

11/29/2020

Waiting in Hope

Psalm 130

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope, My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

The first part of waiting on the Lord is crying out to him for mercy. If you aren't crying out, then you aren't really waiting. The second point is this: wait for the Lord expectantly. The psalmist has prayed his prayer, he has cried out to the Lord for mercy, and now he waits expectantly for God to answer.

We are not just waiting for help, but we are waiting for the Lord himself, and our hope is based on God's word.

The psalmist's hope is in God's word. His hope is in God's promise to rescue and deliver him. He is like a watchman waiting through the long stretches of the night for the morning to come. The night is real, the night is dark, and the night is long, but he has no doubt that the morning will come, and so he waits expectantly.

Prayer

Lord, help us to persevere as we wait on you in the study of your Holy Word and prayer, because "Your Word O LORD, is a firm ground for a waiting soul to rest upon." We want to wait for you even more than the watchman for the morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

Devotional provided by Kimberly Hays.

11/30/2020

Waiting

Psalm 79:5 and 9

How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire? Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake!

Psalm 79:5

How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

Psalm 79:9

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake!

“How long, Lord?” is a theme that resonates with many of us while we wait to return to the way things were. I remember, years ago, waiting until I lost all of my weight, because I thought my life would be so much better then. I remember waiting until I got a certain job, because I thought my life would be so much better then. I remember waiting until I could retire, because I thought my life would be so much better then.

In reality, all these things did not make the difference in my life, but Christ did! Some number on a scale, professional position, or being retired didn't tell me who I was, nor did they make my life better. I found that out the hard way. When I was searching for something to make my life better, I was missing what was really important! It's having an on-going relationship with Christ. It's that relationship that defines me and not the attainment of certain things or the return to normalcy. This relationship is what has allowed me to feel truly blessed!

Maybe we are selling ourselves short in asking for things to return to the way they were. I don't want to go back to the complacency that existed prior to the pandemic, but I want to appreciate all the blessings God has for me in each and every day instead of waiting for some time in the future.

Prayer

Prayer: O God, You who have provided Your Son Jesus as atonement for all our sins, we ask not for a return to normalcy, but for hearts renewed

to see the blessings You bestow in our lives, despite all that goes on around us. We ask this in Jesus name if it is Your will. Amen.

Devotional provided by Joe & Debbie Seiling.

12/1/2020

Waiting for Something New

Micah 4:6-10

In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted.

I love the prophets, Micah especially. There is a sense of vulnerability and timelessness to their words. In this passage, Micah writes from a place of exile—God’s people are broken and scattered, Jerusalem is destroyed, and the people grieve what has been lost, and yearn for a return to normal. Does this sound familiar? As the coronavirus scatters and destroys our human family, we too grieve what has been lost: family members, friends, and the ways we used to go about our daily lives. The grief is real and it hurts. And like the Israelites, we too long for a return to normal, where we can eat and laugh and be together, like we did in the before time.

But friends, the truth is that normal is not returning. This virus is not going away any time soon, and has already fundamentally changed so much of how we do life. The outbreak of the virus has also exposed the many inequities and injustices of our old normal—racism, wealth inequality, and unequal access to healthcare, to name a few. These are problems that are bone deep, problems that will ruin us if left unaddressed.

Now, with this dismal picture I’ve just painted, it’s fair to ask, “Well, what’s the point then?! What sort of future are we waiting for?” To that question, I would encourage us to hear the good news: we are waiting for something new. We live in a complex and broken world—a world not unlike the one Jesus came into, and spoke into, and loved into. Jesus looked into that world that was so different and yet so similar to ours, with all of its violence and injustice and brokenness, and he imagined something new. That something was the Kingdom of God. So friends, as we wait in this advent season for the coming of the Kingdom, let us lower the mountains and make straight the crooked places for the new thing Jesus has planned.

Prayer

God, help us wait patiently and expectantly for your coming kingdom and the newness you desire in us and for us. Open our eyes to the holy changes you are bringing about in our lives and in our world and make us willing partners in your new creation. Amen.

Devotional provided by Clay Chandler.

12/2/2020

Wait with Intentionality and Purpose

Luke 21:34-38

But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

As a sophomore in college, I often hear many people around me say “I can worry about my faith later,” because they are either worried about grades to maintain, making the most of their college experience, or finding a job after graduation. The same goes for many people in all types of situations. There are always reasons that we can come up with to not spend time with God right now.

Why do we call ourselves Christians, but sometimes put off actually living like Jesus? There are many temptations in this world, and they pull us away from following in the footsteps of Jesus. As we know from the story of the gospel, Jesus died for all of our sins that occur from our temptations and our worldly desires. And through Jesus’ sacrifice, we are saved from the sinful world we live in, until we are brought up to sit beside Him.

We do not know when God will bring us to join Him in Heaven, so in our waiting for that moment, do so with intentionality. There are many excuses we can make to delay our walk with God, but why do so when you can start living like Jesus now? Go to church, join in fellowship and community, serve others, and show everyone you interact with the love of Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for loving us so much that you sacrificed your only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. We pray that our faith in Jesus moves us to live more like Him every day, and love everyone like you love us. We love you and thank you God, Amen.

Devotional provided by Trager Conard.

12/3/2020

Ring in the Season

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.

Shane's mom suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, a painful autoimmune disorder. Her fingers, once straight, now zig and zag, and before a surgical repair many did not even function. On bad days it feels like her wrist is broken. She would know, because she has actually broken it, too.

And yet, she is most easily recognized by her smile. Whenever we see her, whether on a holiday or a run-of-the-mill Tuesday, in-person or on video chat, she is smiling. Unlike her son, she has no room for subtle smirks. It's a whole face affair. But the most beautiful thing is the choice behind it. She chooses to live a life of joy with her family. She lives her faith that each day is a gift to experience, share, and celebrate.

Shane's mom's situation is not unique -- you may know pain by a different name. Her response to that pain need not be unique either. God has promised to wipe away every tear from our eyes. Let our embrace of the present be a testimony to our faith in that future. Even as we hurt, may joy ring out from us.

Prayer

Lord, bless us with the wisdom and strength to find the joy in each day, even as we face struggles that seem insurmountable. Through this joy, may we know that You are busy at work, laying the foundation for a future worth waiting for. Through this joy, may we do our part to bring that future ever closer. Amen.

Devotional provided by Shane and Jessica Coogan.

12/4/2020

Confidence in the Lord

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you

We all face challenging times in life, and in those moments, it can be difficult to feel the Lord's presence, especially if you've been praying for a different outcome than what you might be facing. Early in my career, I felt stuck in a job, lost my confidence, was flat out miserable, and felt like there was nowhere else for me to go. I would pray for clarity, guidance, a miracle even, and nothing came. Day after day I felt stuck. Then one morning, after a 3 hour drive to Austin to participate in a business meeting, I was told that I was to be laid off as the company was not doing well financially. That 3 hour drive back home felt like an eternity. How was I going to tell my wife that I wasn't valuable enough to keep employed and that I had lost my job? The very next day, my wife had a doctor's appointment for a regular check-up. Randomly, the doctor asked if we were going to be starting a family soon and prompted my wife to take a pregnancy test. To her great surprise, she was expecting! She came home that day and gave me the most beautiful statue of a husband and wife admiring the pregnant woman's stomach with hope for the future. It was such an unreal moment and my heart was so full of joy. Not long after, I received a job offer for an amazing company doing something I loved. It's been 7 years since that emotional two day stretch, and I'm still at that same company. The Lord has blessed us with not one daughter, but with two. Looking back on it, God was with us the entire time. I see it so clearly now. It reminds me that even in the darkest times, no matter what trials or tribulations you find yourself facing, that God is with us.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your never ending love and presence in our lives. We give you praise for your love and we ask for you to continue giving us confidence that you are with us, that you will never leave our side, and that you are the rescuer of all rescuers. Thank you for Your never ending love and forgiveness. Amen.

Devotional provided by Keith Petru.

12/5/2020

Seeking Comfort

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Ezekiel

In 586 BCE, Babylon came into power, exiling the Jews from Israel. Ezekiel was amongst these Jews, and in these verses, he prophesies the restoration of Israel and the coming of the Messiah. The Jewish people were in a state of despair at having been removed from their holy land, but through his words, Ezekiel brought hope and reassurance that their kingdom would be complete again.

As we become more separated than ever before, find hope in Ezekiel's words and feel energized at the prospect that we will be together again. A church is not defined by tangible means or physical borders, but rather by the strength of our faith.

The Old Testament prepares for Jesus's coming, an ideal paralleled in Advent. Trying to maintain a one's faith while isolated is difficult, as community is central to the church. However as the Jewish community found encouragement in Ezekiel's words after having been exiled from their home, hear Ezekiel and be comforted.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we ask for comfort through these difficult times. As the Jewish people faced uncertainty as to when they would be united again, we face uncertainty at the future. Please allow us to find satiety and purpose through you rather than tangible idols, and allow us to be strong in our faith.

Devotional provided by Cate McSpadden.

12/6/2020

No Preparing Necessary

Isaiah 40: 1-11

*A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord."
Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.*

Mostly, or so it seems, life is about always preparing for something: meetings, classes, events, work, etc. But, Hallelujah, no preparation is necessary to hold God in our heart, our mind and our soul. Verse 3 says, "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord." make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Making a straight highway means removing obstacles - those "mistakes" we make daily and find ourselves asking God for his help. God is there waiting for us to turn this problem over to him. He is waiting for our prayer. And how comforting when we do this. Do you not agree, that when we are torn down, He has a way of lifting us up.

Verse 11 refers to God as a shepherd - gathering the lambs in his arms and carrying them close to his heart. This is the God I hold closely - powerful, yet loving and gentle.

Prayer

Our loving God, thank you for always being with us as we meet obstacles, make unwise turns and ask for your help. Grant us patience as we wait for your answer.

Amen

Devotional provided by Judy Satrapa.

12/7/2020

PREPARING THE WAY

ISAIAH 62:6-12

"Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way of the people! Cast up, cast up the highway! Gather out the stones! Lift up a banner for the people."

This passage brought back memories about our move to Texas three years ago to be closer to our daughter. As we began to pack our belongings, we decided that we would give away all our worldly possessions except for our clothes, computer and a few keepsakes. Maybe that was clearing the stones on our path. Then we started our travel on the highway.

Once we arrived we went "church shopping." Suncreek UMC was the third church we visited. We walked into Suncreek and were greeted by Christy Parker and Pastor Milton. We said we were "church shopping" and Pastor Milton said, "We can fill your shopping bags!" He gave us a tour and shared all about what Suncreek was doing for the community and the world. We believe the Lord led us here preparing the path for his plan. We have been so blessed to be a part of the Missions, Preschool, Music and Stephen Ministry programs here at Suncreek. These ministries are preparing us as well as others to see the salvation of our Lord.

Thank you Suncreek for lifting up a banner for the people of God!

Prayer

Dear God , during this Advent season, we thank you for helping clear our paths so we can focus on you and your will for our lives. We love you! Amen!

Devotional provided by Andrea and Michael Siska.

12/8/2020

God's Shocking Expectation

Acts 11:1-18

If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?

Before Peter's visit and vision in Joppa, the apostles and other Jewish believers shared the message of Jesus Christ with Jews only. They now were astounded to hear that God intended that they share it with even the Gentiles!

Some words stand the test of time--words such as "all" and "everyone." Both these words were spoken in his first Pentecost sermon by Peter (see Acts 2:17 and 21). This is in preparation for understanding the meaning of Peter's dream which is our focus for today's devotional--ALL PEOPLE AND EVERYONE who hears the message.

The message was not meant for a privileged few or even just a special group.

Members of the church in Judea thought otherwise. It was rumored Peter ate with those who were uncircumcised, outside the club, unorthodox and definitely defined as "the other."

Peter's vision challenged this kind of thinking, first to Peter, then to the others. "It is not for you to call profane what God counts clean"(v. 9). Plainly said, God doesn't make junk!

It was a significant teaching then and is a sharp reminder for us today. "The Other," whether of another gender, color, belief, orientation, (dare I say) party, is valued, loved, treasured by the One God who created us all clean.

Prayer

God of all, as we prepare our minds, hearts and homes to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Christ, may we not hinder you in sharing the gift of belief and acceptance within your Kingdom. In celebration of your great love, may unity, peace, and respect for all prevail. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we all recognize each other as your children. Amen.

Devotional provided by Terry and Cindy Zimmerman.

12/9/2020

Softening Our Hearts

Malachi 3:1 Luke 1:5-17

With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

In today's reading, Luke describes the circumstances under which John the Baptist was born. The story may sound familiar. The husband Zechariah is old and his wife Elizabeth is barren. But through prayer and their faithfulness, the angel Gabriel brings great news. "Do not be afraid"; "your prayer has been heard"; "your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son" (Luke 1:13). There are parallels here to Abraham and Sarah's late-in-life birth of Isaac (Genesis 17) and to Jesus' own birth announcement to Joseph (Matthew 1). These are further examples of the many preparations God had done before Christ came into the world. Along with many other prophesies, the messenger was presented for humanities' benefit.

But Gabriel's declaration of what will happen in John's life is most interesting. In Luke 1:17: "With the spirit and power of Elijah he (John the Baptist) will go before him (Jesus Christ), to turn the hearts of parents to their children." This softening of hearts is done, by God and through John, for our preparation of receiving Christ.

Can you think of examples of God hardening hearts? Pharaoh's heart was hardened, for God's purposes, to "multiply God's signs and wonders in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 7:3). How about examples of God softening hearts? In Ezekiel 11 and again in 36, God promises to remove the "heart of stone" and give the people a heart of flesh (softening).

And thankfully, God continues this work in us today.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your willingness to turn our hearts from stone to a heart of repentance, ready to accept Christ anew. Amen.

Devotional provided by GARY R PATTERSON.

12/10/2020

Reaping What We Have Sewn

Psalm 126

May those who sew in tears reap with shouts of joy.

"You reap what you sew." My family has heard me share this expression often. If you look at my social media posts, I frequently share memes about good deeds and random acts of kindness. Like many, I'll always return my grocery shopping cart to the corral in hopes that my car will be spared a ding from a rogue buggy someday. I'm also one who will purchase a candy bar, then tell the cashier to stash it in her pocket until break time; I hope to make the world a sweeter place.

This verse in Psalms seems to contradict my trite expression. After all, who hopes to reap more tears? During 2020, we have all sewn in tears of some sort. Our family was not spared, nor was yours. I came to realize, however, that the tears we were shedding were representative of love. As C.S. Lewis said, "Love is something more stern and splendid than kindness." We weep this year because our love for our families, our church, our schools, and our community is so strong. Surely the bitterness of these heartfelt tears will yield a crop of sweet blessings in the days ahead. This evening, Suncreek will be hosting The Longest Night service - an opportunity to share our common tears, grief, and love. Please join us.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, this year we have sewn in tears of love. We thank you for the comfort of your promise that we will reap with shouts of joy.

Amen.

Devotional provided by Sandy Schneider.

12/11/2020

Press On!

Philippians 3:12-16

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Paul was without fault in the eyes of Hebrew law. Blameless. Yet, once he knew Christ, he counted it all loss. What about me? Where do I fall on the blame spectrum? Some moments, I feel pretty good about myself - "hey, that was a great thing I just did!" - temporarily forgetting humility, forgetting the harsh words I spoke five minutes earlier. Then there are the days I feel very much to blame: lacking the patience and grace I so desire to model for our tiny humans, holding irritation and frustration in my heart a little too long, not fully living into the purpose for which I was created - the list goes on.

But Christ came! Here, to humanity, as a tiny human himself! The Creator of the Universe humbled Himself to be with us, to live a blameless life, to fully reconcile us to Him! That is my source of hope, my reason to press on, even on those blame-filled days, and to learn and grow, moment by moment. It is not by my hand, not by my perfection, that the ultimate prize is won, but through faith and by His Perfect Grace. Best. Gift. Ever.

Prayer

And so, Lord Jesus, let me forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead, pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in You. Amen.

Devotional provided by Cindy & Seth Peterson.

12/12/2020

Only Trust Him

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior

The prophet Habakkuk begins his book full of fear and doubt, questioning God, yet ends it with joy because of his trust in the Lord.

So many times in my life I have cried out to the Lord, begging Him over and over to please give me the answer I believed I needed (desperately wanted); only to feel my prayer has gone unanswered. Ultimately though, during these darkest times, it is when I break down and truly give it over to God, praying as Jesus did, not my will but thine, that I finally come to understand how God has already answered. I didn't see it because it wasn't what I was looking to find. In my life, every time I trust God for His answer, instead of mine, I find joy in the blessed assurance that He will always provide the answer I really need.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the knowledge that we can always trust you to answer our prayers according to your loving will.

Devotional provided by Sandi Jameson.

12/13/2020

Something from Nothing

Hebrews 11:1-3

By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

Hebrews 11: 1-3

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1)
We traditionally believe God made all of Creation, from nothing, with a Word. This is one of the pillars of our faith foundation.

Hebrews 11: 1-3 speaks of God’s creating something from nothing, or, from “things unseen.” In this season of Advent, we are called to a faith expectation of a “New Creation” with the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in things unseen has always been the mark of God’s saints in the past. How can we now, as current participants in God’s New Creation, have faith to expect that God will make something out of nothing?

Our faith does precisely that! Faith believes that God has made us heirs to a shared life with God eternally. The facts would indicate we have done “nothing” to merit God’s favor in granting us eternal life. Yet, our faith in things unseen leads us to believe that God has done “something” for us in the coming of the Christ child and now, through Christ, we are heirs to eternal life. God, again, has created something out of nothing!

Prayer

God our Creator, we thank you for your always present creative activity in our lives and in the entire Creation. You are always seeking to make “something” out of every situation. We anxiously await the coming of the Christ child in this season of joyful anticipation. Amen

Devotional provided by Philip & Joann Mahon.

12/14/2020

Putting Your Trust in God

Psalm 126

And the other nations said, "What amazing things the Lord has done for them."

When the LORD brought His exiles back to Jerusalem, He fulfilled His promise to them. The entire time they were away from their home, they still held on to God's promise that He would return it to them. Without fail, God came through with His word. This served as an example to others that God always fulfills his promises.

Everyone goes through rough times in their lives where it becomes hard to trust in God's plan. It can be difficult to clearly see what His purpose is during these painful times. However, we must remember that He puts us through these challenges so that we come out with stronger faith. Every time we stay true to our faith and trust in Him to save us, we are preparing ourselves for the future. Each test strengthens our relationship with Him so that we can have the confidence to fight the next battle.

In the end, there is a bigger purpose to each of our challenges. They serve as examples to others as people will learn from watching us keep our faith during difficult times. They will see how strong God makes us and that His unconditional love never fails to save us. Our peace and joy will shine bright into the world as we walk with our faith in times of uncertainty.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for teaching us to trust in you, and we ask that You give us the patience and wisdom to get through life's challenges.

We pray that others see your presence through us, and that they recognize that all our strength comes from you. In your name, we pray.

Amen.

Devotional provided by Abby Sprague.

12/15/2020

The Christmas Dolly

2 Kings 2:9-22

Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

The Christmas Dolly

When my daughters were younger, new dolls were always at the top of their Christmas wish lists. One year in particular, I had picked out a new doll for my youngest daughter, who was about 5 years old, from a specialty doll store - it was a doll unlike any other we had. It was made to resemble a newborn baby, and came in an oddly shaped box - almost a hexagon shape. As I had never actually taken my youngest to this specialty doll store, I knew for certain there was no way she would know what was in the box.

In our family, wrapped gifts are placed under the Christmas tree all throughout the days and weeks leading up to Christmas, and my daughters frequently poked around the tree, keeping track of what new items appeared. Imagine my surprise, when my youngest daughter looked straight at the package I had placed under the tree and announced to everyone that the box contained her new dolly. Struggling to keep a nonchalant look on my face, I assured her it could be just about anything and she would have to wait until Christmas morning to find out for certain. Catching on to the idea - her older sisters immediately chimed in with what else could have been in the box besides a doll. Yet everywhere we went, and everyone we saw, friends and family alike, my youngest daughter told everyone about the new doll under the Christmas tree in the box with her name on it.

When Christmas morning finally arrived, and we gathered around the Christmas tree to open gifts, my youngest picked up the box, calmly unwrapped it, and then pulled the doll from the box to show me, "See?" she said, "I told you it was my new doll".

Here was my five-year-old, showing me what having a child-like faith was all about.

In the story of Elisha, from 2 Kings 2:9-14, before Elijah had been taken up in a whirlwind to heaven, Elisha asked to be given a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah responded that what Elisha had asked for was difficult. Yet after Elijah was gone, Elisha picked up the cloak that Elijah had dropped, fully trusting of God's promise and expecting God to show up in a big way. He struck the river with the cloak and parted the waters of the river Jordan to the left and to the right, and he crossed over on dry ground.

As adults, having that child-like faith is much harder. Having expectations of God seems like risky business at times. We know that God is good, we know that He loves us and plans for good things in our lives. But sometimes, it's hard. What if we could simply believe - like we did as children - and expect that God would show up in our lives in a big way? How would we be different? How might our prayer life be different? How might our hearts change, if we waited expectantly for God to show up in our lives?

Prayer

Gracious and loving Father,

How wonderful are your ways, in all the ways that you love us. Help us to step out boldly in our faith, expecting that You will show up in our lives - even when we least expect it.

Devotional provided by Deb Conway.

12/16/2020

The Day of the Lord

Malachi 3:16 - 4:6

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

This text is the final words of the Old Testament. It is a wonderful Advent scripture because it prophesies the New Testament - when "Elijah" (John the Baptist) and Jesus are born, and "the coming of the great and terrible Day of The Lord" - the last judgement and the promise for believers in Christ.

As a kid, I learned that my parents believed in "judgement and promise". They taught me right from wrong, and that my actions decided my punishment or reward. Punishment was not getting to go outside and play or losing my \$.50/week allowance. My reward might be a quarter to buy candy or just knowing they were pleased with me.

Our choices in life will decide which side of The Day of the Lord we will be on - the great or the terrible, the judgement or promise.

Prayer

Dear God, help me to choose to do what is right so that I may claim Your great promise of Eternal life with You.

Devotional provided by Bob & Sharon Sehon.

12/17/2020

Promises

Hebrews 1:1-4

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” (NIV)

Apprehension, uncertainty, anxiety-- all these emotions churned in my heart and mind as I entered the school building for the first time since March with the intention of preparing for the new school year. How would I manage doing things that have never been done before?

As I cleared out old materials as well as new-but-never-used, thoughts flooded my mind. I wondered if my previous students would be successful after only half a year’s instruction. I fretted about how to do my job with so few answers and so little direction. I worried about failing, failing my colleagues who I knew would be looking to me, and failing my students as I floundered along one day at a time. It was hard to let go of the past 6 months to focus on the upcoming year, and just as difficult to look to the future with any sense of hope or certainty.

After Jesus returned to Heaven, Jewish Christians struggled to let go of the past, of the comfort of what was “known” in Judaic laws. But Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is God’s Son, that he is the exact image of God, and that God IS the law. We do not need to fear the unknown, or be anxious of what is to come. God’s power is supreme and he upholds the universe by the power of his word. God’s words are promises to his people and those promises sustain us through all things. Jesus’s birth, crucifixion, and resurrection fulfilled his promise of redemption, of mercy and grace from sin, and when we accept him into our hearts, we are transformed into new beings with new understanding.

When I sat down with my calendar to begin planning the first few days of activities, my apprehension and anxiety fled in the wake of rising excitement-- excitement at the new possibilities before me, of NOT doing the same thing I’ve always done before. I held my breath, and

took the plunge into a year of complete unknowns that no one could have anticipated, but secure in God's promise to sustain me.

Prayer

As we celebrate this Advent season, experiencing the joyful anticipation of Jesus coming into the world, fulfilling your greatest promise to your people, let us also remember anew your promise to uphold us and guide us. Help us open our hearts to new beginnings and look to the future with security.

Link to document if needed: <https://tinyurl.com/y2p7xg5h>

Devotional provided by Michelle Conway.

12/18/2020

Our Covenant with God

Psalm 89:1-4,19-26

You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David, my servant, 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

Have you ever read through the terms and conditions for the things you sign up for online? If your answer is yes, you are a more patient person than I. I just go ahead and check the box that indicates I have read all the very fine print and that I do indeed agree with their terms and conditions of service.

On the other hand, when God gives us His contract - his covenant - we should read it. His terms and conditions are all in the bible. As we gain more understanding of his promise, we hold His words in our hearts.

God made a covenant with David that his lineage would go on forever. It didn't stop with Solomon. The House of David led right up to Joseph's son, Jesus. David was the king of Isreal and Judah but Jesus is the King of the world.

What terms and conditions does God want us to live by? For those who seek Him he requires that we love Him, first and foremost. A second requirement is that we love our neighbors as ourselves. What are the conditions? We are to be obedient to His laws and commandments. God's promise that He will always love us and never forsake us is a contract that will never be broken.

Prayer

Dear Lord,

Help us to reciprocate the steadfast love you have for us with our neighbors.

Amen

Devotional provided by Jan Baldwin.

12/19/2020

Expectations

John 7:40-52

John 7:46

“You don’t understand, he speaks amazing things like no one else has ever spoken!” John 7:46

After graduating college, I couldn't wait to start my career as a teacher. I dreamed about the lessons I would teach and the students I would impact. But in reality, I struggled and teaching ended up being much harder than I expected. After I quit, I went on to work at many great jobs that were better suited to my personality. I've learned that many times our lives take us places that we didn't expect. But we can have faith that God always has great plans in store for us!

Jesus certainly did not meet society's expectations. He was a carpenter, dined with sinners, spoke in parables, and didn't fit the mold of "Savior". Many were confused and divided over Jesus' true identity. But as we know, God's plans were much greater than anyone could have ever expected!

Prayer

Dear God,

I release my expectations and I trust in Your purpose and plan for my life!

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Devotional provided by Sara Stewart.

12/20/2020

Finding Joy

Luke 1:46-55

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

In reading Mary's words here, I am reminded of how our family has been blessed with the birth of our three sons. If there are experiences in which I could literally feel my spirit rejoicing, it is holding each of my sons for the first time. Even when our firstborn made a rocky entrance into the world and required a NICU stay, the exhaustion and worry were counterbalanced by joy, gratitude and fortitude.

This year has been marked by much turbulence, exhaustion and worry. "Uncertainty" and the "new normal" ring in our ears, and we read about them over and over until we wonder what they really mean. 2020 has brought much pain to the world, along with many miracles and expressions of community. It is my hope that our hearts will hold onto the outpouring love around us, and that we will seek to be a part of it in new ways. It is my hope that our souls will truly magnify the Lord and we will realize that He is the reason for the joy and miracles surrounding us.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Please watch over your children and guard our hearts in these turbulent times. Guide us to seek and find the joy in one another with our family, congregation, friends, and community. And also let us not forget the joy we find through our own generosity to help those who are less fortunate. In Your name we pray. Amen

Devotional provided by Denise Matens.

12/21/2020

Rejoice in the Good Things!

Hebrews 9:11-14

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

In this season of Advent and in our 2020 season of life, there have been details, tasks, new realities and processes to learn in order to maintain the status quo or to simply survive. When our inclinations and expectations rise beyond our time and means to carry out the best laid plans, distraction and frustration can take away from solitude and rest. In the pressing on to provide the best picture, we can wonder is this good enough?

In the time of Hebrews, there were specific laws & regulations for worship. Only the high priest could enter the innermost room (the Holy Place) of the tabernacle - all others were forbidden. Access to God was only through the high priest and the sacrifices that were offered. The sacrifices given were an outward offering to atone but were only symbolic and couldn't cleanse the people's hearts or achieve lasting forgiveness. They had to be made over and over again.

What a joy to know that the true High Priest, Jesus Christ, out of His grace gives us full redemption which means permanent freedom from our sins. We can rejoice and celebrate the birth of our King, who transforms us through sacrificial love by cleansing our hearts and forgiving our sins once and for all!

Prayer

Gracious Redeemer, our hearts await with anticipation the coming of your holy presence. Help us to recognize and be grateful for all the good things you provide so that we may know your love more deeply and serve with joy. Amen.

Devotional provided by Rev. Brett & Elnora Smith.

12/22/2020

Solid As A Rock

1 Samuel 2:1-10

There is no one holy like the Lord; There is no one besides you; There is no rock like our God.

There is a pond in Florida in my father's neighborhood that is filled with turtles. It is a spot frequented by people who come to feed, photograph, or simply to observe the wildlife. On a recent visit to Florida, we ventured over to the pond to feed the turtles. As we approached the pond, the turtles joined us up on the shore. What was fascinating to me was the one lone turtle basking in the warm sun on his rock in the middle of the pond. He didn't join in the clamor at first but observed the activity before leaving the comfort of his perch and diving into the murky, dark, and chilly water.

1 Samuel 2:2 is found within a poem known as The Song of Hannah. In this beautiful song of praise, Hannah is rejoicing in the Lord and in His salvation after longing for a child for seven years and finally giving birth to a son, Samuel. Her words in this prayer celebrate that there is no one as holy as our Lord and no rock like our God. It is clear to Hannah that God is the source of her strength and salvation.

After enjoying an afternoon snack, we watched our turtle confidently return to his rock in the middle of the pond. He was safe, and he was home! As we navigate the sometimes dark and murky waters of life, isn't it reassuring to know that we have a God who is our strength and our foundation? May we as God's people find this same comfort in our rock and may we rejoice in it always.

Prayer

Dear Gracious and Loving God,

We praise you for the strong and stable foundation you provide us every single day. As we bask in your love and glory, may we always move forward shining your light and rejoicing in your faithfulness. God, you are our rock and our redeemer. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Devotional provided by Bob and Susan VanKirk.

12/23/2020

God Surprises Us

Mark 11:1-11

*“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the
highest heaven!”*

This year has been full of surprises... We have endured many changes and grieved devastating losses. And yet we have rejoiced in silver linings and blessings along the way—happy surprises in the midst of despair.

God is in the business of surprises. Whatever we assume about God or about ourselves, God flips these expectations upside-down and shows us a new Way.

In Jesus' day, oppressed Jews (our faithful forbearers) hoped for the Messiah to save them from the Roman empire, hoping for someone like Caesar to secure safety and prosperity through power and domination.

Yet the crowds of this passage rejoice in a divine reversal of expectations. The Messiah was coming as a rabbi and not a general, wielding healing instead of a spear, riding a mule instead of a stallion. And tomorrow night, we celebrate a related divine surprise: God gave up God's power to become enfleshed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a poor, brown, vulnerable refugee, subject to the cruelties of this world.

God surprised us then and surprises us today—and for that we cry out Hosanna, Glory Be! We are invited to rejoice with the crowds at Christ's coming presence in our lives in ways that are wonderfully unexpected.

Prayer

God of happy surprises: When things do not go according to plan, may we have grace for ourselves and may Your grace raise us to new life. And may we notice and rejoice in the surprising birth of Christ in the lowly stable two thousand years ago and in the unexpected places of our lives today. Amen.

Devotional provided by Kyle Walden.

12/24/2020

The Light Has Shined

Luke 2:1-20

“The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified”

It started as an ordinary evening for those shepherds: The milky way sparkling across the sky, the gentle rustling of warm animal bodies, and the winter air chilling their bodies as they scanned the darkness for potential threats while simultaneously dozing against rocks and olive trees..

Like oncoming headlights that suddenly appear out of nowhere, the shepherds are suddenly surrounded by a bright, dazzling reflective haze that pierces and overcomes the darkness. All night-vision is ruined. Although the light feels comfortingly warm, they tremble from within, wondering about this mysterious intrusion and fearing imminent death. A voice rings forth “Do not be afraid! I bring good news of peace for all humankind. The Messiah is here. Salvation for the world in the form of a tiny baby. You will find him hidden in an unassuming manger cave.” Just as unexpectedly, an entire joyful chorus now bursts forth in surround sound: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, good will towards men!” As the shepherd’s startled senses awaken and adjust to the overwhelming splendor of divine glory, they turn to one another with questioning, yet hopeful, gazes. Leaving their sheep and all cares behind, they run to seek out the true light of the world.

In your pursuit of the Christ-child, what is it you need to leave behind this holiday season? When in your life have you experienced the light of God drawing near to you, overwhelming you, or illuminating a way through the darkness? How can you spread hope in our broken world? The holy night is here! For what do you rejoice and give God praise this holiday season?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you enter our darkness and bring the hope and peace of divine light into our world. Free us from the things which hold us back from experiencing your love. Help us to recognize your holy presence in every dimension of our lives so that we may

authentically and joyfully reflect your light into our world. And, stir us
to continue seeking after you--even once this Christmas has passed.

Amen

Devotional provided by Pastor Tami Gallaway.

12/25/2020

The Son of God Hebrew

Hebrews 1 1-4

In the past God spoke to our forefathers thru the Prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son.

God has been with His people from the beginning. In the Ancient World, He spoke to His people thru the Prophets. He also engaged Angels to deliver important messages. But our Heavenly Father knew that His people needed more, so He sent His one and only son.

This name, The Son of God, is a name superior to the Prophets and the Angels.

Thru the different stages of our lives we may change. Jesus, the Son of God, remains changeless. He is always fair, just, and merciful to all of us who are so undeserving.

At Christmas, let's reflect on the everlasting gift we have in the Son of God, Jesus, the Christ.

Prayer

Dear Father God,

Thank you for sending your Son, JESUS to us. Although we are undeserving, your Grace has provided us a way to live with you eternally in HEAVEN. We praise your HOLY NAME.

Amen

Devotional provided by Kathy and Stan Pounds.

12/26/2020

Patience in Joyful Hope

Luke 2:22-40

*For my eyes have seen your salvation; a light for revelation to the
Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel*

2020 has been a tremendous blessing to our family. Through the darkness of the pandemic, closures, protests and riots, this year brought us extreme joy and happiness with the birth of two grandsons. Both of our daughters had healthy baby boys within weeks of each other.

We can only can only imagine the surprise and joy felt by Simeon and Anna upon seeing the baby Jesus. They had both grown old under Roman occupation yearning for redemption. They had both dedicated their lives to God and here, in this little child, their prayers had finally been answered; the birth of their savior, their long awaited Messiah!

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we also pray for his return. There is a lot to learn from the patience and dedication of Simeon and Anna. Understanding God's timeline is not ours, but we should never give up hope. Let us rejoice in this hope as we share the light of our redeemer.

Prayer

Precious Jesus, we rejoice in knowing that you are our eternal hope. In dark times when we think we are alone, you are with us. In Joyful times when we don't think we need you, you are with us. Our hearts yearn for the day when we can bathe in your presence. Give us patience and help us to use the time waiting to share our joyful hope with others.

Amen.

Devotional provided by Joe and Jennifer Williams.

12/27/2020

Walk in the Light

John 12:35-36

Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you.

The concept of light and darkness runs from the earliest verses in Genesis all the way to the conclusion of the Book of Revelation. This reading from John's Gospel provides a meaningful conclusion to our Advent-Christ Devotional. Jesus in his earthly ministry continually invites people to follow him. In this text he offers an urgent invitation to follow "the Light" (Jesus) before darkness overtakes them. Anyone who has ever experienced an hours-long power outage in the evening know how challenging it can be to maneuver in the dark even while in one's own home. Darkness causes an anxiety laden disorientation that can result in danger or harm. God's gift of light offered "in the beginning" (Genesis 1) has provided humans with both a sense of direction and a sense of security. So as we move past all the glitz and glitter of secular Christmas may we remain focused on the one who said, "I am the light of the world" so that the darkness of sin and death will not overtake us. Let our daily prayer be, as we enter the new year of 2021, the words of the old hymn: "I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus."

Prayer

Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home -

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet: I do not ask to see the distant scene -

One step enough for me.

(John Henry Newman)

Devotional provided by Pastor Milton Guttierrez.