ME?

Mwajuma Dusabe

1 John 4:7-8 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

As my faith has grown and matured, I have been profoundly influenced by this truth. I believe that the core of my Christian faith is not about right behavior or right doctrine but instead right identity and right relationship - to know myself as a child of God and to let myself be loved by God. My understanding of how to relate to others has focused on that single point as well. My role is not to convince or fix or save; it's just to love and let my love point to the love of God. Others tell me that I have a gift of encouragement, and I feel I have a calling to people who struggle with identity and acceptance. I want people to know they are lovable, so I try to offer unconditional acceptance and invite people into community. And I want people to see themselves the way God sees them.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, help me to see others with your eyes and love them with your heart. Amen.

12.15.2021

THE PIVOT

John Hergert

Isaiah 40:3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

It began with an email from the directors of Holden Village, where I was about to volunteer for three weeks. Things were changing in the village once again due to COVID-19. More stringent practices would be reinstated. Everyone who lives, works, visits or volunteers there must be vaccinated. It is in fact the safest place to do all the things I mentioned above. Since the outbreak of the pandemic Holden, this place apart, has not had one case of COVID-19. They had put in place practices that made that possible. Yet, as my time to arrive came up, the numbers due to the Delta variant were going up in Chelan County. It called upon those already in the community and people like me to pivot, to change directions. It was time for the masks to be put back on again, time for us to gather outside for worship and sessions if possible. It caused all to rethink what we were about in this mountain retreat. The directors asked us to pivot, to change directions once again.

Advent to me has always been that call to change directions, to pivot from what we call Ordinary Time to something much more reflective and somber. A call to prepare for a new reality about to burst into our lives in the here and now, not just 2,000 years ago or in the life to come, but in the present. We are pivoting towards the in-breaking of the holy into reality. Advent invites us to pivot away from the calls to cheapen God's coming into our world and to embrace reflection, prayer and actions that mirror the ones God reveals in Christ. We've always understood that Advent was about watching and waiting as the way was prepared, but it also calls us to action. Advent calls us to a journey of faith, each week revealing a bit more of what Emmanuel will bring to us and call us to as we travel to Bethlehem. The call is to love one's neighbor, to recognize our own blessedness and to share from that abundance. It's tangible and is seen as we help those who cannot help themselves. Advent is the pivot from "it's about me" to "it's about us all."

Prayer: God of abundance, we place our very lives before you. Teach us patience and hope as we care for all those in need until the coming of your Son, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

12.16.2021

A REALLY HARD YEAR

Sharon Jones

Philippians 4:11 "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

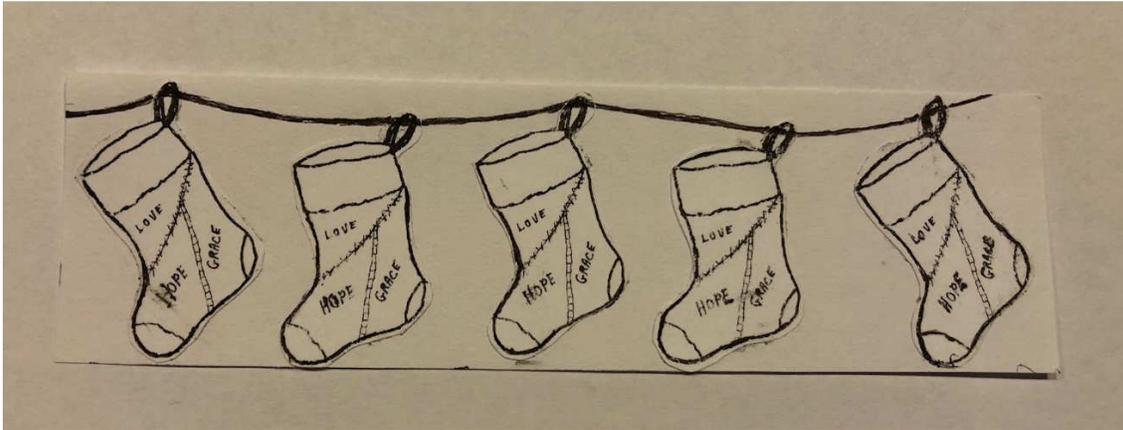
This has been a really hard year for me. I know I am not alone in this pandemic situation. I have a hard time getting motivated, even making myself do things I know need to be done. So what do I do about it? I look out my window, watch the neighbors' comings and goings, and the squirrels, and enjoy the changing of the colors of the leaves. When things started to open up, I began to think "ok, there is a light at the end of the tunnel". WRONG. COVID-19 reared its ugly head again.

Well, I have prayed, and prayed, and prayed some more. I will continue to pray, not only for this to end, but that we will love our neighbors and do our part in putting a stop to the spreading of this terrible virus. God tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

So, sister and brothers as we continue to wait, let us remember:

Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs, according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be content as you supply my needs. Amen.



1 Corinthians 13:13 "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

I was choosing a Christmas symbol I felt represented Christmas in these times. I chose the Christmas Stocking. I know it might sound strange, but think about it.

It's politically correct. It comes in many sizes, from small tree ornaments to the sky's the limit. It can be plain or it can be decorated. It can be mass produced or it can be individualized. It can be simple or complex. (Mine would be crazy quilted with embroidery stitches). It can be the gift itself or the wrapping for a gift.

No matter the size, they all have some things in common:

1. Someone thought about someone else.
2. The recipient will feel some emotion – anticipation (what's in the bottom) and perhaps some joy for the season.
3. It can trigger a memory, perhaps of a childhood past.
4. There will be a little excitement: what all is in there?

I think some of those same feelings get felt in Advent: Hope – that things will change. Joy – for a new season. Anticipation – for the birthday of Christ. Grace – if only for a short while. Love – of ourselves and for others.

So may someone give you a Christmas Stocking this year, and may it be filled with HOPE for the future, GRACE to be shared with others, and most of all LOVE to and for all mankind.

Prayer: Good and loving God, we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. As you have blessed us with your gifts, let them be a blessing for others. With the trees of the field, with all earth and heaven, we shout for joy at the coming of your Son, Christ our Lord. Amen.

12.18.2021

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

Bob Torrey

(from 11.6.2005)

Mark 12:41 - 46 "Sitting across from the offering box, he was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins – a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, 'The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put together. All the others gave what they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford – she gave her all'."

Just some quick thoughts on giving and stewardship. I think all of you have heard my definition of stewardship: Stewardship is everything we do after we say "I believe". Thinking about this brings to mind the memory I have of a wonderful little lady. Her name was Effie Richmond. She was a member here at Trinity when Tammy and I first started to attend. Effie was quiet, kept to herself, but was very active in the church; always there and always doing something like working in the sanctuary or in the kitchen. Effie also had a permanent tracheotomy. She physically had to have the tube inserted in her neck to speak. Maybe that is why she seemed so quiet. One weekend she asked a couple of men in the congregation to help move some partitions from her house to the church. Effie was giving them to the Sunday School. Going to her house, I noticed she lived very modestly. I found out later that Effie lived on a small pension that just met her basic needs. There was very little, if any, money left over. But Effie would tithe. How she could do this on her meager income was a mystery to me, until that day. In a small shed behind her house was Effie's worm collecting equipment. She would collect worms and then sell them to the bait shops. To this day, I am humbled by who and what Effie Richmond was and is: a widow giving two small coins. So, if Effie could imagine, then so certainly we can!

Prayer: O Lord, all that we have is a gift from you. Help us to use our gifts in service to you. Amen.

12.19.2021

BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Sheila Anderson

Romans 10:10 - 13 "Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in suffering; persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

This last year and half has been an adventure. Moving away from all my friends has been difficult. I am in the process of making new friends. With the pandemic, it is slow going. It is wonderful to have family to be close to. Having phone calls from family and friends in other parts of the country helps too. I remember when we moved to Idaho; we did not know anyone. It felt weird to walk around and not know people. Then eventually we started meeting people and had a lot of friends. I know I will have friends here as well. Having church to go to helps a lot.

As we go through life, we need to be the good neighbor to all our neighbors, whether they be close or far. If we can make someone's life a little easier by showing a little kindness, we are doing this unto the Lord. At Christmas we do a better job of this than at any other time of the year. We need to keep the Christmas spirit all year round. This is something I am working on as well. I am pushing myself to go outside my comfort zone and reach out to the people who are not always the same as me. It can be hard to accept the ones who are different.

Prayer: Lord help me to look for the outcast and the ones who need a friend. Help me to be the good neighbor. Amen.

12.20.2021

PEACE ON EARTH

Tami Robinson

Isaiah 49:13 "Shout for joy, you heavens. Rejoice, you earth. Burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones."

In 2002 I began what I have come to call "my season of wandering in the desert." My "affliction" was loneliness. I now know that Jesus was using this time to draw me close and build the foundation for my faith. My children all left the nest right after high school and had settled in other cities in Wyoming, Florida, and Idaho to start their own families. The closest was four hours away. I found comfort in my church and in God's word. In 2014 I finally found the courage and strength to take a big leap of faith, retire a little early, and move home to Nampa. By then, both of my sons lived here with their families along with my two brothers and cousins too numerous to count! God heaped blessing upon blessing upon my head. Family bonds were strengthened; I found a comfortable home; I had lots of free time to spend with family (especially grandchildren); and I found Trinity Lutheran Church. My personal relationship with Jesus was growing because I now had time for a study group and was becoming involved in service at TLC. I have new friends and many faithful, godly women that I look up to.

Then, in answer to a 31-year prayer, my daughter and her family decided to move back to Idaho. They were also feeling the pull of family after being away so long. One of their sons had planned to move to Colorado after graduating from college but moved with them to Idaho first. He now is working in Boise and isn't talking about Colorado anymore. Another grandson, who had been struggling since high school, has a secure job, a solid relationship, and a roof over his head. God does provide!

Even through the dark times of early COVID-19 when we had to make so many hard choices, my family seemed to draw even closer together for comfort and peace. We spend more time laughing and less time disagreeing about the things over which we have no control.

Because Jesus has wrapped me in His arms, I feel secure in His promises, and I am finally able to loosen my grip and open my hands to receive the joy that comes from all those blessings!

Luke 15:23b "Let's have a feast and celebrate....."

Prayer: Gracious God, when my life is loud and messy, remind me of the loneliness in the desert and of the joy I receive from my family, friends, and my brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

12.21.2021

DISSONANCE & RESONANCE

Sarah Henthorn

John 1:11-12 "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

Have you ever had an experience that didn't live up to your expectations? How did you feel? Maybe you were disappointed, frustrated or scared. The older I get, the more I find that things like birthdays, vacations and even Christmas don't always hold the magic that I expect them to. Since COVID-19 started, I don't think anything has gone the way I would have hoped. Life isn't bad, yet I grieve these unmet expectations. Sometimes, I'm so busy grieving the dream of Christmas, that I miss the joy of the Christmas that is right in front of me.

Perhaps things haven't changed much. When I read the gospel stories, I often wonder about the people who missed what was going on. Surely, a star amazing enough to get three people to follow it to a different country would have been noticed by more people. Surely a city full of "visitors" would have noticed a gaggle of shepherds running through the streets in the night, talking about

angels. Wouldn't the crowd of worshipers at the temple notice when Simeon and Anna saw Israel's salvation in the face of an infant? An entire people were waiting and wishing for a Messiah - a leader who would set them free. They were anticipating a king, a prophet, a liberator...someone with power. While they were looking for their expectations to be fulfilled, wrestling with their own frustrated desires, they missed the baby in the manger.

Grieving is important and faithful work. I'm not saying that we aren't allowed to be sad at Christmas. What I am challenging myself to do is to allow myself to receive Christmas, however it comes. I'm going to be surprised. I'm going to find delight in unexpected places. Maybe I won't have a Hallmark movie type of Christmas. There are friends and family and traditions that will be missed. Still, there may be some joy to be found in the real Christmas. Maybe hope can be found in what is...after all, our God was born in a barn. You never know what might happen.

Prayer: Lord, help me to put aside my expectations, receiving what comes and finding joy within unexpected moments. Amen.

12.22.2021

A PRECIOUS PROMISE

Mary Braudrick

Deuteronomy 31:8 "The Lord himself GOES BEFORE YOU and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

The autumn season in Virginia, where we were living, always redeemed the humid summertime. That fall was no exception. Colorful trees abounded, and beauty was everywhere. Except in the atmosphere of our home. It was the fall of 1990. Things were more than tense with Desert Storm looming in Danny's future, our relationship issues, two incompatible teenage girls at odds, and me working full time at work and home. I remember losing it more than once. I've come to realize that those years of raising a family were some of the most challenging for us. (Sound familiar?)

Danny did go serve in Saudi Arabia and retired from the US Army soon after his return. After his retirement we had to figure out some difficult logistics for our girls, one in college and one remaining behind in Virginia to finish high school there. We made our last military move from the DC area to Nampa that summer. It was all super stressful, and there were times when I felt close to a nervous breakdown. However, God gave me this wonderful promise (above) in the midst of all these changes. It became my daily mantra. The very concept of God going before me, preparing my path and promising to be with me always was of great comfort. His promise calmed my fears and brought me peace when I most needed it. May it be so with you. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: Gracious God, You go before me, you are with me, and you will not leave me. Your promises are true. Your love is pure. What more could I ask? Thank you. Amen.



While my friend and I were reading together, she posed the question, “what is so special about perfume?” So we began to make a list of Bible stories that referred to perfumes. We used our concordance to verify some of our remembered images. Our thoughts tumbled like the bits inside of a kaleidoscope. We considered words and phrases: expensive, pleasant, pervading, oils, anointing, honoring, healing. We investigated containers, the importance or use of specific aromatics such as frankincense, the idea that these valuable commodities were a major economic item, as trade items and a form of currency.

As we shared, we also added images of *Luke 7:36-50*... “one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to dine with him, and He went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the town, who was ‘an especially wicked sinner’, when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s, brought an alabaster flask of ointment (perfume). And standing behind Him at His feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head; and kissed His feet affectionately, and anointed them with the ointment/perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw it, he said to himself, ‘If this Man were a prophet, He would surely know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a notorious sinner - a social outcast, devoted to sin’. And Jesus replying said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you’. And he answered, ‘Teacher, say it’. ‘A certain lender of money at interest had two debtors; one owed him 500 denarii, and the other 50. When they had no means of paying, he freely forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered, ‘the one, I take it, for whom he forgave and canceled more’. And Jesus said to him, ‘You have decided correctly’. Then turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, ‘do you see this woman? When I came into your house, you gave me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss, but she from the moment I came in has not ceased to kiss My feet tenderly and caressingly. You did not anoint My head with ordinary oil, but she has anointed My feet with costly, rare perfume. Therefore I tell you, her sins, many as they are, are forgiven her, because she has loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little’. And He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven!’ Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this, Who even forgives sins?’ But Jesus said to the woman, ‘your faith has saved you; go in peace.’” - in freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as the result of sin.

Our senses and emotions considered the terms “Grace” and “Forgiveness”. When the perfume/oil is poured out it is spent, it seeps all throughout and it is going to get on you! The seal is broken, and it is not going back into the bottle. The lady had great love because she realized she had been forgiven much. The other dinner guests were impacted whether they accepted it or not. It is the same in our lives. During these troubled times, I sometimes feel quite overwhelmed. However, as I rest in the gentleness of the Holy Spirit’s pleasant fragrance, I can trust that the LORD is reaching and touching hearts.

Prayer: May the grace and forgiveness that you have poured out over me flow out to others. Amen.



12.24.2021

PEACE BE WITH YOU

Diane McGeoch

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

The sharing of the peace has taken a different form during the pandemic. We often make the peace sign during online or in-person services. The hand shaking and hugs and other greetings have not happened as much as we keep our physical distance. I use the words "physical distance" intentionally. I hate the words "social distancing". We are in a time when we need each other more than ever, when we need to build up and support one another, when we need to be the church in its richest fullest sense.

Most of us are familiar with the word Shalom. It can be translated as Peace. This Hebrew word means so much more. Shalom means completeness, soundness, welfare, peace, safety, prosperity, quiet, tranquility, contentment, and friendship. It is also used to describe peace with God. If we used all of these words, it could change our sharing of the peace dramatically. How do these sound and feel?

Completeness be with you, **And also with you.**

May quiet be with you, **And also with you.**

Friendship be with you, **And also with you.**

These are just a few examples. The use of these different words brings on different emotions and wishes and support for each other. Words like these remind us of what God desires for all people and for all creation. The experiences of living in harmony with one another and relationships and creation in balance with one another can flow out of these greetings of peace.

The season of Advent opens us up to new experiences of peace. We can live into Shalom in new and exciting ways. God's grace and ongoing concern for us and for creation can be expressed in the many ways we share the peace. I learned recently that Shalom can be used both to greet people and to bid them farewell. Think about saying goodbye to someone this way. May safety be with you; May welfare be with you; May God's peace be with you as people leave. Departures can take on a different tone and mood with these words.

Prayer: As we live into Advent hope, O Lord, help us to greet one another with Shalom. May our words of peace to one another reflect your desire of peace for all creation. Help us to be givers and receivers of peace in all its forms. As we wait for you Lord, Prince of Peace, to be born, may Shalom be born anew in each one of us. Amen.



Psalm 136:1 "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever."

I realized this last year that there were many pieces of my dad that I lost before his actual death in December 2020. My dad used to give the best bear hugs, but his dependence on a walker and sitting in his individual chair rather than the sofa changed the frequency with which he gave hugs. I am convinced I am a pastor, at least in part, because of singing with my dad's beautiful baritone voice for years in the car and in the church pew. But he did not sing as much in the last few years. Everyone who met my dad talked about his laugh, and that too tapered off with age. What never left was my dad's love. One of his last good days in the residential Hospice, after mom and I decided to go home for the day, I told him I loved him. He grabbed my arm, looked me straight in the eye and said in an urgent whisper, "I love you too!" He meant it, and he wanted me to hear it. Dad's love for kids, for those experiencing homelessness, for the marginalized was also steady throughout his life, including his final days. He tried to always see with the eyes of faith and a heart full of love. Love remained even when other pieces of him faded away.

So much has changed for followers of Jesus in the past 18 months--the way we gather for studies, the way we worship, the needs of our local and global communities. What has remained steady is God's love for us and the imperative to love our neighbor. Christmas is one of the greatest reminders of God's love. Not unlike my dad making sure I heard his voice his love for me, God says "I love you so much world that I am going to come and live among you!"

Prayer: Gracious God, you came as Immanuel, God with us. You are love and for that we give thanks. Teach us to love one another. Amen.

