

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)**

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

We're observing the season of Advent as an invitation to prepare, make room, & get ready for the Promised One. Each week the focus shifts, but the goal is consistent: to open ourselves to transformation within our hearts and to empower our outward expression of good news in the world. Our worship and spiritual practices will guide us in making room for the hope, peace, JOY, & love of the promised One, so that the community around us is transformed by our work bringing light & love to God people. In short, our transformed lives are transforming lives.

Well, friends, an accountability moment... How did you make room in your heart this week? What one thing did you 'fast' from (let go of) to create a space to spend time drawing closer to God? How PEACEFUL is it with your soul?

Maybe you found peace in continuing to add to the decorations in your house, listening to music of the season, or spending time touring the holiday lights in the neighborhood. DID YOU KNOW:

- Saint James' paper stained glass windows are listed as a place to drive by on the HoCo list of holiday lights.
- And, thanks to our neighbors at the fire department, our trustees, and men's group, our wreath is verified secure, safe, and sound.

So the lighting of the wreath and the illuminated windows offers a lovely peaceful scene of light and welcome to all who see it.

As was mentioned earlier, this third Sunday of Advent turns us to joyful praise, song, and continuing preparation. That's right, we are still in preparation mode... anticipating something wonderful, and yet it is not yet here. There's still work to be done to make room in our hearts and lives for Christ, and to participate in renewing relationships rooted in hope, peace, and love.

The prophet Isaiah uses poetic images to speak to the people about his divinely given vision... a message that echoes across generations seeing violence & war, captivity & exile, as well as a return to the homeland. There is a broad movement in the vision of God's people transformed in holiness... from evil seed to holy seed. Charles & John Wesley conveyed this message in many of their hymns and sermons as their biblical holiness movement spread across the lands.

The Isaiah selection read today comes just after the prophet shares how the '*Lord God of heavenly forces*' is chopping branches...the lofty will be cut down, the exalted laid low, and the mighty will fall with an ax (10:33-34). Then God's promise of a shoot from the stump of Jesse (11:1-16) will bear fruit in righteousness, there will be peace between wolf & lamb; cow & bear. There will be a ceasing of jealousy & harassment, and God will make a way through trials (think exodus and parting of the seas) so that God's people survive and thrive.

And on that day you will...SHOUT TO THE LORD all the earth, let us sing of power, majesty & praise for our good God! REJOICE, good friends, rejoice, the Holy one of Israel who makes a way in the sea, in the desert, in the wilderness. Shout and sing o People of God, because the Holy one is among you.

What do you hear in Isaiah's Song? Do you hear what I hear? Do you hear sing with joy and a trust in God?

This is a song of joyful trust in God. It is A song of salvation promised for you and for me. In this short passage, we hear a promise of abundance.

Let me ask this: do we feel that we live in a time of abundance? How much is enough?

People often live with a sense of scarcity, including worry & anxiety and desperation. Many times what we need for joy is present, here, now, yet we don't see it. For example, the Isaiah text is presenting abundance, as drawing water with joy from the springs of salvation.

A spring is something that might be bottomless; it's ever-flowing. When I hear the mention of a spring of water in the sacred text, it feels like it's pointing to abundance, a never-ending supply. Springs often have never-ending supplies, whether we think of them as springs of water or falls or oceans, they're hard to drink from. You have to bring a cup and take out a reasonable amount for you.

This reminds me of the Old Testament stories of manna. How you get enough for today. Tomorrow there's enough for tomorrow. God provided the manna for each day. Hoarding it resulted in spoilage. We can learn that rhythm of trust and hope. That rhythm gives peace. That rhythm gives joy. In trust, then, we experience that in a way that is taking what you need and knowing that the rest is available to other people, and the rest of creation, for that matter. It is God who has done glorious things for all the earth. What a joy that is! This spring goes out to every nation and still never runs dry.

To have joy just by yourself really isn't possible. Thinking this way, **if you're not sharing it, it's not joy**. A quiet moment of contentment can be a very good thing. However, it moves you and draws you toward a bigger community and sharing. So the experience that the Holy one is great among us is something that will heal the world, not just our church, our community, a particular group of people or a way of life. The joy just moves (ripples) out so much further than anything we can imagine.

In the Grinch story, It's the moment the Who's sing, without all the trappings of glitter and gold, of presents galore. They sing in joy of the community they share. Isaiah portrays the vision of growth and of creating a just society.

John the Baptist gives practical instruction for the fruit of changed hearts and lives. It has to do with how we are creating wellbeing within the community, trusting, and not being afraid.

Do you hear the simplicity of what John is talking about in this gospel passage? He gives examples of the signs of change in hearts and lives because people ask him, "What do we do?" What John keeps showing them is no matter who you are or what you do, every day there's an opportunity to reach out to one person. That's what it means to have a changed heart and a changed life.

If you have two of something, share with someone who has less. Take the food you have and share it with one person. We don't need a large task force and an initiative with massive global funding to cure hunger. That's not what we're called to do in this passage. We're called to feed people one at a time.

Sometimes the problems feel so large that we feel incompetent or ill-equipped for the task. And so we freeze, or we are not sure what to do. The truth is that we can't fix it all, but we can do what's right in front of us. And so part of the work in this theme of making room, in this season of Advent, is to discern what's right in front of us, what do we have that we can share to meet a need. John invites us to simply open our eyes and extend an offer to meet a need.

So church: What one thing could we do? Theologian Jon Berquist suggests the first thing is To **decide what really matters**. The best way to do that is to open our eyes and take care of the first thing we see.

As we adapted to worshipping online, you were invited to meet at the flag pole and wave as we rang the bell. The bell ringing was a sign that Saint James is alive and well. Those gathered each week were a visible sign of hope and of welcome, of presence and vitality. When we began meeting in September, the bell ringing continued, but the gathering at the flag pole stopped. Our visible presence has been missed, friends. How do I know, because people remarked about it. Those crazy Methodist! Yup, and people noticed.

Friends, it's one of the beauties of the Advent Season. Everything good starts out so small, it's almost invisible, Like a baby. Every good deed starts

with something that has a potential you don't recognize, nourishing those righteous branches is what gets them to grow into shelter.

Let's reflect for a moment: What does this faith community have to offer? What need is there within 5 miles of this house of prayer? What can we share for the wellbeing of our neighbors?

The invitation of Advent calls us to open ourselves, to use this time to increase our faith, and to enrich our love in outward expressions; to be bold, courageous and faithful to the call to change our way of living...

Friends, What one thing will you do differently this week because of this Word? May it be so. So be it. Amen.

**Leading Into Prayer** Let us JOIN voices TOGETHER once again, to make room for the prayers for God's people, church & world, As we sing: verse 3 "Come and Find the Quiet Center" **TFWS 2128** ( *in the hymnal, the worship guide, or on the screen.*

In the Spirit let us travel Open to each other's pain Let our lives and fears unravel Celebrate the space we gain There's a place for deepest dreaming There's a time for heart to care In the Spirit's lively scheming There is always room to spare.

**THE LITURGIST, Dessie Moxley, will LEAD us in prayers for God's people, church & World ...**