

ready
the way



a walk through advent 2009

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*for students, all young adults
especially those in the U.S. military*

The Office for Young Adult and Campus Ministries
at The Episcopal Church Center

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“Watch, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.”

—Mark 13:35, 36

Greetings and peace to you in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ! You are holding in your hands a small gift that has been lovingly crafted for you especially for this season of Advent. This year, the season of Advent begins on Sunday, November 29 and concludes with the great celebration of Christmas on December 25. During that time, the church calls each of her members to an attitude of reflection, prayer, and faithful expectation. Jesus is still “not yet” and we eagerly await the coming of God in our lives once again.

Traditionally in Advent, Christians have marked off each day of the season in some way or another. I remember as a child opening a new door each day on a children’s Advent calendar in order to find a tasty piece of chocolate waiting for me. I never wanted the days of Advent to end! But end they must, and end they do, with the birth of the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. How will you prepare for this day? Consider what you have in your hands an Advent calendar of a different sort. No, you won’t find nuggets of chocolate on each page (sorry!), but you will find a rich daily meditation that has been written with you in mind. The purpose of this little booklet is to carry you through the days

of Advent, offering up a bit of Christian spiritual wisdom and insight, in order to help prepare you for the coming of Christmas. The authors of these meditations come from all over the Episcopal Church and are of all ages. We hope you will find them moving, humorous, profound and helpful.

To the young service men and women of the United States military, please accept this guide with the sincerest gratitude for what you do for our nation and our world. The church is praying for you always. May this Advent be one of great expectation and even greater fulfillment.

Your brother in Christ,

Lucas Grubbs

on behalf of the Committee for Young Adult Ministry

advent: week one

November 29-December 5

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the First Sunday of Advent
The Book of Common Prayer, page 211

First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2009

*If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me,
you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress.
As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided
the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths;
my feet have not slipped.*

—Psalm 17: 3-5, 8-9, 12, 19-21

I am a veteran of the tumultuous 1960's. It was the time of peace and love, but also war in Vietnam. My duty assignment was to transfer officers and enlisted men from various stations across the United States to a West Coast Base in preparation for assignment to Viet Nam. These personnel were to become the boat crews that patrolled Viet Nam's inland rivers. These young men were all volunteers.

When these crews were first placed together prior to training, they were fresh, innocent, and happy young men who were looking forward in anticipation of their duty to preserve freedoms in a far off land. At the end of the training the smiles were gone, apprehension apparent, however, before me stood men of conviction. These men were now warriors. I was extremely proud of each one of them.

Rick Stenzel, Yeoman Second Class, U.S. Coast Guard, Retired
Diocese of Northern California

But you, O Lord, do not be far away, O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! Amen.

First Monday of Advent

November 30, 2009

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

—Psalm 23:1

And, yet, so often, I find that I do. I desperately want a moment of silence set along still waters. I hope to stumble along the paths of righteousness. I long to bend my knees in the open, green meadow and breathe fresh air. For me, this Psalm is an intense prayer that hopes for a deep, inner wellspring of God-given peace, overflowing even when we are in the darkness. So often, I find myself in these dark valleys, completely spent. I reach back to grasp for the green pasture but only find a dry blade of grass.

Why does there never seem to be a moment to restore my soul among bucolic fields of wildflowers and babbling brooks? Perhaps this is why the Psalmist says he is made to lie down in green pastures. Maybe it is simply not our natural state to be still, so we must be made to stop.

And then, lying there, grass cool against my back, sun warming my face, God continues to remind me: Do not to fear the shadow of Death; God is life. God calls out to me from the house of Goodness and Mercy, telling me that a room awaits.

David Henson, Diocese of Northern California

God of the dark valleys and greenest pastures, Make us to lie down when our feet cannot stop. Lead us, stubborn though we are, toward still waters. Restore our souls even when they strain to run away. Amen.

First Tuesday of Advent

December 1, 2009

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

—Psalm 118:22, 23

Advent marks the dawn, inverted. A savior cries, amid dust and hay, and burdened beasts. Shepherds stinking of sheep lovingly leave black finger marks on the baby's forehead. The one who opens the gates of righteousness was born in the barn when the door to the inn was shut. The strong city that Isaiah envisions is built by the poor and needy on top of the crumbling towers of the powerful and wealthy.

But who are the citizens of such a city? Time and again, Jesus explains to his followers that the kingdom of God is populated by the “least of these,” who welcomed the Advent dirty, but happy. All these stones rejected by a buttoned-down society will be cornerstones in the kingdom.

When we erect our houses of worship, which stones do we seek? When the winds and the rains come, will we be found in the lofty city with the inhabitants of the precarious heights? Or will we be found, dusty and dirty, as close to the solid rock as we can get?

Amber Henson, Captain U.S. Air Force, Diocese of Northern California

God of the upside-down kingdom, Grant us the strength to let go of our power in order to be your hands among the powerless. Bless us with the courage to find ourselves covered in dirt and not cringe. Help us to share our blessings with the least of these. May we serve them to serve You. Amen.

First Wednesday of Advent

December 2, 2009

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them.

—Mark 10:14

I count myself as blessed for having been raised in a culture that romanticizes childhood. Children are often considered to have about them a certain amount of innocence and purity. When we read texts like that from Mark, it is easy to assume that the gospel writers had the same ideas about childhood that we have.

But in reality, the gospel writers lived in a world that didn't place children on any sort of pedestal. So far as society was concerned, children were virtually invisible. When Jesus picks up these children, blesses them, places them in the middle of things, he is challenging the disciples to open their hearts to those whom the world has judged to be non-persons.

Jesus suggests that, in some way, the faithfulness of our Christian discipleship is measured by the extent to which we welcome and care for those whom society has disregarded. To receive the vulnerable, outcast child is to receive Christ.

Nathan Finnin, Diocese of East Carolina

Lord, we are all your children. We thank you that you welcome us into your family, that you claim each of us in our baptism, and that you remember our names. Help us to always use the gifts that you have given us as we seek to answer your charge that we welcome every one of our brothers and sisters into your church. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

First Thursday of Advent

December 3, 2009

*The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.*

—Isaiah 40:8

We are the grass of the field, the flowers in the meadow. Like the grass and flowers, we wither and fade. But if we are rooted in the Word of God, we have faith that after we wither and fade, there is opportunity for new growth. This reminds me of a song called “Closing Time,” from the mid-90’s band Semisonic in which part of the chorus says, “Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.” God’s promise to us through Jesus is a hope rooted in new beginnings. However, we must understand that to make room for new beginnings we have to let our old self die. The grass must wither and the flower must fade to make room for the resurgence of life. One of many things that the Living Word teaches us is that we are everlastingly being made new, being reborn, learning from our mistakes, putting the past behind us and making space for new beginnings. This is one reason why Advent is so important. We must prepare for new beginnings.

Caleb J. Lee, Diocese of East Carolina

Heavenly Father, prepare in me a space for the coming of the Lord. Hold me up when I wither and fade. For you hold the promise that when I die in spirit, there is always opportunity for renewal and a return to your loving arms. Through Jesus Christ, our holy example of your eternal promise. Amen.

First Friday of Advent

December 4, 2009

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

—Mark 1:4

I think John the Baptizer was a hippie. He wore strange clothes that he probably got used from the local thrift store. He had an odd diet: bugs and honey. He liked to preach and remind people that they are in need of forgiveness. He lived in the wilderness. I imagine he had a pretty rough look.

Secretly, I have always wanted to be a hippie. I always thought they looked cool and are free spirited and freethinking. But hippies don't get much respect. Most people assume that they are lazy and dirty. I guess what I am getting at is that you can't judge a person by their appearance. Some of our greatest prophets are people who we least expect. I wonder what would happen if John the Baptizer was somehow reincarnated. What would our reaction be? We would probably say something like "There goes another crazy, dirty hippy." Wouldn't that be a shame? How many prophets have been brushed aside because we have labeled them crazy? I wonder what would happen if we all started to really listen to ourselves and to God.

Matt Scully, Diocese of East Carolina

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

First Saturday of Advent

December 5, 2009

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ...Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

—Matthew 6:31-34.

Anxiety is not of God. However, anxiety seems to be a staple of the human condition. There are a host of things we can worry about, but to what end? Earlier in this chapter from Matthew, Jesus says, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” There is no benefit to the worrisome road that we travel and yet we can’t seem to get off of it.

Maybe the need for control leads us down this path. Maybe it’s the desire to have things happen on our time table. Whatever the reason, the results are often frustrating, disappointing and confusing.

Attaining the peace that passes all understanding begins with seeking God’s kingdom and doing so in a proactive and contemplative manner. “Night Prayer” from “A New Zealand Prayer Book” frames it this way:

Ewart Jones, Diocese of Texas

It is but lost labour that we haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of anxiety. For those beloved of God are given gifts even while they sleep. Amen.

advent: week two

December 6-12

*Merciful God, who sent your messengers
the prophets to preach repentance and
prepare the way for our salvation: Give
us grace to heed their warnings and
forsake our sins, that we may greet
with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our
Redeemer; who lives and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now
and for ever. Amen.*

Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent
The Book of Common Prayer, page 211

Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2009

*“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching
and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer.”*

—Acts 2:42

As boring as this may sound, our God is a God of moderation. God’s never changing and persistent love for us is a great example of the beauty of the routine.

People often talk about “mountain top” experiences, but to have one of those you usually come from some type of valley. Spiritual rollercoasters provide fleeting moments of exhilaration, but you always have to stop, get off the ride and stand in line if you want the experience again. Faith is not about having to be jump-started out of your funk in order to experience a “Jesus moment,” it’s about living into the steadfast love of God.

When Jesus had a mountain top experience, it usually involved going to the mountainside to pray. There is comfort in knowing that a slow and steady pace grounded in the model of Jesus Christ provides a firm foundation to express our faith walk.

Ewart Jones, Diocese of Texas

Oh God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second Monday of Advent

December 7, 2009

*Remember that I have commended you to be determined
and confident! Do not be afraid or discouraged,
for I, the Lord your God am with you wherever you Go.*

—Joshua 1:9

It is amazing how a few words can bring us back to trust, to belief, to confidence that everything will be just fine. As Christians we sometimes forget that God is the only one that can close doors no man can open and opens doors no man can close.

This past week I've been under a lot of stress, worrying too much about what was to become of my life. Although I felt blessings in other aspects of my life, I couldn't seem to fully enjoy those blessings because of the other things that were bothering me. I needed someone to remind me of God's call to Joshua, commanding him to be confident, to not be afraid because God is going to be with him always. And as we all know the Lord works in mysterious ways. He is always sending angels to remind us of his power, mercy and love for us. Very often these angels work through sending or saying words. I encourage you, when God leads you to the edge of the cliff, trust him fully and let go. One of two things will happen: He will catch you when you fall, or He will teach you how to fly!

Wendy Arleene Barrett Buchanan, Diocese of Honduras

Dear Lord, keep reminding me of how great you are, keep teaching me lessons either by catching me or letting me fall. Make me a stronger believer, a stronger Christian with the confidence that you will always be with me. Amen.

Second Tuesday of Advent

December 8, 2009

*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you
not only the gospel of God but our lives as well,
because you had become so dear to us.*

—1 Thessalonians 2:8

Never let the zeal of wanting to spread the Gospel get in the way of actually communicating the true love of Christ. It's often a slippery slope we find ourselves on when we are called to share the Good News.

The reality is that the most effective type of communication occurs when relationship is established. It's not only important to know the audience, it's important to relate to the audience. Listening is more significant than talking. Sincere actions are more relevant than well-intended words.

When the time is taken to become “dear” to those around us, the fellowship of the Lord is a natural and truly wonderful result.

Ewart Jones, Diocese of Texas

Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second Wednesday of Advent

December 9, 2009

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails.”

—1 Corinthians 13:4

Paul is talking about love in its fullest meaning; true love between God and man. Without this love we have nothing, the most glorious spiritual gifts are of no use. Paul writes that, in the sight of God, “A clear head and a deep understanding are of no value without a forgiving and charitable heart.”

In this violent, selfish and faulty world, Christians need to know and have the perfect love, which is revealed through Jesus Christ. We as Christians understand the need to make living sacrifices as we try to love other people and particularly those who hate us. Surely God demands and requires a self-denial from our human flesh to understand and practice the perfect love.

Fred Isaac Flores Cano, Diocese of Honduras

Lord, thank you for this day you have given us. I ask you to please teach us to forgive those that sin against us, and to love one another in the name of your son Jesus Christ.

Second Thursday of Advent

December 10, 2009

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

—Psalm 136:1

I know with certainty that God challenges us, yet is faithful and giving. When I have been challenged to the point of not knowing if I can endure a level of pain, I am reminded that I am not alone. I have personally known days where I felt at my lowest emotional point. I became a child once more. I cried so much I had no tears left. I did not know my future. I was unable to pray. I was told by a wise friend, “God understands.” God was OK with the fact I was unable to have a dialogue with Him. She advised me to sit in the cathedral in solitude and find comfort by His presence. It was the most powerful day of transformation; I sat in the quiet pews of the cathedral and wept.

God is faithful. He doesn't desert us in our good or bad days. He is always present in our lives. We may be faced with challenges that seem unbearable, but He doesn't push us past our personal strength and limits. With trust and faith, windows are opened, allowing us to persevere, finding the hidden blessings in our pain.

Diane Bawcom, Diocese of Idaho

Almighty and steadfast God, uphold and strengthen us in all that we do, that we may remain always walking in your most holy ways, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Second Friday of Advent

December 11, 2009

For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.
—I Corinthians 6:20

According to Corinthians, we need to use our bodies in a way that is pleasing to God, in ways that are moral. It's tempting to skip over this admonition. Indeed, before becoming a Christian I never understood the concept of sinning against one's own body. According to a pragmatic or worldly view, if it hurt me but did not hurt others, there was nothing wrong with it.

We all have gone down the path of engaging in some action which makes us unhappy and on that basis realizing it was a mistake. But what about an act that makes us happy or at least not unhappy, but which is not pleasing to Christ? Christ says that our bodies do not belong to us, but to the body of Christ. Indeed, I realized only recently that the ramifications of these acts can only be fully understood in relationship to Christ himself and his body, as something that distracts from and disturbs our relationship with him and with all the people who make up "the body." Therefore it's not so much disgust that we should be feeling at our actions, but rather the missed opportunity of being closer to the body of Christ and the feeling of love which emanates from it.

Zena Cook, Diocese of Idaho

Lord Jesus Christ, God in human form, keep us ever mindful of the bodily needs of others, and help us to sustain those in need, that our bodies may glorify and honor you and your creation. Amen.

Second Saturday of Advent

December 12, 2009

*I press on toward the goal for the prize
of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 3:14

“What kind of work do you do?” In our culture, this seemingly innocent question too frequently masks the real questions: “How well are you educated? Do you make much money? How powerful are you?”

We sense that we will be judged on our answer, and frequently we are. If we have a good job, we answer the question with our job title or description. If we don't have a good job, or any job at all, we answer with a rationalization of why we don't.

Think, though, about how Jesus might have described the kind of work that he did: “I glorify God on earth.” What a great world it would be if each of us could honestly say that our life's work was glorifying God on earth. Glorifying God doesn't take money, it doesn't take education, it doesn't take a beautiful face. We just have to do it.

We can start right now by doing at least one thing a day that glorifies God. If we do this often enough perhaps we will, before we die, be able to answer the question “What kind of work did you do?” with the answer, “I glorified God on earth.”

Elizabeth Nelson, Diocese of Idaho

Watch over all who labor, dear Lord, that the work we do may glorify you and build up your love in the world. Amen.

advent: week three

December 13-19

*Stir up your power, O Lord, and with
great might come among us; and,
because we are sorely hindered by our
sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy
speedily help and deliver us; through
Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with
you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and
glory, now and for ever. Amen.*

Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent
The Book of Common Prayer, page 212

Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2009

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
just as God in Christ forgave you.*

—Ephesians 4:32

The world needs kindness. But let's narrow the scope even further. Your world needs kindness. Your home needs kindness. Where people are living in close proximity, kindness sometimes gets lost.

In the New Testament, the language of the church is the language of the home. The fruit of the Spirit is tested in that laboratory we call the family. If we can be tenderhearted, kind, and forgiving with our families and in our homes, we can be those things anywhere on the face of the earth.

I have experience where I needed to forgive someone who has done wrong to me for many years. I learned that the only way that I will find peace in my life is if I forgive the person who has acted wrongly.

Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood for all of our sins. So why can't we seem to forgive each other? Life is too short for revenge, grudges, and not forgiving! He did it for us -- why can't we do it for each other?

Kamilah Z. Ragoo and Diona M. Stokes-Moncur, Diocese of Southeast Florida

Dear Lord, just as you preach forgiveness; please help us to follow your teachings and forgive those who have wronged us before and become better followers of your Word. Amen.

Third Monday of Advent

December 14, 2009

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out
to the place which he would receive as inheritance.
And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

—Hebrews 11:8

Hope is necessary in our lives because often our way is unknown. God came to Abraham and said, “I want you to go to a place that I have charted out for you. I want you to leave your home and your family and go there.” He didn’t give Abraham a map. He just said, “Go,” and Abraham pulled up everything, and he left.

It was the hope that Abraham had in his heart that helped him get through the way he didn’t know. Abraham woke up every morning not knowing what God was up to, but his hope helped him hold on to what God had told him.

Some of us ask God to help us, but don’t believe in our hearts that he will come through for us. God’s promise takes time and we have to be patient and believe that it will happen. If God said in His word that He will never leave you or forsake you then he meant it, just put your hope in him and believe.

Maureen E. Campbell, Diocese of Southeast Florida

Lord, open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts to hear your message and remove any doubts that we have. Amen

Third Tuesday of Advent

December 15, 2009

*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

—Ephesians 2:10

I'm really into goals, objectives, and plans. I had a hard time figuring out what is God's plan for me career wise, and I tended to get frustrated. Then, I realized that God's plan doesn't always come when you want it, but when God is ready.

I have no idea what God is up to in my life and yours, but as He works his mighty Spirit, we are about to find out. God is not going to put a note on the chart to tell you what it is. God is going to do it in His own mysterious and unexpected ways through us, as we trust Him and pray.

But as we pray, we may discover that what we thought were great lofty goals, are pale and puny alongside God's goals for our life and ministry.

Let us ask God to make us faithful as people of prayer, and let us pray that God will do his work through us. Then, whatever God wants to do, let's be open to it! God has a plan for your life. Allow Him to work through you.

Lemuel R. Moncur, Diocese of Southeast Florida

Dear Lord, sometimes we have our own agendas, but only your agenda is all that matters. We pray to you Lord that your plans for our lives represents your work and our favorable in your sight. Amen.

Third Wednesday of Advent

December 16, 2009

*I baptize you with water for repentance,
but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...*

—Matthew 3:11

Being a good follower is not exactly the most admired trait in our society, but that's what I see in John the Baptist: a great follower. This is the way I look at John the Baptist. To be sure, Jesus had more than a few dedicated followers. But John the Baptist was a follower who believed before he saw Jesus do anything spectacular like raise the dead or love his neighbors like himself. He believed that a leader was coming before he knew that leader. How hard must it be to have faith that a change of such monumental, world-altering proportions is on its way?

How different would the story be if John had refused to acknowledge Jesus as his leader? After all, John had been a leader in his own right, with his own following. And he relinquished that authority and power without hesitation. He discerned that his time of leadership, in that particular way, was at an end. And yet, we all know John still had a part to play in the story, just as each of us do, whether we are leading or following.

Nicole Seiferth, Diocese of New York

***Lord, help us to know that we are all your beloved children.
Help us to follow the way of Jesus, who leads us towards you.
In Christ's name we pray, Amen.***

Third Thursday of Advent

December 17, 2009

Let anyone with ears listen!

—Matthew 11:15

I live in Manhattan, a center of culture, commerce, and noise. Jackhammers, car horns, loud neighbors in the apartment downstairs, Christmas music piped into the park down the block from my office. It's a very noisy place.

Maybe that's why I've come to appreciate the quiet moments of my life so much. It's in quiet that I'm able to reflect, to hear the blessings of the season. I like to think that the hill that the shepherds were sitting on was very quiet before the angel broke in and disturbed it all with the pronouncement that Jesus had been born. And then, after the angel left (flew away, disappeared, who knows how angels handle graceful exits?), there must have been at least a moment of stunned silence. It's in that moment of stunned silence that I find the joy and delight that is Christmas. The quiet moments are all connected for me – the quiet of Advent as I anticipate what's coming, that stunned silence of the Christmas miracle, and on to what must have been another stunned moment of silence when the two women came upon an empty tomb on Easter morning. So, yes, silence is difficult for me, just as faith is difficult, but it is so very worth searching for.

Nicole Seiferth, Diocese of New York

Lord, teach me to find silence and quiet within myself in the midst of a noisy world, and help me to find you in that silence and quiet. Amen.

Third Friday of Advent

December 18, 2009

So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

—Luke 3:18-20

Sometimes, John the Baptist doesn't seem very smart: he didn't have to criticize Herod and the other rulers of his day with quite so much vehemence. Couldn't he have been just a little bit more subtle and discreet? The answer is, of course -- no, he couldn't. Subtlety was not part of who John was. He was on fire, passionate about the wrongs he saw all around him. He rebelled against the status quo. And, like so much else about John, his rebellion was a mere precursor to the far greater rebellion that his cousin, Jesus, brought to the world. Talk about rebellion against the status quo. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies. Forgive.

John was human. Loved by God in all his imperfections, loved by Jesus, although surely he caused Jesus some inconvenience (maybe even some familial embarrassment?). Like all of us, John's actions were an imperfect reflection of the perfect, astonishing love that Jesus lived and preached.

Diana Church, Diocese of Kentucky

Lord, help us to be passionate in righting the wrongs of this world, in championing the dignity of every human being. Help us to recognize and love that dignity in ourselves, as well. Amen.

Third Saturday of Advent

December 19, 2009

*You are those who have stood by me in my trials;
and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me,
a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table
in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones
judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

—Luke 22: 28-30

As we see in this passage, Jesus addresses the importance of serving and standing strong in the face of trials and adversity. We also see that there is promise of what may come once the trials are passed through. We understand that as soldiers in a foreign land, one must stand strong in the face of trials everyday. That one must also keep hold of the promises that wait once ones trials are complete. Just as the disciples stood by Jesus in his trying times, keep in mind that even during your hardest times there is loving support from family, friends, and your brothers and sisters in Christ.

During the season of Advent, we are reminded of the need to have hope and contemplation.

Ben Badgett, Diocese of Kentucky

Dear, Lord help us to listen and focus during this season of reflection. Receive our thanks for you loving invitation, in your name we pray. Amen.

advent: week four

December 20-24

*Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by
your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus
Christ, at his coming, may find in us a
mansion prepared for himself; who lives and
reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent
The Book of Common Prayer, page 212

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2009

And he said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!' Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.'

—Luke 22:33-34

Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation for the coming of the Christ child at Christmas. As we read the passage in Luke, we see that Simon Peter expresses an earnest desire to follow and serve, even to the point of prison or death. How humbling must it have been for Simon Peter to hear Jesus' reply. Yet Jesus follows that by asking if they ever lacked anything when they were sent out. Their answer was a resounding "nothing." As we see ourselves preparing for and anticipating the upcoming Christmas season, what is it that we carry with us? What are the gifts, blessings, and talents we possess that will allow us to follow and serve the Christ child? Do we lack anything?

In this time of preparation and anticipation, have you taken a personal inventory?

Amy Real Coultas, Diocese of Kentucky

Dear Lord, during this blessed time we give thanks for the many gifts you have bestowed upon us, give us the strength to use those gifts to better your creation. Amen.

Fourth Monday of Advent

December 21, 2009

You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him." He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.'

—John 3:28-30

John serves as a model for how we might prepare for the coming of Christ into the world. He teaches us to watch and listen for the ways in which we are called to cooperate in God's work. We learn to share God's message of love and mercy with others, inviting them to join us in watching, listening, and sharing. As we see God's work happening around us, we rejoice. Joy compels us to give more of ourselves to do God's work, humbled by the power of Christ to embrace and transform creation through the sharing of our lives in service to others.

Kendall Badgett, Diocese of Kentucky

We pray to you Lord, to remind us of the joys this season brings. We give you thanks for the rebirth that is offered to us in the name of your son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fourth Tuesday of Advent

December 22, 2009

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son;
those who believe in him won't perish but have eternal life.*

—John 3:16

For the love that God had, has and always will have; he sent his only son.

Have you ever wondered how God really is? I have. I know that the answer to this question for me is that he is everything, everywhere, he is our father, our creator, he is powerful, he has a place for us with him in heaven; he is righteous and loveable.

If in this world you have made many mistakes, in heaven they will all equal to zero. We aren't perfect, so we have him to correct, judge, and love us. We won't ever lack love, strength, and forgiveness in God, as he promised that those who believe in Jesus Christ won't perish, they will have eternal life.

Eduardo B. Vasquez Lavaire, Diocese of Honduras

Dear Lord, thank you for all the good things you've given me, especially for the sacrifice you sent your son to make for me and all humanity. Amen

Fourth Wednesday of Advent

December 23, 2009

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

—Hebrews 12:1-2

A few years ago, I helped organized a youth camp. We had to deal with a number of obstacles: lack of finances, bad weather, transportation problems. I was tired, stressed out, and really interested in getting it over with at any cost. Then the day of camp came, and everything started to fall into place. The best part was being able to feel God's spirit and presence with us.

Some of us tend to think that we can't show our need of a closer, deeper spiritual encounter with God. Sometimes we don't allow ourselves the chance to enjoy and listen to God's voice speaking to us.

Wendy Arlene Barrett Buchanan, Diocese of Honduras

Dear God, sometimes I am consumed by so many things that I seem to forget that you are next to me listening, loving me, and asking me to put my trust in you. Thank you for such great love. Thank you for letting me feel your presence, get a taste of your grace, and rest secure in knowing that this is your will. Amen.

Fourth Thursday of Advent

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2009

My friends, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure.

—James 1: 2-4

In the life of a Christian there are many temptations and mistakes that lead to sin. But many of us have heard that “we learn from our mistakes” and, even if it sounds like nonsense, it is true. As we grow as Christians, we encounter temptations that require us to choose between doing what is good and what is bad. Depending on the decisions we make, it might turn out to be a big mistake. That is when we turn to the Lord asking for his forgiveness, hoping that next time we will think twice and won't make the same mistake again.

Mistakes and temptation make us realize that we are not perfect and we will never be, even though we were made in God's image and likeness. Learning from those mistakes helps us develop a greater understanding that without the Lord we are nothing. We must rejoice in the temptations that are placed in our way, because they help us to understand and they develop our patience. They bring us closer to God.

Joseph David Sheran, Diocese of Honduras

Lord, thank you for this day and for your wonderful mercy. I ask you to show me how to live and to rejoice in temptations which bring us closer to you. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

2009

The Office for Young Adult and Campus Ministries
at the Episcopal Church Center

*for a daily meditation, please send an email with your e-mail address as the subject line
and “join meditations” in the body to mharewood@episcopalchurch.org*