

The Advent wreath will be in church this Sunday and we will begin a journey toward Christmas. In the Gospel of Luke, we will actually move backwards the next four Sundays, beginning with today's Gospel about our expectation of the Christ coming in Glory, to the Christ coming as a child in a humble birth in Bethlehem. The text is a scary text about natural disasters, conflict, and anxiety. We might wonder if it was written for now—and it is. In Advent we are being asked to pay attention to how God is entering the world in the midst of our stress, the challenges of the Pandemic in the world and our community, environmental disasters, and strife in our nation and the world. How are we to respond as a community of Christians?

Jesus says, "stand up, raise your heads;" look up—do not cower and look away because God is near and here. There are signs around us that we can understand. If we talk with one another there are reminders that we are not alone; God will be faithful, even though it sometimes does not feel like it.

As we step into a stressful season, sometimes filled with shoulds and oughts, sometimes filled with expectation that are no real, may we breathe deeply knowing that God is with us, as individual and as a community, a larger community than we ever imagined before the Pandemic.

Advent can be a time to try praying in short bursts, or quietly while preparing our homes and hearts for Christmas. Treasuring silence or abandoning our souls to Christmas carols, when intentional, deepens our life of prayer. Using an Advent calendar or Advent wreath, or Advent candle every day to help refocus our attention on what is important (which sometimes includes chocolate!) seems like a necessary discipline for all God's faithful people. "All your paths are love and faithfulness" O God, and you renew the face of the earth and renew a right spirit within me. Let us pay attention to the God moments, tiny miracles, and faith moments we experience as we wait and move toward Christmas Eve. May we as a community witness to each other and to the world the power of love in a sinful and broken world that is eagerly sharing the power of giving gifts of grace, healing, and hope.

I invite you to say this prayer from Psalm 25 during the week, listening to your heart as you hear God's promise to be with you and hear yourself speaking the intimate murmurings of your own heart to God.

Psalm 25

- 1 To you, O God, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you;
* let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame; * let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
- 3 Show me your ways, O God, * and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, * for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the daylong.
- 5 Remember, O God, your compassion and love, * for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; * remember me according to your love and for the sake of your goodness, O God.
- 7 Gracious and upright are you; * therefore you teach sinners in your way.
- 8 You guide the humble in doing right * and teach your way to the lowly.
- 9 All your paths are love and faithfulness * to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.