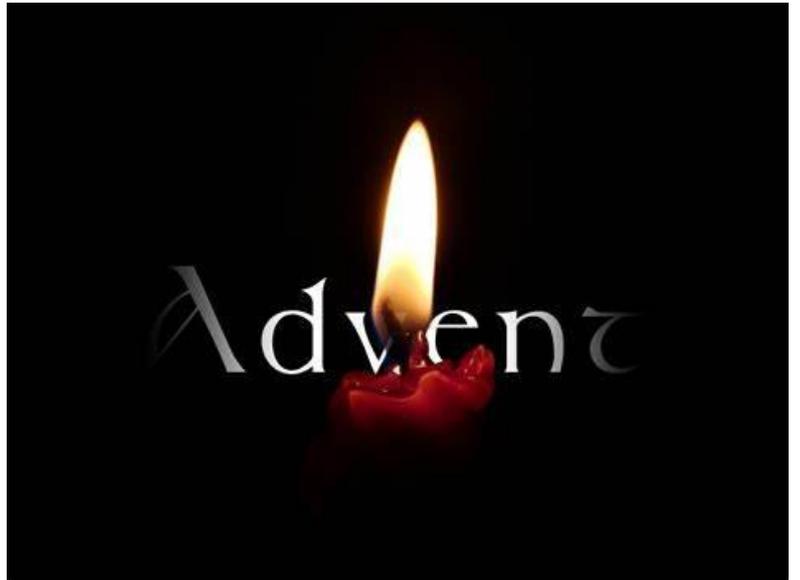


THURSDAY ZOOM BIBLE STUDY - PREPARING FOR SUNDAY

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT - YEAR A

COLLECT

Eternal God,
through long generations you prepared a
way for the coming of your Son,
and by your Spirit
you still bring light to illumine our paths:
renew us in faith and hope
that we may welcome Christ to rule our thoughts
and claim our love;
to whom be glory for ever.
Amen.



1. FIRST READING - Isaiah 2: 1-5

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. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

COMMENTARY

The great vision of Isaiah paints a vivid imagery of what Jerusalem would be: a place of refuge where nations flock and learn the truth. Undoubtedly, the passage is an articulation of Isaiah's hope for peace in the midst of tumultuous times. One day, people would know the sovereignty of God and as a response they would go to Zion the sanctuary of the faith where the absolute trust in God will heal all relationships marred by mutual distrust and fear. According to Isaiah, God will be at the center of the movement towards lasting peace. The instruments of destruction will be the very means of construction, and there the unconquerable conviction of people towards a world free of war and suffering will finally find its fruition.

It is admittedly an idealistic vision, and some who take pride in their realism will surely question it. Yet one of the indisputable responsibilities of Christians is to work for peace. Christians should be part of the solution in resolving conflicts, and the first ones to pursue peace in strained

personal or corporate situations. By doing so, we take part in the good work of building the kingdom of God in our present circumstances.

QUESTIONS

- + Is it possible to have peace among nations and individuals without God?
- + What current issues in the world today challenge the fragile peace among people

2. Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem built as a city that is bound firmly together.

To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.

Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."

For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."

For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good

COMMENTARY

Scholars suggest that this psalm was sung by pilgrims upon arrival in the holy city of Jerusalem. Thematically, it is closely linked with our previous text from Isaiah. Notice, for example, how verse five of this psalm speaks of the "thrones of judgment," similar to Isaiah's proclamation of God as the arbitrator among the people (v. 4.) More significantly, the resounding hope for peace is again expressed.

This psalm reminds us of the proper orientation for, and culmination point of our lifelong pilgrimage - the peace that permeates every aspect of our lives. Not only will there be peace among nations, as Isaiah foretold, but also in the lives and hearts of every pilgrim who enters the city gates. Peace in the biblical sense meant not the absence of strife, but the fullness of life - right relationship, freedom from fear and the satisfaction of physical and spiritual needs. Jesus embraced this notion of peace and sought to bring it to all he encountered, as is evidenced by his healing miracles, exorcisms and preaching of God's peaceful reign. The final two verses of this psalm serve as a challenge to all who hear: Do we have hearts wide enough and hope strong enough to say to all of our fellow human beings "peace be within you," and "I will seek your good"?

QUESTIONS

- + Which word or phrase from this text resonates with you?
- + How does this text challenge you and/or give you hope?

3. THE GOSPEL - LUKE 21: 5-19

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

COMMENTARY

This gospel text affirms that Jesus will indeed return, but that no one, not even Jesus himself, knows the day or hour. Such knowledge has been reserved to God alone. Some Christians, however, have interpreted the exhortation to “be ready” to mean that one must be physically prepared for the events that will accompany the Second Coming. Others attempt to calculate when this event will occur. Interestingly, such predictions and calculations often attract widespread public attention and curiosity.

While mainstream Christians usually don’t get caught up in the hype and anxiety that surround apocalyptic predictions, such incidents, as well as today’s gospel text, invite us to reflect on a few significant issues. Often, spiritually and emotionally, we distract ourselves from what is essential by focusing our attention and energy on that which is tangential and often beyond our control. But in the end these are pseudo concerns that draw us away from responding with maturity and wholeness to the Christian call for transformation of heart and mind.

QUESTIONS

- + In what ways do you succumb to the temptation to excessively focus on peripheral issues over which you have little control?
- + How might you apply Jesus exhortation to “keep awake” (verse 42) to your own life and circumstances?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.

God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.

God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the centre, the focus of our lives

always, and particularly this coming Advent time. **The Grace.....**