



HOT METAL BRIDGE FAITH
COMMUNITY

ADVENT
2020

Welcome to Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community's Advent Devotional for the Year 2020. "Unprecedented" is perhaps the word of the year; but as the Church calendar turns, and Christmas comes closer, we take some time to reflect on another "unprecedented" event - God becoming incarnate as a baby. This is the event that brings us hope, peace, joy, and love during this season and always.

Below is a schedule of readings and reflections from the members of the Hot Metal Community. Writers were free to choose their own scripture for inspiration, but the foundation is readings from the book of Isaiah, a prophet of the Hebrew Bible whose writings are often quoted around this time of year. Sure, that could be attributed to Handel's use of Isaiah in his *Messiah*, but it's also because Isaiah has a way of capturing the daring hope of a people and a world anticipating a Savior. When the world is still in need of such hope, it felt appropriate to turn to those ancient words.

Each day offers you a scripture for reading, a written reflection and prayer, and an invitation to respond. For each day, you are invited to make a sort of "reverse" Advent calendar, placing the suggested items in a box or bag in your home. On Christmas Eve (as pandemic restrictions allow) you are invited to bring your box to Hot Metal to donate those items for our ministry anytime during the day 9am-5pm. If you can't make it that day, drop offs can also happen any Tuesday or Thursday in the New Year from 5:30-6:30pm.

Be sure to mark your calendars for our Christmas Eve EVE service, which will be a prerecorded service premiered on Facebook and YouTube at 7pm on December 23.

Then, join us for a Zoom Christmas Eve service at 7pm on December 24.

<https://zoom.us/j/789826837>

Meeting ID: 789 826 837

Passcode: 031714

Sunday, November 29 - Pastor Erin

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 64:1-9</p> <p><i>O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence— as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity. Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity forever. Now consider, we are all your people.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>“Oh that you would tear the heavens open and come down!” The prophet puts into more eloquent language this lament than I have used over this year of 2020. “Geeze God, what the **** are you doing?” has been more my cry, but I think the sentiment is the same. We look around and see a world broken in so many ways: pandemic, political division, pollution, a racial reckoning too long overdue. And any person paying even a little bit of attention is probably wondering where God is in all of it. We wonder</p>

	<p>what would happen if God spectacularly showed up to fix it all. We long for big showings of divine power to fix everything.</p> <p>And yet, the promise (and irony) of this Advent season is that we are awaiting and anticipating the birth of Jesus. God does indeed tear the heavens open and come down--not in some big show of might, but as a helpless baby in a manger. God sees the brokenness of the world even more clearly than we do, and instead of “fixing it” in the way we would like, comes to be in solidarity with us. The relationship between God and God’s people, between potter and clay, becomes inextricably linked in the person of Jesus. So when we ask where God is, the answer is always “with us.”</p> <p>As we begin this Advent journey. I hope that these devotions help you see God in this community and in the world. And I pray these will inspire you to speak not only your laments but also your hopes into the world, so that others can experience Emmanuel, God with us, now and always.</p>
Prayer	<p>Dear God, we see so much going on all around us, and we long for you to show up. Help us to name our laments and to see how you are already and always showing up to be with us. Thank you for this season of Advent, and may we use it to prepare our hearts and minds for your arrival once again. In the name of Emmanuel, Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>While we so often want God to show up in a blaze of fire, God’s warmth is often softer and more subtle. Put some handwarmers in your donation box or bag so someone might and know feel that warmth.</p>

Monday, November 30 - Tom Cox

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 2:1-4</p> <p><i>The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>At Christmas, one of the titles we ascribe to Jesus is "Prince of Peace." We read it in Isaiah and sing it in <i>The Messiah</i>. We send greeting cards proclaiming "Peace on Earth and Good Will to Man." But even as we do so, we inwardly realize that these are relatively empty sentiments. They do not reflect the state of our world, the priorities of our faith, nor the way we normally view Jesus the rest of the year. Our faith doesn't really insist on peace after December 25.</p> <p>Costa Rica is a country Jean and I are rather fascinated by these days and a place we want to explore. There are several reasons for this, but one is their commitment to peace and good will. This year marks seventy-two years since they completely disbanded their military. They used the savings to improve education, health care, economic prosperity, and contentment. At the highest levels of government, their leaders made a commitment to achieving peace and conflict resolution without the use of violence. Can you imagine? They figuratively beat "<i>their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.</i>" Today, they are considered the most stable and prosperous country in Latin America and The Happy Planet Index rated them the happiest country on earth.</p> <p>O that we would go up to the mountain of the Lord, that God may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths... the paths of peace... the paths of contentment and happiness. May it be more than a greeting card sentiment. May we learn war no more. May we commit to the ways of peace and nonviolence as we follow the coming of the Prince of Peace.</p>

Prayer	God of peace, you call us all to beat our swords into plowshares. Thank you for the example of leaders and nations that strive to live into this ideal, and may we embody your peace all year round. In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.
Respond	The way of peace takes many forms, but enjoying a nice hot beverage on a cold day is a time of peace many enjoy. Take some tea bags or hot chocolate and put them in a ziploc bag in your donation box, so others might find a moment of peace.

Tuesday, December 1 -Kathy Fullmer

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 6:1-8 (NLT)</p> <p><i>It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other,</i></p> <p><i>“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies!</i></p> <p><i>The whole earth is filled with his glory!”</i></p> <p><i>Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. Then I said, “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”</i></p> <p><i>Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”</i></p> <p><i>Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?”</i></p> <p><i>I said, “Here I am. Send me.”</i></p>
Reflection	<p>“Filthy Lips”</p> <p>Those are jarring words, right? My inclination is to clean them up or at least use a different translation. And yet, by startling us, they help to make a point in this passage. Many of us know the passage, “In the year King Uzziah died, I (Isaiah) saw the Lord.” Can you imagine the scene? A holy God on his throne, a smoke filled temple, angels worshipping him in such a way that the temple shook? Take a minute and imagine yourself as Isaiah- or maybe you, like the prophet of old feel terrified at even the thought of being in the presence of such a God.</p> <p>Isaiah, like many of us, felt that he was “doomed” because... “filthy lips!” He was, he felt, an utterly sinful person in a nation of other rank sinners. I’ll let you reflect if you like on what that means but really, it’s not the main point. The main point, the point that always pierces my heart, is that a holy God cleansed those “filthy lips” of Isaiah’s, proclaimed him forgiven and commissioned him to be his messenger. Beloved, can you take that in? God does not hate you or desire to punish you for your misdeeds or sins! He only wants to extend to you his mercy. And He trusts you, He trusts me, with his message of reconciliation!</p>

	Please consider taking a few minutes to read this passage and to sit quietly reflecting on it in the presence of a God who loves you this much!
Prayer	God of cherubim and seraphim, thank you for loving us. Thank you for calling and sending us. Thank you for cleansing what we call “filthy,” and claiming us as your own. Amen.
Respond	God cleanses us in many ways, but sometimes we take literal cleaning supplies for granted. Add some toothpaste and a toothbrush to your donation box so others might literally have a clean mouth.

Wednesday, December 2 - Michael Van Ness

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 9:2-5</p> <p><i>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.</i></p> <p><i>You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>This is one of the heavy hitters-the kind you do not have to memorize to already know by heart when they are trotted out each year during advent. Re-reading the same passage for the 1,000th time can make it difficult to appreciate. In an effort to “just get through it” I’ll read these verses through the lens with which I am most comfortable because that makes it easy for me.</p> <p>But since I am writing this devotional, I decided to read the passage again. And again (because I skimmed it over the second time....). This time I was drawn to a different part of the passage than I normally read that says that God “enlarge[s] the nation and increased their joy”. I love that we can see that God does want to bless the nations and increase our joy! God knows I could use more joy and probably so can you! We can all use more joy at the end of 2020! Its like that little bit was put in there just for 2020. At least I like to believe that it was! Lord knows how 2020 has seemed like we are all walking in darkness. Lord knows that there have been too many BIPOC, trans people, poor people, sick people, and oppressed people who have been walking in darkness for too long. God promises them (especially them!) joy too!</p>

	<p>I hope I can look at my life the same way I experienced this passage-taking a second, maybe third looks at what I had always glossed over and made assumptions about. This year has certainly forced us to do that enough times. Maybe we are weary from re-examining and could use some of that joy! Maybe, in order to get some of that joy, we need to do some re-examining!</p> <p>May you find the presence of our loving, creative, and nurturing God in some of things you may have thought to never look twice at. May God and God's family and creation find new ways to reach you this season, through all the decorations, traditions, and readings that we use year after year. May the God of all goodness and lovingkindness bless you while making all things new again.</p>
Prayer	<p>God of second (and third!) chances, thank you for walking with us, even in times that seem mired in shadows. Increase our joy, and help us to walk with and seek justice and joy for all your people. In the name of Jesus, Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>The journey is often long, and our feet grow weary of walking. Add a pair of shoes to your donation box today. Men's boots are especially appreciated.</p>

Thursday, December 3 - Tammy Wiens

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 9:6-7 <i>For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, 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 with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>These words from I Jo saiah were spoken a thousand years ago, and yet they speak to people from every generation. Even in 2020 we hear “a child is born” and lock onto hope for God’s new order. Isaiah’s message encouraged Israel to believe that an heir to David’s throne would grow up to rescue them from exile and restore the ruins of their homeland. Some historians interpret King Hezekiah’s reign as a partial fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, yet hundreds of years later, the Jewish people were still waiting for the promised Messiah who would rule with authority, oust the oppressors, and bring a new regime of peace and prosperity in Jerusalem.</p> <p>It is Mathew’s gospel (4:15) that links these words from Isaiah to the birth of Jesus, but it is probably fair to credit Handel’s “Messiah” for most memorably linking Isaiah’s verses to Jesus’ identity as “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” The German-born composer premiered his oratorio in 1742 while residing in the United Kingdom. The “Messiah” is one of the most celebrated expressions of sacred music in orchestral history. Nearly 300 years after its debut, crowds the world over continue to gather for Handel’s “Messiah” because the eternal truth of Scripture pairs with stunning harmonies to move the human heart toward the heart of God. This Christmas season, look for Jesus to come to you as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!</p>

Prayer	God of Peace, we thank you for the ways in which your words of hope speak across the generations. Help us, in our time of uncertainty to hear your promises anew, and feel your reassurance as you walk with us. Grant us the courage to call on your name for comfort in this time. Amen.
Respond	God connects with us through the generations through the written word of scripture. Help someone connect with a loved one through the written word by adding a postcard or stationary with postage to your donation box.

Friday, December 4 - Megan Lindsey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 11:1-5</p> <p><i>A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>Has 2020 made you feel like you're watching a tree fall in slow motion? Creaking, shuddering, some smashing and crashing and then an unsatisfactory flump as it hits the ground? Maybe you had plans for this year. My list included a theater performance I was really proud of, unfortunately scheduled two days after the first stay at home order. A pregnancy that didn't take. The desperate desire to travel, anywhere. A cancelled 30th-and-40th joint birthday bash with my sister. And I wasn't planning on the nonstop decision fatigue about every small interaction with the world outside my home.</p> <p>What a dead stump of a year.</p> <p>And yet, out of this blunt representation of death, I can see small shoots of life. This is what nature - Mother Nature, the name I now insert anytime I read "Holy Spirit" - coaxes out of her creation: rebirth. Renewal. Different branches, growing in different directions but still the same roots, the same entanglement with the experiences that all of humanity at any point in history are sharing: sorrow, joy, loss, hope, resurrection.</p> <p>Isaiah, with his poetic mind, sees new life where there is currently a dead stump. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a</p>

	<p>Branch will bear fruit." Isaiah's branch is wise, compassionate, not concerned with climbing the ranks of the system but instead with justice for the poor of the earth. Good God, how I need to tie the wild careening tire swing of my life to this particular branch.</p> <p>It's Advent, and we're all looking for hope. Can you find the tiny buds that are sprouting from your stump of a year? One day they will bear fruit, and the birds of the air will nest in them.</p>
Prayer	<p>God of the dead stumps in our lives, we want to feel you moving beneath the hardened earth. We want to sense a connection to your living root system which gives life to all life. Be our hope this advent. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>God is the source of re-growth and re-birth. But we can help others experience a taste of that rejuvenation. Add a charging cable or brick to your donation box so someone can literally have new life out of a dead phone battery.</p>

Saturday, December 5 - Megan Lindsey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 11:6-10</p> <p><i>The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>The just hatched chicks we brought home at the beginning of the pandemic are now fluffy, bossy hens, providing us with eggs and entertainment as they gleefully destroy our garden beds and run pellmell down the hillside from invisible adversaries.</p> <p>Having birds ranging free in the yard has brought forth a bounty of neighborhood cats. Some come to look and stalk from the safety of the flower beds, but one or two have been brave enough to rush the flock. Once from the kitchen I felt more than saw a flurry of activity, flashes of fur and feather - in seconds our large and flightless birds had flapped their way up to the top of an 8 foot fence, where, woozily clutching the wooden planks, they loudly berated me and the tortoiseshell cat for our negligence in maintaining their peaceful environment.</p> <p>This is nature's way, always some animal eating another animal, or charging at it for the sheer ecstasy of predating a slower creature. This is also our human way, our dog-eat-dog attitude about success, our devouring consumerism. Isaiah sees another world entirely: not the uneasy peace of my yard where the big hens and the scrawny cat have decided to mostly ignore one another. Not the begrudging world of capitalism's magnates who decide to grow a charitable arm because their unethical policies have come to light. No, this is the way of the Root of</p>

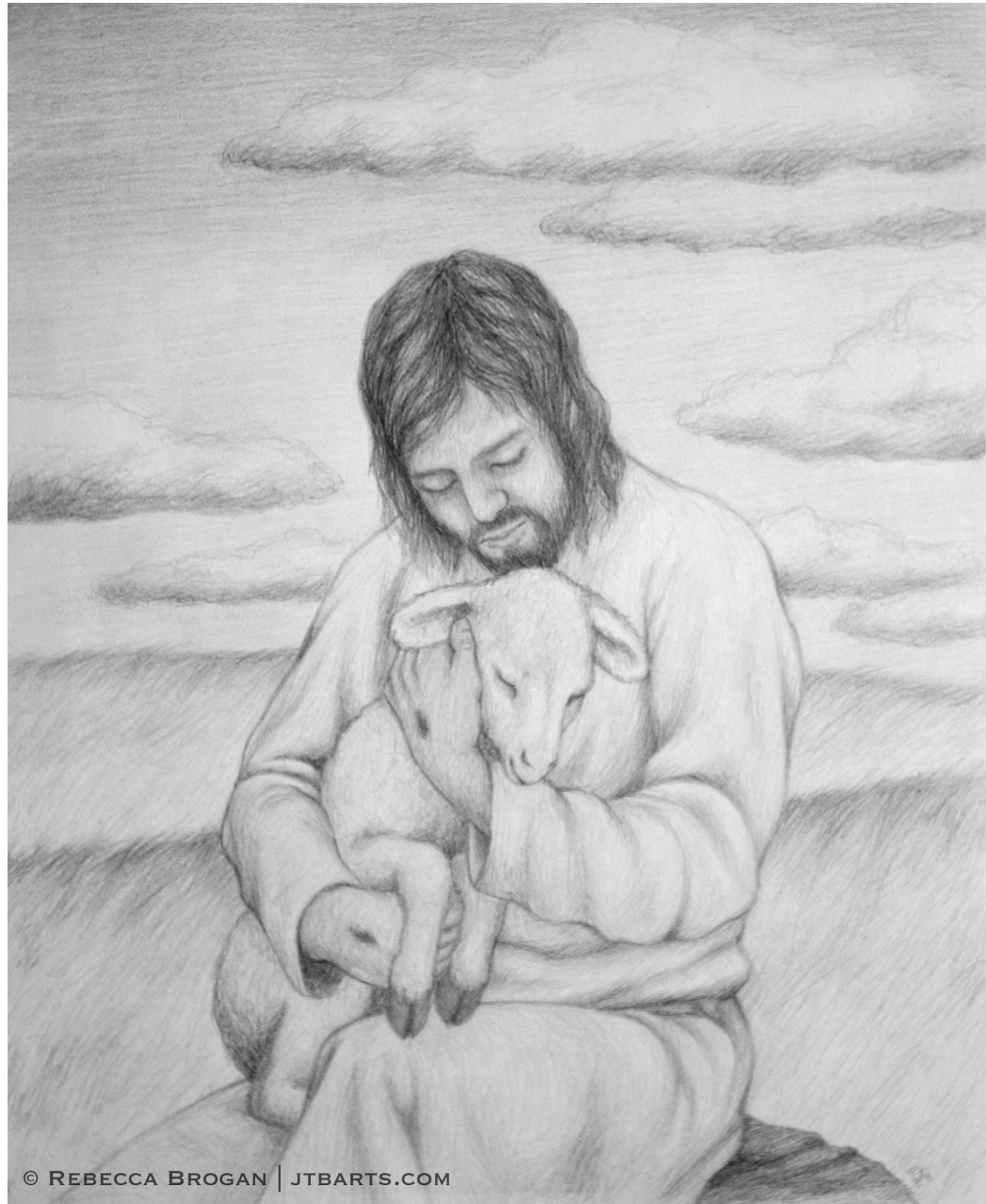
	Jesse, he who roots for the underdog: “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.” The needy, the poor, the young, the old...we will all shelter in his resting place together, and it will indeed be glorious.
Prayer	God of peace, you promise a world without predation, an earth safe for our children and full of justice. We await the prophet’s vision. Until it comes, may we be the hands and feet of peace, working for the good of those who need safety and hope in this life. Amen.
Respond	Part of a world without predation means that all have enough to eat and subsist on. Add some fruit or pudding cups to your donation box so someone can experience a relief from hunger today.

Sunday, December 6 - Kathy Fullmer

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 40:1-11 (NLT)</p> <p><i>“Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God.</i></p> <p><i>“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.</i> <i>Tell her that her sad days are gone</i> <i>and her sins are pardoned.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, the Lord has punished her twice over</i> <i>for all her sins.”</i></p> <p><i>Listen! It’s the voice of someone shouting,</i> <i>“Clear the way through the wilderness</i> <i>for the Lord!</i></p> <p><i>Make a straight highway through the wasteland</i> <i>for our God!</i></p> <p><i>Fill in the valleys,</i> <i>and level the mountains and hills.</i></p> <p><i>Straighten the curves,</i> <i>and smooth out the rough places.</i></p> <p><i>Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,</i> <i>and all people will see it together.</i></p> <p><i>The Lord has spoken!”</i></p> <p><i>A voice said, “Shout!”</i> <i>I asked, “What should I shout?”</i></p> <p><i>“Shout that people are like the grass.</i> <i>Their beauty fades as quickly</i> <i>as the flowers in a field.</i></p> <p><i>The grass withers and the flowers fade</i> <i>beneath the breath of the Lord.</i></p> <p><i>And so it is with people.</i></p> <p><i>The grass withers and the flowers fade,</i> <i>but the word of our God stands forever.”</i></p> <p><i>O Zion, messenger of good news,</i> <i>shout from the mountaintops!</i></p> <p><i>Shout it louder, O Jerusalem.</i> <i>Shout, and do not be afraid.</i></p> <p><i>Tell the towns of Judah,</i> <i>“Your God is coming!”</i></p> <p><i>Yes, the Sovereign Lord is coming in power.</i> <i>He will rule with a powerful arm.</i></p> <p><i>See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.</i></p>
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	<p><i>He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>There's so much in this passage that I won't even try to summarize it for you other than to say that it's all about a God who sees our despair and offers us comfort and hope!</p> <p>I'd like for us to reflect on a phrase in verse 11, "He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to his heart." If you're like me, I'll bet you've imagined that this refers to small children. It's not hard for us to imagine that God through Jesus feels great tenderness for them, is it? But what if God is talking about us, too? I think the truth is that God sees us all, using the imagery here, as his little lambs- sometimes lost, sometimes wounded, often thirsty and hungry. And His first inclination is to scoop us up and hold us close to his heart!</p> <p>Consider taking time to look at this image and notice the expressions on the faces of the shepherd and the lamb. Then, if you feel comfortable, imagine yourself as that little lamb nestled safe in God's arms. Praying you'll feel God's peace and comfort!</p> <p>*If this brings up painful thoughts, please reach out to someone to process it with you. Pastor Erin or Autumn Brownlee are always available, or can point you to other resources.</p>

Prayer



Respond

“God will make the rough places smooth.” Help someone experience the soothing love of God’s touch by adding a travel size lotion to your donation box.

Monday, December 7 - Tom Cox

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 25:1-5</p> <p><i>O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>This passage (and the grand universal banquet that follows in Isaiah 25) reminds us that the kingdom of God, Jesus' kingdom, always existed on the margins. The church, on the other hand, has become <i>status quo</i>. It has been formed into institution. And it is often coopted by hucksters and charlatans seeking glory, celebrity, and audience with the rich and powerful, but in so doing, they only come away with worthless counterfeit coin and a foul aftertaste.</p> <p>But the kingdom of God will not be tamed. As a young child, Jesus was identified by nomadic Magi, strange religious star-seekers from foreign lands. He recruited followers of fishermen and uneducated commoners, far removed from the more acceptable rabbinic crowd. In his ministry, he touched lepers, ate with Gentiles and prostitutes, and welcomed tax collectors and other despised people. He made Himself an irritant to the religious and political leaders while He offered God's love to any who would receive it. He "<i>subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.</i>"</p>

	The kingdom of God come down to earth. This was not Plan B. It was not a desperate rescue plan nor a course correction for Eve's disobedience. It was all part of <i>"the plans formed of old, faithful and sure."</i>
Prayer	God, our refuge, you are steadfast in your presence and love among us. Inspire us to be a church that is also always on the side of the poor, on the margins of society, following in your footsteps; in the name of Jesus. Amen.
Respond	God is a refuge in the midst of the storms of life. Help someone experience shelter in literal rainstorms by adding a poncho to your donation box.

Tuesday, December 8 - Michael Van Ness

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 25:6-10a</p> <p><i>On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>Passages like this seem to focus on the heavenly times when there will be only good things-wedding feasts, joy, everyone coming together, the removal of the shroud of death-and not the “getting there” parts...the messier parts, the parts that don’t fit as nicely in an Instagram post or wall hanging from Etsy. But I think this verse can serve as an invitation to consider those bits of life that are less fun to preach about and write about.</p> <p>Consider: What must it take for this beautiful wedding feast to take place? What sort of divine wedding planning had to go on for this to come about? How many late nights, stressful phone calls, cost-comparison spreadsheets, and crappy vendors must God have gone through to throw us this magnificent party where “the shroud (read: burial garment) that covers all peoples” will be destroyed? That sort of stressful, mind numbing, why-isn’t-my-partner-doing-what-I-asked-them-to-do, back-and-forth is enough to overwhelm anyone! That seems to me to be the stuff of life, the dust in the corners, the fears or longings we dare not confront. God took this task head on when they gave us Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us. It is Jesus and the Holy Spirit who are our constant guides while we try to check off the endless task list that seems to take up our life. I believe that it is an act of faith to continue to believe that this is all going <i>somewhere</i>, no matter how burdensome the task.</p>

	<p>God, speaking to us through the prophets, reminds us what we have to look forward to at the end of this seemingly impossible hour, day, month, week, or year. We have been given the person-ness of Jesus, the Incarnation that we celebrate this month, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, to help pick our heads up, to point us towards the glories-yet-to-come as we struggle with all the burdensome tasks and impossible errands of making all things new, planning the wedding feast, alongside our loving and creative God.</p> <p>May your tasks be light and your errands joyful this season as we labor to prepare us and our world for the feast to come.</p>
Prayer	<p>God of Incarnation, thank you for all that you have done to prepare a banquet for us and all whom you love. Help us to as joyfully fulfill the tasks you call us to, as you have joyfully worked in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>Sometimes, life is messy and there are tears despite our best efforts. Add a pack of wipes or tissues to your donation box to help someone wipe up and feel God's comforting presence with them.</p>

Wednesday, December 9 - Michael Van Ness

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 26:1-6</p> <p><i>On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:</i></p> <p><i>We have a strong city;</i> <i>he sets up victory</i> <i>like walls and bulwarks.</i></p> <p><i>Open the gates,</i> <i>so that the righteous nation that keeps faith</i> <i>may enter in.</i></p> <p><i>Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—</i> <i>in peace because they trust in you.</i></p> <p><i>Trust in the Lord forever,</i> <i>for in the Lord God</i> <i>you have an everlasting rock.</i></p> <p><i>For he has brought low</i> <i>the inhabitants of the height;</i> <i>the lofty city he lays low.</i></p> <p><i>He lays it low to the ground,</i> <i>casts it to the dust.</i></p> <p><i>The foot tramples it,</i> <i>the feet of the poor,</i> <i>the steps of the needy.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>Sometimes looking at a passage as a whole can be difficult to do and it helps to break it down and go piece by piece. I know I am not fluent in ancient near eastern poetry analysis so passages like this can be a struggle for me to understand. For a long time I was trained to read passages like this through the colonizing church lens: if we are good Christians and don't do anything wrong, then God will save us and crush the people we don't like.</p> <p>I must admit I struggle with passages like these. I struggle to see outside the lens that I have been using for so long. Changing the way I see something takes a lot of work and effort. Instead of trying to see the whole passage at once and re-learn it, I can use a technique called "chunking" (It's a real thing, I swear!). Chunking means to break something down into several different component parts in order to understand how the whole thing works. For instance, "Eating breakfast" can be broken down into: Walk into the kitchen; Pick a bowl; Open the</p>

	<p>fridge to get milk; Close the fridge and pick a box of cereal; Pour the cereal in the bowl, then pour the milk; Put the milk away and so on... Isaiah 26:1-6 might be broken down to:</p> <p>“We have a strong city because The thing that protects us is God’s salvation The people who come in are the ones who kept believing You will keep us steady because we trusted that you would, even when things were hard or we were confused Trust God, because God is the thing that does not move, even in the storm God will help people who think they are better than everyone else realize that just because they have a lot of stuff, they do not get to hurt other people. The people who do not have a lot of stuff will show them this because God wants it to be that way.”</p> <p>That is something I can understand! I am in the process of un-learning how to read the bible as a colonizer, as a member of the oppressing class of people, and re-learning how to read it. Passages like this, which are ones that I tried to avoid or ignore, become powerful tools for God to help me re-learn how to engage with the Bible when I can use another way of learning or seeing.</p> <p>May you find new ways to see and experience the things that gave you trouble or difficulty this season. My God’s presence find new and exciting forms for you this season as we celebrate God-with-us (Immanuel, Jesus). May you find God in yourself, in the world, and in others!</p>
Prayer	<p>Revealed God, we thank you for the gift of scripture, and for new ways of reading that help us more fully understand you and your Word. Guide us on our never-ending journey of trusting and engaging. In your name. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>Unlearning what we have been taught is a hard, long process. The only way is by exposing ourselves and others to a variety of voices and perspectives. Add a paperback book (or pocket Bible) to your donation box so others can read and learn too.</p>

Thursday, December 10 - Kathy Fullmer

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 35:1-10</p> <p><i>The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;</i></p>
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	<i>they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.</i>
Reflection	<p>I love the images that reveal God to us in Isaiah- God on his throne bending low to us, lambs and shepherds, and now springs in the desert! The part of God's big, beautiful family that I know best- the Pentecostal/Charismatic/non-denominational tribe and I think our black siblings of faith, have long rejoiced in passages such as today's scripture reading. Many of those folks have known all too many times in life that try and stretch one's faith. And so historically, we've looked toward and longed for the day when God would restore his creation and make all things right. This is often expressed in songs of lament but more often in joyous songs of hope in God! These songs often sung (and danced) exuberantly bring joy to the soul and release tension in our bodies!</p> <p>There's something else in this passage, too. In the meantime, we're asked to "strengthen those who have tired hands." To me, this not only implies verbal encouragement but joining in with people who are weary in their struggles- to be treated fairly, to feed their families, to find a place to rest from these struggles. We can do this in so many ways from small kindnesses to larger more costly advocacy. And in so doing exemplify what God's kingdom could look like now but surely will be one day!</p> <p>Try this: Make a list of your own songs of encouragement. When feeling discouraged, sing loudly, maybe even dance. But don't stop with feeling better, walk with someone else in their struggle.</p>
Prayer	God of music, help us to hear your song as it makes springs in the desert. Open our hearts and minds to sing along with you and your people as we work and wait for your Way. Amen.
Respond	Many travel on the highway of the "Holy Way." Help someone's journey be a little easier by adding a bus pass or gas card to your donation box.

Friday, December 11 - Megan Lindsey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 40:21-23</p> <p><i>Have you not known? Have you not heard?</i></p> <p><i>Has it not been told you from the beginning?</i></p> <p><i>Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?</i></p> <p><i>It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,</i></p> <p><i>and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;</i></p> <p><i>who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,</i></p> <p><i>and spreads them like a tent to live in;</i></p> <p><i>who brings princes to naught,</i></p> <p><i>and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>I am reading a memoir by an award winning female astrophysicist who discovered a process for finding exoplanets, places where life like our planet's life could exist. Though I don't always understand the intricacies, I appreciate cosmology for putting my life into perspective. When I feel disgust within my body upon hearing that a group of powerful humanoids wearing expensive suits have made another terrible decision in some boring windowless room that will make them wealthier and adversely affect most of the people on the planet... well, it helps me to know how small of a blip in the universe we earthlings actually are.</p> <p>Isaiah, before any telescopes or satellites, looked up at the sky - the same sky I see and also a very time-changed sky - and marveled. When I read his words on the bigness of God, my anti-establishment self gets all excited about the reduction of the rulers of this world to nothing. Dust. Naught.</p> <p>And how does this powerful past-present-future God bring about these perspective bending acts of justice? He comes as least powerful - a baby. He's born poor, in a barn. He's given to a young girl to take care of, to feed with her body; this all powerful God person is literally made of the cells of a woman. Now that's some good science.</p>
Prayer	<p><i>Universal God, stretch out your heavens over us as a tent of safe haven. We need your powerful presence when we are feeling powerless. Thank you for coming to our earth as weakness, as poverty, as the other. Amen.</i></p>
Respond	<p>As we ponder and wonder at all God has done, help others make space for reflection too. Add a small notebook and pen to your donation box.</p>

Saturday, December 12 - Megan Lindsey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 40:27-31</p> <p><i>Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>There are birds of prey that fly above our house, which sits nearly at the level of the Garfield hilltop and overlooks 300 lush and wooded acres of Allegheny Cemetery. For several months my husband told me decisively that we were watching some type of black headed eagle swoop and soar; growing up mainly in the midwest suburbs, I believed him and his rural childhood knowledge. Why not?</p> <p>Eventually he concluded that our glorious eagle was actually a turkey vulture. So that’s a pretty good metaphor for this year.</p> <p>But late in the summer I saw three - three! - pairs of hawks on the wing on a particularly brilliant day. They were flying the way people do in dreams, for the sheer enjoyment of catching the current and feeling their bodies bathed in sunlight. Climbing to drop, because it feels good.</p> <p>This year we have seen many people groups in our country cry out: "My cause is disregarded by my God!" Many are tired and weary. So it is fitting that Isaiah turns again to nature, reminding us of giant birds on the wing as a symbol of power and freedom. Not the brave, ferocious, stick-it-to-our-enemies kind of freedom we associate with the American</p>

	eagle's razor sharp talons. This is the freedom of hope: strength renewed, regardless of age or physical limitations. Power to the weak. An invisible wind guiding us on a non-linear journey, if we will stop fighting it and just lean in.
Prayer	<i>God of the cosmos, spirit of all living things, these are times of stumbling and great weariness. For the ill, the anxious, and the lonely, we pray an extra measure of the understanding no one can fathom. Remind us this advent what it is like to walk and not be faint. Show us how to be a people that soars. Amen.</i>
Respond	The most asked item at the Table and many homeless shelters is socks. Help someone not grow faint as they walk by adding a pair (or two!) to your donation box.

Sunday, December 13 - Tammy Wiens

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11</p> <p><i>The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.</i></p> <p><i>For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.</i></p>
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Reflection	<p>In Isaiah 61:8-9 the Lord is the first to speak, declaring “I love justice.” A second speaker, introduced in verses 10-11, is said to “rejoice greatly in the Lord,” while simultaneously acknowledging the ways in which his (or her) life shines as a witness to the Lord’s promised restoration. Isaiah’s audience heard in these verses a promise that the shame and humiliation of living as exiles and refugees would be reversed. Imagine their glee, even in the misery of captivity, at hearing their enemies would not get the last word!</p> <p>Isaiah offers a series of metaphors to convey the Lord’s promised restoration, speaking in the first person as though it were a personal triumph. “I” will be, clothed in garments of salvation, covered with robes of righteousness, dressed as a bride or bridegroom in splendid wedding finery, and appear like a garden spilling over with blossoms. Perhaps in 2020 we are able to relate more vividly to the people’s collective misery than to this lone prophet who rejoices in anticipation of God’s promised deliverance on a date yet to be determined. It’s okay. God understands if the gloom of the present moment sometimes looms larger than our hopes for a better day. We can bring the trauma as well as the triumph into the place of prayer. God meets us in the despair as well as the hope. God will listen—God is listening!</p>
Prayer	<p>God of justice, in this season help me to rejoice greatly in all you have done for me. Open my heart to be able to celebrate and hope, even when hope seems lost. Create space for my grief and misery, so that I can create space for your peace. In the name of Jesus, who proclaims your favor. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>While God clothes us in righteousness and salvation, many need actual clothing. The Care Closet is currently well stocked for winter coats, but we are in need of pants, especially in men’s sizes. Help others feel clothed and warm by adding a pair (or two!) to your donation box.</p>

Monday, December 14 - Tom Cox

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 42:1-9</p> <p><i>Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>This is nothing short of a manifesto from God to a people living in shame and desolation. God had delivered the people from bondage in Egypt, made a covenant with them, and brought them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land in Canaan. They became a nation and built a temple for the Lord. They grew powerful, hoarded grain, and created a military industrial complex of chariots and fortresses. They essentially</p>

	<p>became a prosperous economic and military superpower. Talk about forgetting where they came from, these children of the Exodus even used slave labor to build their military walls and outposts. (See 1 Kings 9:15.) Prophets came with unheeded warnings and predictions, nevertheless, the Babylonians finally swept in and devastated Israel. They destroyed Israel's temple as well as the political, economic, and religious life they had known for centuries—all as God did nothing to intervene. Had God abandoned them? Was God still God? Were they still God's people?</p> <p>Into this identity crisis comes a word from Isaiah, reminding them of who God is and how God works. Isaiah draws their attention away from their present circumstance to the larger purposes of God. God is not only the God of Israel but also the One who <i>“created the heavens...and spread out the earth.”</i> This is the God <i>“who gives breath to the people upon [the earth] and spirit to those who walk in it.”</i></p> <p>Isaiah then proclaims how God acts in particular ways, first sending a spirit-filled servant, not a conqueror or tyrant—<i>“a bruised reed he will not break”</i> This agent of God will be a Liberator who will bring justice, not domination. Second, God will work to <i>“bring forth justice to the nations,”</i> that is, to all, everywhere. God sends this servant to persevere until justice is done all the way to <i>“the coastlands.”</i> Third, God purposes God's people to be <i>“a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”</i> They called not to be righteous for their own sake, salvation, or destiny but for that of the nations.</p> <p>This is good news! Even in darkness, shame, and isolation, God is still God! God's people are still God's people and their purpose extends beyond themselves to all the earth, not in vengeance but in mercy.</p>
Prayer	<p>God of light, we thank you for never abandoning us. Thank you for being God and help us to always strive to live into your light as your people. Guide us as we shine for others to see. In the name of the light of the world, Jesus Christ. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>God calls us God's people through relationship. Help others experience the joy of relationship by adding a pack of cards or other small game to your donation box.</p>

Tuesday, December 15 - Alex Bard (and friends!)

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 43:1-7</p> <p><i>But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth— everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>God is intense.</p> <p>While this Old Testament chapter is very specifically talking about God's creation and unwavering love for Israel and its people, the context can be applied to also be about You. You are God's precious creation and he loves you in a way that you cannot comprehend. Through Jesus your life has been given this gift.</p> <p>In Jesus, we are gathered from all ends of the earth and called to be children of God. As this verse describes there is seemingly no price that</p>

	<p>he would not pay for you. He will stand for you under any circumstance, but perhaps more importantly it is by your acts of faith that you are redeemed. Follow your own path and you very well may find yourself swallowed by the river or burned by the fire.</p> <p>There is no doubt about it - the struggle is real. Life is a challenge and yet because you are of God's creation, no matter what obstacles you may face, as long as you bring faith to the forefront of your path God will redeem you on your way.</p> <p>At the start of this call for reflections I was called to sing. I had a song in my heart and I asked Pastor Erin to give me a verse for the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul." Isaiah 43:1-7, she said. So, I got to task.</p> <p>I'm thankful that exactly the right people (Sheldon, Tammy and Erica) came together at exactly the right time (about four days later) to do this work with me. I hope you find some small bit of peace here as I did. While working through the hymn, Sheldon informed me that the song was written after the author lost almost everything. It turns out to be a very sad tale but one that echoes some of the messages here in Isaiah 43.</p> <p>Written by Horatio Spafford and published in 1876, this song was developed after several traumatic events in the writer's life. First, the death of his four year old son in the Great Chicago fire of 1871 and shortly thereafter the loss of his four daughters in a shipwreck while relocating to England. What pain. I can't imagine.</p> <p>...and yet, "whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know, it is well, it is well with my soul" are the words that Spafford writes.</p> <p>It is faith that carries us through the fire and lifts us from drowning in the water. Lord let faith guide us and let your love shine through us. Amen.</p>
Prayer	Listen to "It Is Well" here: https://youtu.be/81WWHiSaWr8
Respond	God makes sure that the waters will not overwhelm us, and the peace we experience is like a river everflowing. Remind someone of God's renewal in water by adding a reusable water bottle to your donation box.

Wednesday, December 16 - Megan Lindsey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 52:7-10</p> <p><i>How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.</i></p>
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Reflection	<p>My three year old has hobbit feet. We can't even figure out what shoe size he is, his feet are so wide and flat and adorable. He pads along, so sure footed - climbing trees, riding a bike, leaping from the top bunk over a sharp cornered wooden storage unit to land in a huge pile of cushions, and would you like to see my grey hairs? I know both of my children by the sound of their small feet slapping the tile or clomping up the stairs or, most unfortunately due to its frequency, flopping across the creaking wood floor at 3 am to rouse one of us from our slumber.</p> <p>Feet and voices. Eyes and arms. Isaiah dips into the poetry of the body to sing his song of joy and comfort. When "the Lord [lays] bare his holy arm", I envision an arm wrestling match at an enormous rough hewn wooden table, raucous and unwinnable for anyone but God. I also see another side of God, a strong, capable woman in the same room who has rolled her sleeves (and maybe her eyes) to tackle a mound of bread dough or a farm chore or the birth of a baby...while she simultaneously manages a hundred other tasks.</p> <p>These feats of strength, every kind of strength imaginable, are the gifts of our community. For we were once ruins, and now we are comforted and redeemed. How will we each use our strengths to proclaim peace and bring good tidings across the mountains in our lives?</p>
Prayer	<p>God, place our feet on the path that is best for us. Teach us the song our voices need to sing. Help our eyes see with clarity, give us good hard work and the strength of many arms to do it. Our bodies bring us closer to you, as your body comes closer to us. Amen</p>
Respond	<p>We are all called to use our voice to proclaim God's comfort and peace. Add some dental floss to your donation box to help others have good dental hygiene while lifting up their voice.</p>

Thursday, December 17 - Megan Lindsey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 53:1-6</p> <p><i>Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>The melancholy prophet returns! Having used up his joyful exuberance in chapter 52, Isaiah reminds us that we can't celebrate Christmas without the iniquity of us all. As a fellow melancholy often wondering why I can't "feel Christmas-y" - by which I mean the tall order of having nothing to be depressed or exhausted about while simultaneously being dazzled by every whim of the season - there are nights when the toddler tornadoes of holiday cheer are finally sleeping and the house is trashed and I can no longer stomach my pandemic hair and refugee children are still in cages at the border...I get it, Isaiah. This passage of scripture is devoid of jingle jangle, and I am too.</p> <p>Here's the God of Stumps again, that tender shoot growing up out of dry ground. Not beautiful, not desirable. Despised, rejected, a co-sufferer of human pain, "yet we considered him punished...stricken...afflicted." Isn't that just the human way? When we see someone in pain it makes</p>

	<p>us uncomfortable, and when we don't want to press into that discomfort - which often will call us to action or empathy or, even worse, the unheroic action of quiet contemplation - we instead scapegoat. Boy they must have done something really wrong this time. If they could just do this and that and get their life together...</p> <p>And when it happens to us, the mental illness or the inescapable grief or the relationship crumbling, we heap on the same measure of shame and judgement. If only I had... If only, if only, if only. If only the Lord had laid on someone else our iniquities. If only we could find peace on the other side of our wanderings. If only we had a co-sufferer in our collective low self esteem.</p> <p>"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...and by his wounds we are healed." It is this surety that we look forward to as we light our candles in the dark, dark night.</p>
Prayer	<p>God of Stumps, you feel what we feel. Cut off. Abandoned. Despised and rejected. In our lowest moments, remind us that joy comes in the morning and walking with you is never walking alone. Give us extra strength to reach out to the poor and the lonely this holiday season despite our own discomforts and sorrows. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>God is not afraid of the messiness of humanity, and willingly comes to be with us in the muck of it all. Add a roll of toilet paper to your donation box to remind others of God's love even when cleaning up life's messes.</p>

Friday, December 18 - Wiley Bucey

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 55:1-9</p> <p><i>Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>Close your eyes. Imagine you are alone, cold, walking through a deep woods. Maybe there's snow on the ground. You've told yourself that you are not lost, but maybe you are. You have been walking for quite a while. You are seeking respite, warmth, even something you can't name.....life! Ahead, you see a fire. You smell something cooking on the embers. And you see a man standing, looking towards you. And</p>

	<p>you are totally struck. This is not just a man. You know in your soul that this is the Lord Jesus Christ. He's looking at you with compassion and welcome. He's smiling. He is saying, "Come". His invitation is deep. This is the most amazing invitation you have ever found or ever heard. It's a compassionate invitation. He welcomes you into his presence. No force. No power play. No shame. Just "Come". But you also sense his invitation is unconditional, universal. It is not exclusive.</p> <p>Jesus is welcoming you, but he would welcome everyone. (The nations that do not know you shall run to you.) His compassion is endless. Perhaps, now you hesitate to step into his compassionate, universal invitation at that warm fire. This is an invitation to a relationship. His invitation to step forward with him is not mindless. He speaks "Listen carefully to me.....Come...You decide". So you do decide. You approach him and he embraces you. You are found.</p>
Prayer	<p>Come Lord Jesus. Oh come, oh come Emmanuel. Thank you for your words of warmest welcome. Thank you for your unconditional invitation. May I respond to your invitation my all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, and all my strength.</p>
Respond	<p>The invitation to the banquet is an eternal one. Help someone have a taste of the feast to come by adding a can of food like pasta or stew to your donation box. Pull tab tops are preferred, or include a can opener.</p>

Saturday, December 19 - Ben Towne

Scripture	<p>Isaiah 58:6-10</p> <p><i>Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?</i></p> <p><i>Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?</i></p> <p><i>Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.</i></p> <p><i>Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.</i></p> <p><i>If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>“Keeping our eyes on the goal”</p> <p>Rules are restrictive, sometimes in very uncomfortable ways, and especially when their restrictions drag on for so long we might forget why they were imposed in the first place. Well after "15 days to stop the spread," we've been in a pandemic lockdown for three quarters of a year. The results? Covid-19 case and death counts are higher than ever, and many people are losing patience with frustrating ongoing restrictions. Compliance in name only with restrictions means "outdoor dining" now sometimes takes place in mostly-sealed structures. At this time of year when we want most to be physically gathering with family and friends but can't, not seeing the results we were told to expect can be frustrating.</p> <p>This passage from the prophet Isaiah is a quote from God, beginning in verse 15 of the previous chapter. The prophet describes Israel as a nation</p>

	<p>that claims to seek God "as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness" but seems frustrated by the results. They follow the religious laws around not eating on a certain day each week and humbling themselves, but think God doesn't notice. God's response is that the people are missing the point of the rules, continuing to fight and oppress their workers to serve their own interests even while practicing religious piety. In this scripture, God reminds us of what our goal should be in our service: seeking justice, empathetic human connection, and removing the bonds of oppression and poverty. There are huge benefits to be gained if we make these our goals, and set each of our actions toward supporting those goals, instead of spending our time trying to blame, insult, or burden each other.</p> <p>If you've been around the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community for at least a few weeks, you might have noticed that we tend not to focus much on piety to religious traditions for their own sake, while we do spend significant efforts on caring for our community through outreach efforts like the Table, Care Closet, and homeless outreach. We do this in a city with one of the highest concentrations of philanthropic giving, unfortunately based on a history where that money was extracted through ruthless oppression of workers. As a community, we seem to be moving in the right direction under this guidance from Isaiah, but we still have a long way to go. How can you bring yourself and the communities you are part of to advance those goals?</p>
Prayer	<p>God who is love distilled, help me keep my aim toward you. As I go through this holiday season of waiting, help me remember the most important goals in this life that you have laid out for us. Help me make decisions that advance justice, resist oppression, and lighten the burdens of poverty among my neighbors near and far. As we wait to remember the light of your child entering into the world on Christmas Day, guide my thoughts and actions to bring this world closer to those goals! Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>As the winter months march on, the work of justice might simply look like making sure someone is warm. The Care Closet has lots of coats, but add some mittens or gloves to your donation box.</p>

Sunday, December 20 - Tammy Wiens

Scripture	<p>Luke 1:46-55</p> <p><i>And Mary said,</i></p> <p><i>“My soul magnifies the Lord,</i></p> <p><i>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,</i></p> <p><i>for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.</i></p> <p><i>Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;</i></p> <p><i>for the Mighty One has done great things for me,</i></p> <p><i>and holy is his name.</i></p> <p><i>His mercy is for those who fear him</i></p> <p><i>from generation to generation.</i></p> <p><i>He has shown strength with his arm;</i></p> <p><i>he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.</i></p> <p><i>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,</i></p> <p><i>and lifted up the lowly;</i></p> <p><i>he has filled the hungry with good things,</i></p> <p><i>and sent the rich away empty.</i></p> <p><i>He has helped his servant Israel,</i></p> <p><i>in remembrance of his mercy,</i></p> <p><i>according to the promise he made to our ancestors,</i></p> <p><i>to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”</i></p>
Reflection	<p>I hope you won't stop reading just because I mention "Latin," but I thought it worth mentioning. You might have heard this passage called "The Magnificat." The reason being, that in the Latin translation of Luke's gospel, "Magnificat" is the first word of the verse we translate, "My soul magnifies the Lord." The joyful song we attribute to Mary is reminiscent of the Psalms and other Old Testament hymns that Israel sung in response to God's mighty acts throughout history. For example, those familiar with Hannah's story will recognize in Mary's song some parallels to the song Hannah sings at the birth of her son, Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). In both cases, the mother is full of confidence that God's purpose will be accomplished through the life of her child. In expressing their faith these young mothers testify to God's past faithfulness and anticipate the fulfillment of God's promises yet to come. Mary's song grows out of a heart that is grateful for what God has done and a joyful expectancy for what God is about to do through the child she now carries. How might you find a deep-down joy in your soul as you wait on God's promise of what is yet?</p>

Prayer	Precious Redeemer, let me sing with Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” I need something deeper than the bubbly joy that ends when the Christmas music stops. Fill me with an abiding contentment that is steady and strong in every season. It is in your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.
Respond	God “fills the hungry with good things.” While we mostly provide food we make or are non-perishable, help someone have the gift of shopping for themselves by putting a grocery gift card in your donation box.

Scripture	<p data-bbox="386 254 553 285">Luke 1:5-25</p> <p data-bbox="386 296 1406 537"><i>In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.</i></p> <p data-bbox="386 583 1414 1493"><i>Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."</i></p> <p data-bbox="386 1539 1414 1738"><i>Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.</i></p> <p data-bbox="386 1785 1398 1864"><i>After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me</i></p>
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	<i>when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”</i>
Reflection	<p>Listen to Jonathan read this scripture: https://drive.google.com/file/d/16q3ltQ7LoIKSFW5i_c8NIr6K1VYxf6hX/view?usp=sharing</p> <p>What words, phrases or images stick out to you? Imagine you are Zechariah. What are you feeling? How is that different from if you imagine yourself as a different character (Elizabeth, Gabriel, someone in the crowd)? What is God inviting you to do, be, or change as you hear this passage?</p>
Prayer	God of surprises, thank you for stories of those who encountered you and were changed. Bring us an openness to your word and promise, especially when we are stubborn. Help us to experience your presence in this season and always. Amen.
Respond	Elizabeth rejoices in the feeling of being redeemed. Help someone else feel clean and renewed by adding travel size shampoo and/or body wash to your donation box.

Tuesday, December 22 - Tom Cox

Scripture	<p>Luke 1:68-80</p> <p><i>“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”</i></p> <p><i>The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>Nadia Bolz-Weber compares the early chapters of the gospel of Luke to an Andrew Lloyd Weber (no relation) musical. Indeed, perhaps it's more like a first-century version of <i>Glee</i>, in which, as the drama plays out, people spontaneously burst into song. It begins with an angel visiting the young Mary, singing a greeting that is now known as the Hail Mary. In response, Mary sings her own song to her cousin Elizabeth, the Magnificat. Then, in Luke 2, a company of angels sing of a coming savior to shepherds in their fields and an old man named Simeon holds the eight-day-old Christ and bursts into singing the Nunc Dimittis. But today's song is sung by Zechariah, husband to Elizabeth and father to John the Baptist. It's called the Benedictus, and it is a song of freedom still sung at Lauds, a dawn prayer sung in many abbeys.</p>

	<p>You may be aware of the backstory, that Zechariah was an old, childless priest performing his temple duty when he is visited by the angel Gabriel, not a pudgy cherub as depicted on Christmas cards but a powerful, heavenly warrior whose very appearance makes him begin almost all his earthly interactions with, “Be not afraid.” Gabriel informs Zechariah that the barren, also-late-in-years Elizabeth will conceive a son named John who will prepare the way for the coming Lord. Instead of obediently nodding and welcoming this news, Zech’s doubts overwhelm him, he questions the angel’s authority, and is struck mute by the impatient visitor. Zech was basically put into a nine-month time out. Nice to know that occasionally, God just has to silence the men to get things done.</p> <p>Zechariah became among the first in a long line of those who have had to retreat into silence in order to reexamine everything they assumed or believed around how God worked. Perhaps in his old age and isolated duties, he just assumed that God had forgotten about him or generally had no use for him. Maybe because the prayers of this unimportant couple had gone unanswered for so long, Zech had given up all hope of another story being possible. I like to think that his imposed silence was not a punishment but the only way for him to accept that a new way was possible.</p> <p>Maybe we should venture into silence now and then in order to reassess the stories we believe, about ourselves and about God. The stories that tell us we are useless, forgotten, inconsequential, and abandoned. Like Zechariah, we might emerge from our silence singing a new tune. I like how Nadia puts it: “Maybe when our opinions and neurosis and pride and expectations about what we don’t deserve die down...maybe when we just shut the hell up and sit in this quiet of Advent, we might begin to see where something else is possible. Something waiting to be born in an unlikely time and place, something like the conception, birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ itself.” Amen.</p>
Prayer	<p>God, who is found even in the silence, quiet the voices in the world and in our hearts that too often drown out the voice of truth. Give us time to see the many possibilities you open to us. May these last few days before Christmas be one of reflection and contemplation of what you are up to, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>Zechariah needed a reminder that God makes all things new. Help someone feel and smell renewed by putting a bar of deodorant in your donation box.</p>

Wednesday, December 23 - Tammy Wiens

Scripture	<p>Luke 2:1-20</p> <p><i>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.</i></p> <p><i>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,</i></p> <p><i>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”</i></p> <p><i>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>One of the main vibes we pick up on in Luke’s gospel is God’s eager self-disclosure to people who exist on the lower rungs of the social ladder. It is almost certainly the case that the shepherds Luke depicts as “keeping watch over their flock by night” (v. 8), were the brunt of many a joke in their day. And yet, it was to this ragtag crew that the angel of the Lord</p>

	<p>announced the good news of Messiah's birth! These shepherds barely get over the shock of the first angel, when suddenly there was an entire choir of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest." The only conceivable response was to set out to verify the news sent from heaven. Indeed, they discovered everything just as the angel described—an infant king, born in a lowly cattle stall. Being invited to Bethlehem to meet God's Messiah is in itself evidence of the liberation that Jesus' birth set in motion. Full of joy and a renewed sense of worth, they depart the scene of the Messiah's humble birth and go out to spread the good news to all who will listen. We, too, can spread the joy of Christmas because Christ's love is born in us through our acts of love and kindness and justice. Unto us a Child is Born!</p>
Prayer	<p>God of glory, we give you thanks that you have revealed yourself to us. We seek to find joy in this season, and to show joy to others. Be with us as we find new ways to celebrate in rejoice. In the name of Jesus, the Christ Child. Amen.</p>
Respond	<p>As we remember the shepherds sitting out in the cold at night, we also think of our neighbors this winter. Add a hat or scarf to your donation box to help someone stay warm.</p>

Thursday, December 24 - Ben Towne

Scripture	Luke 2:8-20 (see above)
Reflection	<p>“The Extraordinary Happens”</p> <p>In "The Black Swan," author Nassim Nicholas Taleb focuses on the extreme impact of certain kinds of rare and unpredictable events, along with our human tendency to try to retrofit simplistic explanations for them.</p> <p>This passage from Luke describes such a "black swan" event. Shepherds, who occupied a low position in the social hierarchy of the time, were out in the field one night, probably expecting an experience similar to many previous nights. If anticipating hazards, they were likely in the form of natural hazards like weather, wild animals, or common thieves. Suddenly, a terrifying otherworldly being appeared before them, radiating what might have seemed like blinding light, joined soon after by many more like it. This was how, and to whom, God revealed what he's done in the world!</p> <p>Caught off guard, the shepherds concluded that the only logical response was to rush to Bethlehem and see this thing which was evidently a Very Big Deal, so that's what they did. They found what God had said they would, and shared their experience. This beyond-"mind-blowing" experience clearly marked what had just happened as an incredibly important and rare event in the history of the world. The Savior was born!</p> <p>Luke tells us that "all who heard [this news] were amazed at what the shepherds told them." This was clearly big news. Mary, who had gotten the shock of an angel's message several months before, probably connected this news back to that time. She knew that if this was what happened at the birth, more was likely to come which didn't fit any known model for understanding what was happening. The extreme deviation from what was known and understood was underlined by God's choice to have such an important event marked in the company of such lowly people, generally disregarded by those who "mattered" in society. God was sending a signal loud and clear: this is something different from what you've known so far.</p>

	In what ways have you seen God, who is Love, show up in unexpected places or doing unexpected things? How have you responded to God's challenge to forget what you knew and understood about the world before, to prepare for a new world where His love is more tangible and accessible to all?
Prayer	Doer of miracles, thank you for turning my world upside down with your entrance. Help me recognize your love in the most unexpected of places, with a brilliance that compels me to action. Fill me with uncontainable excitement about what you have done and continue to do in this world, and guide my words and actions to convey that amazement with others I encounter. Amen.
Respond	Remember to bring your donation box to Hot Metal anytime 9am-5pm today! If you can't make it today, you can come by any Tuesday or Thursday in the new year from 5:30-6:30pm, or you can email Pastor Erin to arrange another time.

Scripture	<p>John 1:1-17</p> <p><i>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.</i></p> <p><i>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.</i></p> <p><i>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.</i></p>
Reflection	<p>We end this season not in the manger, but with this theological treatise from John. This is a reminder to us that Christmas, the Incarnation of God in human form, could never be confined to a mere day. It is instead the fulfillment of God's love and promises that have been in place from the beginning of the world. Every time that grace and truth are revealed, God is there.</p> <p>This Christmas will feel vastly different from years past. We did not gather last night to sing Silent Night all together by candlelight. We are separated from our families or are with a much smaller group than usual. We have had to abandon cherished traditions.</p> <p>And yet, the Word is still God, who dwelt among us. This day is about a God who loved humanity so much, even in its brokenness, that God</p>

	became one of us. So even as we celebrate today in a way we are unaccustomed to, where can you show the world that the Word is alive and well? How can you reveal that God is still showing up and giving grace upon grace?
Prayer	Incarnate God, we give you thanks for this day when we remember you coming into the world. Bless our celebrations, and be with us as we grieve the loss of our traditions. Help us to hold onto your promises, and to place our hope in the One who fully revealed the depth of your love to the world, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.
Respond	As we continue in the promise of God Incarnate, think of ways you can continue to serve others, beyond providing much needed supplies. Can you volunteer to cook a meal at the Table or organize the Care Closet? Can you advocate for just and compassionate laws? Can you give someone the gift of your presence, as God is present with us in Christ Jesus?

Notes: All Scripture is from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise noted.

List of items for donation (for planning/shopping):

1. Handwarmers
2. Tea Bags/Hot Chocolate packs
3. Toothpaste and toothbrush
4. Shoes
5. Card or stationery with postage
6. Charging cable/brick
7. Fruit/Pudding Cups
8. Travel size lotion
9. Rain Poncho
10. Baby Wipes or Tissues
11. Paperback Book or Pocket Bible
12. Bus pass/gas card
13. Small notebook and pen
14. Socks
15. Pants
16. Playing cards or small games
17. Water Bottle

- 18. Dental Floss
- 19. Toilet Paper
- 20. Can of Food (pull tab preferred)
- 21. Mittens/Gloves
- 22. Travel size shampoo/body wash
- 23. Deodorant
- 24. Hat/Scarf