

Readings - Advent 1

**Isaiah 2:1-5**

**Romans 13:8-14**

**Matthew 24:34-44**

### **Preparing the Way**

Sometimes, it's easy to believe that we have the season of Advent all figured out. That we know everything there is to know about this time of preparation and joy.

After all we know that in church Advent is the quiet waiting season. It's a time of reflection meditation and prayer. Advent is the most counter cultural season in the Christian year. In anticipation and waiting Advent is like a gift waiting to be unwrapped. It the season when we begin to light candles that symbolize a light flickering in the darkness and a spark of warmth in the cold. Advent is the quiet hope of a woman who watches and waits and cradles within her, the promise of new life. And here in the stillness of a church fragrant with greens, it can be easy to believe that we have this season all figured out.

But, then we hear the readings. And if we look a little closer...if we read a little deeper... if we listen a little harder... If we open ourselves up to the people and images that shape this season, we may find that Advent is something more— something different from what we expected.

You see, today's readings speak of people streaming to God's house; The prophet Isaiah speaks of Coming to the mountain of the Lord so that we may be taught his ways, and walk God's path. The scripture speaks of judgement and instruction and transformation. It is in this quiet meditative season that we hear metal tempered in a forge and pounded into new shapes for a new purpose. We see nations that will not longer lift their swords. It is in this time that we are called to come and walk in the light of the Lord. We are reminded that love is the only way to fulfill God's law. And above all, we are warned to stay awake for the night is advanced and the day is at hand.

So perhaps the season of Advent is a bit more complicated—and a bit less tame than we would like to think.

Perhaps it is now that when we are challenged and reminded that the true life of a Christian is a life filled with adventure and full of the unexpected. Advent is the most counter cultural season of the year.

It is true, we may never stand at a forge pounding swords into plowshares, but we can be dedicated to peace in a world where rage is admired and forgiveness is for fools.

We may never transform a spear into a pruning fork, but we can testify to the value of life, in a world where life is disposable and everything is for sale.

We may never prepare for a flood, or be raptured from a field, but we can live each day thankfully, alertly, and gratefully.

These readings remind us to wake up and clear our minds while we walk the path to the mountain of God. Perhaps we should awake from our numbness, lethargy and complacency and use this season well.

For some of us, that means leaving behind our comfortable sins, asking for forgiveness and praying for a change of heart.

For some of us, it means re-focusing our lives and renewing our dedication to God and family and Church. For some of us, it means living more boldly and testifying more freely.

The advent road is a road of awakening. The advent road calls us to pay attention to that which numbs us and puts us to sleep unaware of God's presence. The advent road is a road of anticipation or awakened waiting. The advent road prepares the way of the coming of Emmanuel God with us.

That is why this advent I would like to give you the opportunity to join me on a spiritual practice challenge. I have made up several advent calendar booklets that offer a variety of spiritual practice options to enjoy every day. My hope and desire is that this we assist us as a community in preparing intentionally for the Christmas season. It is my hope that as we engage communally in times of prayer and service over the next four weeks we will be strengthened as individuals and community. You will see the booklets here. Please take one per family. If you would like to take one for a friend you may do so. I will also post daily on the blog and I invite you to comment on how your practices are going, even if they are not all good news stories.

Some days you will see the spiritual practice is an activity e.g. Offer hope to someone you know is feeling hopeless. - I encourage you to make these practices as big or small as you like. You may want to make them cookies, write them a card, give them a phone call or simply offer an intentional greeting to someone you usually might not. It's up to you.

I look forward to hearing in the next weeks how your practices are going. Oh and if you slip and miss a day - no worries just pick up and start again. This is about an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with God and self not about judgment so do what you can.

Because for all of us, Advent is a time to be surprised.

To discover that somewhere along the way our lives have become a little too small, a little too safe, a little too tame.

O house of Jacob, come!

Let us walk in the light of the Lord!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Fleming McGurgan textweek.com (adapted)