

Daily Meditations around the Advent Wreath

Today we enter the First Week in Advent ~

We light the first candle (one on the circle) to remember the voice and vision of the prophets and peoples who longed for a saviour and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.



LB file photos

Music for the first week in Advent:

Carol: O come o come Emmanuel to gather in your arms our suffering world.
We dwell in darkness yearning for light.
O come again and bring us love and life.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel has come to us, o people of this Earth.
Or
God rest you, merry, gentle ones, let nothing you dismay.
Remember Christ our saviour was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, o tidings of comfort and joy.

Taize: Within the darkest night you kindle a fire that never dies away.

Handel's Messiah: Aria - Bass: The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light
Tenor Recitative: Comfort ye my people

As you enter into prayer today, as this season of Advent opens, what is the longing deep in your heart?

Trusting that the Spirit is here to help you, read through this passage several times really slowly. You may find that reading aloud helps you slow down. Let the words move deeply into your being, like refreshing rain into dry soil. Allow a word or phrase to touch you. Listen for the Holy One to speak to you in your deep longing from Isaiah 9:

The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light: those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exulting when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken, as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

As you continue in prayer now, reflect on the word or phrase that has touched you, exploring what it means to you here and now. Let the word or phrase connect with your personal situation.

Consider the communities and nations you are part of. What darkness in your community or nation needs to be eased and addressed? What might it mean to long for justice and well-being in your neighbourhood, in your city?

Respond to God about what you have thought, and noticed through this reading and reflection: write or pray your response, dance or paint or even sing your response: in gratitude, trust, longing, repentance or intercession.

Feel free ... for as long as it takes.

As you gaze at the Advent candle, sit quietly with God, at rest in the presence of the One who loves you. Be still, trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work in the depths of your spirit deepening your faith. Allow the Word to move from you head to your heart to dwell there in peace-full silence.

Holy One, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Two of the First Week in Advent ~

Lighting the candle again, we remember the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a saviour and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.

Today we hear from the prophet Jeremiah (ch.8) We may be surprised at the bleakness and despair, and wonder how this sits with the fun-filled expectancy of Advent. My human condition, my divided heart, my self-absorption, my busy distracted-ness all lead me to suffering, to unjust practices, and to many sparkling images...

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.

Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols? The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved."

For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

Here, Jeremiah has a whole raft of questions to God about his society. I take some moments to articulate my own heart-felt questions about our society.

Am I able to stay with the hurt, the mourning, the dismay? Or do I want a quick solution and to move on? Israel waited many centuries, many harvests, many summers ...

But it's not just "those people out there" who are provocative, who oppress, who serve themselves....

While in this prayer space, I recall the times I too have turned aside. I reflect on this past week, on how I have spent my time, on how I have spent my money, on how I have spoken ... and I know why my joy has gone and my heart is sick.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord grant us your peace.

Reading the passage again, I give thanks for people like Jeremiah who have the courage to lament and voice their concerns before God

Holy One, hear my prayer, and may my cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Three of the First Week in Advent ~

as we light the candle again, we remember the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a saviour and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities

Hope rises in today's reading from Habakkuk 3

Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord;

I will exult in the God of my salvation, God the Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights.

This lament from the world of agriculture reminds us of our environment, of global warming, of our poor stewardship of creation. And there is also the world of commerce, of the internet, of cities and neighbourhoods, of the marginalised, of the powerful. How would Habbukuk express himself in our context?

Read the passage again. You may find rising within you a parallel litany of all that is going wrong in your neighbourhood, your family, or the world. You may even wish, after this meditation, to write a 'dynamic equivalent' for our day, following Habbukuk's pattern.

How will your version end? "God makes my feet"?

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went,
Oh morning, at the brown brink eastward springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.

G.M.Hopkins

Holy One, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Four of the First Week in Advent ~

with candle lit, we remember again the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a saviour and leader who would ease their suffering, bring justice, and well-being to their nation and communities

Psalm 10 is a profound expression of the injustice, suffering and distress people are still experiencing today.

(1-4) Why, o Lord, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor – let them be caught in the schemes they have devised. For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart, those greedy for gain curse and renounce the Lord. In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, “God will not seek it out” and all their thoughts are “There is no God”.

(7-14) Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity. They sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding places they murder the innocent. Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; they lurk in secret like a lion in its den; they lurk that they may seize the poor; they seize the poor and drag them off in their net. They stoop, they crouch, and the helpless fall by their might. They think in their heart, “God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.”

Rise up, o Lord; o God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed. Why do the wicked renounce God and say in their hearts, “You will not call us to account”? But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan.

(17-18) O Lord, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

Have you ever asked the questions at the start of this psalm? What is your own experience of God being distant, or seeming to hide? Recall a period when this has been your reality. How did it or does it feel?

When was I last called to account, for a poor decision, a mistaken judgment, or insensitive action? Have I noticed how mixed my motives are even in everyday matters ?

Read the passage a second time

Today, instead of railing against those who exploit and deceive, perhaps I could take on the contemplative discipline of asking at every small or major decision point in my day: what are my motives here - really?

Holy One, hear my prayer and may my cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Five of the First Week in Advent ~ as the candle is lit, we remember again the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a saviour and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities

Zechariah is another of the prophets who kept hope on the horizon for an anxious and miserable people. He especially encourages women to rejoice...

Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion! Shout aloud o daughter of Jerusalem! See your leader comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the warhorse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, o prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. For what goodness and beauty are his! Grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the young women.

I love to hear that it's the young women who get to enjoy the new wine! In fact this reading sets out talking to women, to the daughters of the land and the city. In what ways does the good news of Jesus' coming have special significance for women? How might they be relieved that the coming leader is humble?

Consider contemporary parallels to setting free women and girls, setting free prisoners from a waterless pit, the prisoners of hope.... Imagine how this might be.

There is much imagery in these words of Zechariah the prophet: a protected flock of people / the shining jewels of a crown / prisoners of hope. As you read the passage again, notice what resonates with your context, with the journey you are on. What prophets and suffering people might your lighted candle be shining for?

As our meditation comes to an end, take some minutes to stay with the pictures God has brought to mind. You may wish to revisit any words and images during sacred pauses in your day and night.

Holy one, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN

Today is Day Six of the First Week in Advent ~

as the first candle is lit, we remember again the voice and vision of the Prophets and peoples who longed for a saviour and leader who would ease their suffering, and bring justice and well-being to their nations and communities.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

silence

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week?

Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you. Wait on God.

As this first week of Advent draws to a close, give thanks for the many prophets and people of vision, love and courage who have held the faith and comforted God's people and brought hope to the poor and neglected.

You may wish to write down the names of particular prophets and peoples; place them beside the Advent wreath candle.

Holy one, hear our prayer and may our cries come to you. AMEN