

Witness



Discerning God's *kairos* in the midst of our daily *chronos*

ADVENT DEVOTIONS – WEEK 4
DECEMBER 20–26, 2020

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SUNDAY | ACTS 1:6-10

Why read a passage about Jesus' ascension during the season of Advent when we prepare for his birth and return? What do Jesus' final instructions to his closest friends just prior to being lifted up to heaven have to do with us on the cusp of Christmas? What resonates in this passage at this time in this year is the disciples' pressing question. They want to know if now is the time that God will restore the kingdom of Israel. Their question is understandable. Having endured seeing their friend and Savior suffer and die, they want an assurance that all that pain results in restoration. In our human terms: they want to know it has all be worth it, leaving their familiar vocations, following Jesus, fearing for their lives, huddling behind locked doors, processing the good but utterly upending reality of resurrection. After all this, will the world be set right on their terms?

Do we not have similar questions at the end of this long year? Will the vaccine come soon and be safe?

Will we be able to be together in person again? Is now the time we can sing in worship? Will those long oppressed find justice? Will the economic fallout ebb and turn course? Is it not the time for the restoration of what we used to call normal, Lord?

Jesus tells the disciples that he does not know the answer to what is to them their most pressing question. Instead, he gives them a mission, an unwavering purpose no matter what is happening in the world. They are to be his witnesses right where they are and to the ends of the earth. I wonder if they were frustrated by his response. I wonder if we are, too. Often we want Jesus to answer our most pressing questions, but rather than answering our question Jesus gives us a job to do. We are to tell the world what we know of Jesus and what we know of God through him. Even as we make ready for his birth, we are to tell others why his incarnation matters to us and to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the world.

As we continue to navigate a difficult time in the life of the world, we bear witness to the love of God that refuses to let us go. As we wrestle with challenges that persist despite our fatigue and dismay, we tell of the one found among the least of these. As we press God with understandable and pressing questions, Jesus recognizes our fears but entrusts us with the gospel anyway. As we get closer to Bethlehem, we remember that we are already and always witnesses to our Savior right where we are and wherever we are sent.

Gracious God, we have so many questions, urgent questions. We want to know when this time filled with so much upheaval will come to an end. Even as you honor our questions, you entrust us with your mission of bearing witness to Jesus Christ at all times and in all places. Open our mouths that we might proclaim your praise. Guide our actions that we might embody the good news of our Savior. Amen.

MONDAY | JOSHUA 24:19-24

Joshua asks the people to make a public declaration of faith, a commitment to serve God and God only. After they do so, Joshua reminds them that they are witnesses "against themselves." They cannot claim ignorance or deny their affirmation of loyalty to God. When have you made a public commitment to serve God? How will you make that choice evident today?

Gracious God, you abound in steadfast love and yet you hold us accountable to the public witness we make to serve you. When we forget or neglect our affirmation of faith, call us back to you and correct our ways. May our witness against ourselves be a constant reminder that our ultimate loyalty is to you and that commitment is made visible in how we live. Amen.

TUESDAY | EXODUS 20:16

How often do we think about God's commandment to not bear false witness against a neighbor? What does it even mean to do so? Perhaps it would be helpful to put this in the affirmative: Tell the truth. Live with integrity even if it costs you something. We will inevitably violate this part of God's law as we do most others, nonetheless we are to aspire to tell the truth.

God of Truth, we often make excuses for our behavior, thinking that our violations of your law are small and even justified. As we prepare to welcome the Word incarnate, the true light coming into the world, help us to live with integrity, love our neighbors and bear honest witness to your goodness in all we say and do. Amen.

WEDNESDAY | 1 THESSALONIANS 2:9-12

Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that they, along with God, are witnesses to Paul's "holy and righteous and blameless" conduct toward them. How we treat others reflects our relationship to God. Our means and ends must match, our behavior commensurate with the gospel we share. Who have you witnessed being holy, righteous and blameless? What about the opposite?

As we draw near to Christ's birth, we wish to reflect the One we profess to follow. We pray, God of grace and glory, to be holy and righteous and blameless in our conduct toward others. When we fail to meet this standard, forgive us and send your Spirit to help us to do better and be a closer likeness of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

THURSDAY | HEBREWS 12:1-12

Christmas Eve

On this Christmas Eve we reflect on the journey to Bethlehem. It has been difficult and confusing at times. We have questioned if we would make it this far and even if God was with us along the way. As we prepare to meet Jesus face to face, we give thanks for the great cloud of witnesses that have guided us to his manger. For whom do you give thanks this year?

Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nations, we travel with your family to the stable in Bethlehem, eager to meet you, heavy with expectation, longing for rest as we prepare for your inbreaking. Surround us with that great cloud of witnesses that upholds and instructs us, inspires and spurs us on until that day when we are all gathered around your heavenly throne in worship. Amen.

FRIDAY | LUKE 24:44-49

Christmas Day

On this the day of Jesus' birth, we recall that in all times and in all places, he appointed witnesses to tell of his incarnation, his death and resurrection. We who welcome the infant Jesus proclaim the saving work of Christ. As we worship at the manger, prepare us, Lord God, to leave and tell the good news of great joy for all people. Amen.

Emmanuel, God with us, we rejoice at your birth, we offer you our gifts without reservation and we rest for a moment in thanksgiving and peace. As we prepare to be your witnesses, we seek to always live in hope and act courageously in faith knowing that there is nothing not taken up and redeemed through your incarnation. Glory to God in the highest! Jesus Christ is born this day! Amen.

SATURDAY | ISAIAH 44:6-8

In this Christmas season we witness to incarnation, the birth of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. As you reflect on this year with all its challenges and changes, where have you experienced the presence and power of God? How will you tell this good news to the world?

Emmanuel, as we worship and adore you, we praise God for the gift of your coming into the world. We see in your incarnation God's relentless love and refusal to give up on the goodness of creation. Make us your witnesses, ready to proclaim your truth, courageous in our discipleship, humble in our following, reflections of your light in this God's beloved world. Amen.