



Preparing to Become the  
**BELOVED  
COMMUNITY**

# Advent 1

**Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race**

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Read the Scripture Together: Mark 13:24-72

**Reflection: Keep Awake**

In the gospel, Jesus promises a new day is coming. He also urges people to wake and get ready. What does that mean for us? One of the earliest, hardest steps toward becoming a community that reflects God's dream is telling the truth. Like the servants left behind, we may be tempted to bury our heads, but there is grace and truth in examining our church's story and bringing to light what has been hidden. Jesus invites us to see what is really happening and then to ask for the Spirit's power to live anew.

**In the Labyrinth: Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race**

We cannot become what God created us to be unless we also examine who we have been and who we are today. Who are you, as a church community? What groups are included and excluded? What things have you, as a church, done and left undone?

**Make It Real: Inside/Outside Exercise**

Gather in groups, ideally of no more than eight people. Share the **Conversation Tips** from the welcome letter. Now invite people to pause and recall a particular time and place when you felt welcome, as if your voice, ideas, and presence were valued (if it has never happened, imagine it in detail). Pair off and tell the story to a neighbor, for about one minute each.

# Advent 3

**Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus**

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Read the Scripture together: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

**Reflection: Stir Us Up**

The Prophet Isaiah envisions a holy community where all people flourish and seek the good for each other and it all begins with the amount of the Holy Spirit. How often do we pause in our efforts and ask God to stir, anoint, and equip us for the journey? Remember that we are always learning and practicing the way of Jesus, who blesses and teaches us to live his way of love.

**Pattern of Jesus**

Loving our neighbor takes formation, practice, and commitment. How will each of us learn to be reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers in Jesus' name? How could we practice sharing stories, growing relationship across dividing walls, and seeking Christ in the "other"? Gather in circles of no more than 15 people. Review the **Conversation Tips** from the welcome letter. Now reflect on ways your congregation or ministry engages in loving your neighbors, within and outside the church. Make a list of the most significant ministries (*no more than three*). For each ...

- Recall the story of how your church took up this ministry. Who had the idea? Why did others say "yes"?

Next, recall a particular time and place when you felt unwelcome, as if your voice, ideas and presence were not valued or received. Share with the same neighbor. Then reflect in the small group. What did it feel like to share about being welcome? Unwelcome? To hear someone else's story? What did you learn?

Now as a whole group, take a large sheet of paper and draw a circle.

- What racial, cultural, and ethnic groups experience their voices, presence, and ideas as valued and welcome in our congregation today? Which groups have been welcome and shaped your church's story since its founding? Write those groups in the inner circle.
- What racial, cultural, and ethnic groups are not present and/or not welcome in your congregation today, although they are in the same or a nearby town, area, or region? Write margins in the past? Write those groups in the wider circle. How do you feel as you recall and share these realities? Where do you see possibilities for growing into Beloved Community? Name them together.

**Closing Prayer**

You may wish to give thanks for God's grace, wisdom, and abiding love, and for the honesty, courage, and vulnerability people demonstrated. You may return to the promise of forgiveness and new life that we receive in Jesus Christ.

• Describe the process of beginning the ministry. What was hard? What made it work?

- What (and who) did you not know at the beginning that you know now?
- How has God blessed you and your church through relationships? How are those experiences a gift you can help you to approach forming these challenging new relationships? How could the ministry experiences you described before reflect together?
- How could the deeper relationship? Once the circle has decided, develop deeper relationship? Which groups would whom your church has experienced separation or even also socioeconomic, ideological, and theological - with Think about people groups - racial, ethnic, and cultural, but Now consider your conversations over the first two weeks.

What new learning and practice would help you to prepare for relationship across difference and division? Book study? Dismantling racism training? Story-telling training? Pilgrimage Prayer? (*For specific information, check episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation*)

**Closing Prayer**

You may give thanks for particular gifts of the Spirit that are now or have been present in your church's life (humility, resilience, generosity, compassion, etc.). You could also ask for God's gracious accompaniment as you venture into spaces of difference and discovery.

The whole journey is framed around the labyrinth.

Why? In the ministry of racial healing and justice, none of us walks a straight line. We enter the labyrinth wherever God has provided an opening – telling the

We make the journey not only as individual Christians and congregations, but as a whole church. This spring, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies Gay Clark Jennings and their supporting officers shared "Becoming Beloved Community," a new vision document that lays out the Episcopal Church's long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice. A second resource — "Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are" — details many ways for individuals and congregations to take concrete steps toward change and healing. Both are available at [www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community), along with a host of resources for faithful reflection and action.

Advent is a season of preparation: shopping for gifts, decorating our homes and sanctuaries. Advent is also a time to prepare our hearts and communities for the coming of Christ, the Almighty God who came among us poor and homeless, a stranger and a child. There may be no better time to reflect on how we as the Episcopal Church embrace the Holy One who continues to draw near in the neighbor, the stranger, the refugee, or the one who seems most "other" to you. It is the ideal season to commit to becoming Beloved Community and growing loving, liberating, life-giving relationships across the human family of God.

*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God ... Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together. -Isaiah 40:3,5*

# Welcome

# Advent 2

**Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community**

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Read the Scripture Together: Mark 1:1-8

**Reflection: Proclaim Good News**

God sent John the Baptist to proclaim the good news that we could repent, be forgiven, and return to God's dream of restoration and salvation. John didn't just cry out in the wilderness; he prepared people to enter the waters of baptism, to share their deepest truths, and to rise up ready and/or not welcome in your congregation today, although they are in the same or a nearby town, area, or region? Write margins in the past? Write those groups in the wider circle. How do you feel as you recall and share these realities? Where do you see possibilities for growing into Beloved Community? Name them together.

**Closing Prayer**

You may wish to give thanks for God's grace, wisdom, and abiding love, and for the honesty, courage, and vulnerability people demonstrated. You may return to the promise of forgiveness and new life that we receive in Jesus Christ.

**Make It Real: Listening & Learning Session**

Gather in groups of ideally no more than seven people each. Review the **Conversation Tips** from the welcome letter. Ask each participant to tell a story using one of the following

# Advent 4

**Repairing the Breach in Institutions and Society**

Pray the Collect for This Sunday

Read the Scripture Together: Luke 1:26-38

**Reflection: Here I Am ...**

Imagine young Mary's surprise: She has just learned she carries the Messiah in her womb. Impossible! Rather than balk at the enormity of her call, Mary leans into the power of the Spirit and says "yes." The idea of healing and transforming deeply broken systems, structures, and institutions may sound impossible to us. We can borrow Mary's courage and faith and say as a church, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord."

**In the Labyrinth: Repairing the Breach in Institutions and Society**

God came among us in Jesus because of the deep, divine longing to love and repair this world. What social institutions and systems are broken around you? Where do you notice systems and structures that reflect racial injustice? How could we together participate in the repair, restoration, and healing of institutions and systems?

**Make It Real: In Solidarity Exercise**

The coming of Christ is so close we can sense him. Dwell for a moment with your own longing for Jesus' coming. After some silence, as a whole group, sing or speak this hymn:

Prompts: Allow at most two minutes for each story, with a little silence but no discussion between each. Each group should designate a timekeeper who will gently but clearly indicate when each speaker has 30 seconds left, then 10 seconds, and when time is up.

1. When I walk around this neighborhood/town/city/community, I feel ...
2. When I look at our neighborhood/town/city/community, I dream of ...
3. To me, Beloved Community looks like ...
4. I was especially aware of my race when I ...
5. I was saddened about race in our neighborhood/town/city/community when ...
6. I was grateful for race in our neighborhood/town/city/community when ...
7. To foster Beloved Community, I hope to ...

Offer everyone the opportunity to share a story. If there is time, go a second round and invite each person to choose a different prompt. Leave 10 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- What surprised you? Did someone's story change the way you view a situation or idea?
- What stories or ideas do you wish you could hear? How can you humbly invite those voices to the listening & learning process?

**Closing Prayer**

• Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel That mourns in lowly exile here, until the son of God appear Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel Invite people to pause and silently imagine communities near and far who wait for ransom and relief: refugees, immigrants without documentation, prisoners and detainees in the criminal justice system, victims of human trafficking, and many others. What unjust systems and institutions in our society disproportionately target people of color? In a posture of deep prayer, name these systems aloud. After naming and capturing them, and reviewing the **Conversation Tips** from the welcome letter, reflect as a group:

- Which of these systems and institutions most intersects with the life of your church or community? Agree on no more than two.
- What efforts can you identify, as a group, that contribute to healing and transforming the systems you have named? Research options on the web in real time.
- How could your church actively participate in repairing one of the systems the group identified? Together, set one concrete, achievable goal for engagement in the year ahead.

**Closing Prayer**

Invite people to name what graces they have experienced in these Advent sessions. Name the gifts you need, as individuals and a congregation, to keep walking the labyrinth and becoming Beloved Community. You might finally ask Jesus to dwell richly in you, so that you can share his light and be Jesus Movement people in the world.

Preparing to Become the

# BELOVED COMMUNITY

THE Episcopal CHURCH



Wherever you are, this Advent every Episcopal ministry is invited to prepare to embrace Jesus' ministry of reconciliation and healing. Open this packet and discover a full set of resources to guide community prayer, reflection, and action. Additional resources and conversation space at [www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community)

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