

A glowing cross is positioned on the left side of the upper half of the cover. The background is a dark, starry night sky. Below the sky, a dark silhouette of a city skyline is visible. The words "FEAR" and "NOT" are written in a large, white, serif font to the right of the cross.

FEAR NOT

**A Devotional Booklet for the
Season of Advent - 2020
The Union Church in Waban**

INTRODUCTION

From Pastor Stacy

In the holy poem which is the Christian liturgical year, we are entering Advent. Advent — a liminal space. It is a space of unknowing. A time of waiting. A time to release ourselves from our certainties and to rest in the power of possibility.

Advent is all of that but according to the Gospel story, Advent is also about fear and learning to fear not. In the opening chapter of the Gospel of Luke, fear is all over the nativity story. Zechariah was terrified and fear overwhelmed him when an angel appeared to him in the temple. The angel tells him not to be afraid. Later the angel appears to Mary and tells her not to be afraid. Fear comes over all the neighbors when suddenly Zechariah can speak again after the naming of his son, John. Similarly in the Gospel of Matthew, an angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The Christ comes to a people who it turns out are very well acquainted with what it is to be afraid.

We too know fear. We are living through fearful times. My hope is that the Advent and Christmas message will speak to us like never before. My prayer is that in the midst of our fear, we may receive a word of heavenly hope and encouragement. I pray that that word will come to us through these heart felt reflections and offerings from our fellow UCW companions.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this booklet.

For All Ages — Suggestions for Using this Booklet with Children

From Pastor Amy

This book is filled with wisdom and beauty for all ages, and we hope you will share its contents with all the members of your family, perhaps reading them together and reflecting over dinner or in a quiet moment as you light your Advent candles. However you use it, we hope you will find this book, and the love of our UCW community reflected in its pages, a blessed companion on your Advent journey.

This year, as we seek space and simplicity in the clamor of our world, we have also removed our usual pages for kids and families, and encourage you instead to find the table tents, which are either physically attached to this book if you are reading a paper copy, or which can be found by [CLICKING HERE](#) if you are reading this digitally. They were created by The Salt Project and explore simple Advent prayers and practices through the lens of the Danish Advent tradition of Hygge, sometimes translated as “the art of coziness.”

Advent is a season of waiting, and of making space for the holy to enter again — reveal itself again — in our lives, homes, and world. It is a time of darkness, when seeds and hibernating animals are hidden underground waiting for the warmth and light of brighter, longer days. Hygge embraces this time as holy and containing much beauty. If you have an Advent wreath or candles, we invite you to light a candle as you explore the Hygge reflections and read this book’s reflections. All families should also have received an Advent Prayer Circle, with small prayer ribbons you can tie each day to create a mosaic of prayer through the season.

We pray that with this book and the practices of candle-lighting and prayer, we may all draw nearer to one another; find deep rest and peace; and widen the spaces in our own hearts and homes for the spirit of hope and joy to enter in and fill us again with light and love.

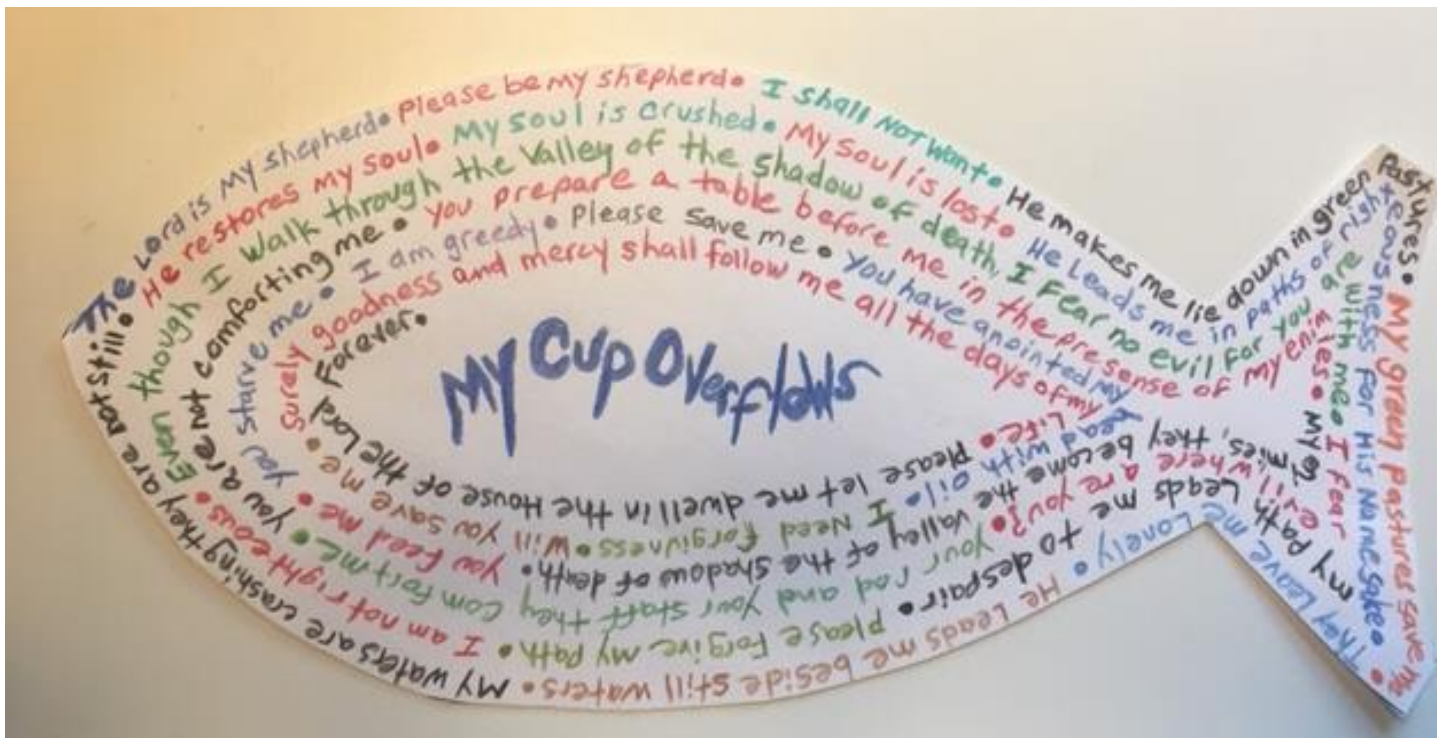
THE FISH

At our All Church Retreat during the month of October, we considered the passage known as the Feeding of the Five Thousand that appears in all four Gospels. As the Gospel of John tells the story, a little boy brings Jesus two fish and five loaves of bread. He gives all he has and in doing so sets into motion a miracle where not only all who gathered were fed, but there was enough left over to fill 12 baskets. (John 6:1-14).

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” (John 6:8-10)

Reflecting on this story, we were asked to consider what we are bringing to Jesus in this season. What do we have to offer that with love may be transformed by Christ into bread for a hungry world. What do we need so very much from Christ? What are we hungry for?

The images of the fish, presented throughout this booklet are in response to those questions. May they be a blessing to you as together we seek God in this season of emergence.



ADVENT

The Child is Waiting to be Born in Us.

Where are you in this gestation period of Advent? What are you waiting for if not for the Christ child to be born within you?

The Christ child wasn't just born two thousand years ago, the Christ child is waiting to be born in us each day. In the Christian tradition we were called to be *theophoroi*, literally meaning the bearers of God into the world. Christianity makes the bold claim that the Divine became human, that we could see, touch, know the Divine in the life of Jesus Christ. How shall the love of God in Christ Jesus be known if we do not become *Theophoroi*, birthing God's love into this world?

Where might you be a bearer of God's love this Advent in a new way? Where might the Divine Love within you be given birth?

Where is the stranger waiting for your welcome?

Where is someone bearing the hatred and rejection of others who needs to know they are included in the circle of God's love?

Where is hostility creating the illusion that hatred is more powerful than love?

Where is a rule, a policy, a law, a movement, an ideology, an organization breaking up the family of God rather than pulling it together?

Where is God's earth body crying out for your attention before it is too late?

Where is someone waiting for forgiveness in your life?

Where is someone lacking a room to lay their head or what is making it impossible for them to find a room?

Where is someone/something?

Where is the Christ Child waiting to be born within you?

Brita Gill-Austern

HOPE

WEEK 1 -



HOPE

WEEK 1

Reading 1 - Isaiah 64:1-9

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.



Art: Mary and Joseph
2011 Scott Laumann

Reading 2 - Mark 13:24-37

“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.”

HOPE

WEEK 1

A Poem

The Fear Not Angel awakens
Our slumbering joy, deep stirrings.
The Christ child
Comes again, the Radiance
That shakes our darkness,
Dispels our deepest winter
We gather memories
Of the exchange of love,
Remembrance of hugs.
We allow the truth of our
Faith, listen to the music
Of spread wings.

Perhaps we've been looking
In the wrong places for hope,
Passing the cradling manger
With shuttered eyes.

Rituals can cleanse us,
Hanging sparkles, bright colors,
Shaking bells,
Reminding our feet to dance,
Stroking our pet's fur,
Helping someone to stand,
Covering the shivering
With woven blankets,
Understanding loneliness,
The gift of smiles.

Anita Barickman Roberts



A Prayer for Hope

Holy One,

When our eyes are heavy and so are our hearts, when we see more endings than beginnings, and when we have lost the Way and do not know where to turn, come to us.

Kindle your Hope in our hearts.

Have its warmth awaken our own compassion for ourselves and for the world.

Have its light bring delight into our lives again. Have it take us by the hand and lead us home to you.

In the name of the one who brings us Hope we pray,

Amen.

HOPE

WEEK 1

A Prayer by Bart Kelso

Great Giver of all our hours and our days,
God before and beyond all times and seasons,
It's here again --- that time of year which I love,
but with reservation;
that season of such high expectation
and of such great frustration.
Caught somewhere between pre-Christmas pressure
and Advent awareness, I wonder
if this time it can be different,
if I can be different,
more centered on you, Jesus.
Lord, do not let me do more
if in doing less
I might do it better.
Do not let me acquire more
if in living with less
I might know you better.
Let me not be so foolish
as to equate quantity with quality,
wealth with security,
or approval with right priority.
Forgive me for spreading myself thin
for the sake of appearance.
Enable me, Lord, to amend my ways,
lest I miss the Babe in the manger,
the Boy in the carpenter's shop,
the Teacher on the hillside,
and the Savior on the cross.
In your Name I pray. AMEN.

HOPE

WEEK 1

Fear, Hope and Gratitude

Fear not, for I am with you.....oh, but I do fear. I wonder where you are; are you there? Can you hear me? We need you. Save us from despair, from loneliness, from pain and loss. Yes, I feel this, and I see when you feel this way, too.

But then.....

I see glimmers of hope. And there's gratitude, so much gratitude. I'd like to share just a couple of these moments with you.

Now, if you know me you know I love to garden. I dig in the soil, the earth's smell is a familiar welcome, ahhhhh I love it! The planting of flowers and pulling of weeds are a labor of love. The birds are chirping and happily bathing in the bath nearby. In this place, this wonderfully inviting and beautiful space, everything else falls away; the fear, the grief and the worry. I feel the most here. Memories flood my mind here, problems solved here, but I'm safe and sound, and I'm fully "plugged" in to everything around me. I feel everything here and I'm grateful for it.

There are morning glories growing where I planted their seeds in the spring. I planted them near the patio (a patio is a safe outdoor enclosure for my cats to go). The vine grew ever so slowly up the patio over the summer months, and I was hoping that it'd move along so that it would have a good bloom before the fall. Finally, it made its way up the side of the patio and onto the top as well. Then one day as I was sitting at my desk looking out of my window at the flowers that bloomed on the top of patio, I noticed that a tiny piece of the morning glory vine had made its way into my house. It had found the smallest crack in my window frame to squeeze through. I could tell it worked hard to get through that small space, and I imagined it reaching and weaving its way in with all its might just to make it through to the other side - like it wanted to "see" what was here on the other side.

At first I think, well that's not supposed to happen, there's no sun in here, how will you even grow. Why did you choose that tiny little crack to grow through when you have a vast area outside to cling to. For a moment I wonder if I should guide this little tendril back out to where it came from. Finally, I decide to just let it be, to see if it'll grow. Each day I checked, and each day it grew, and it grew pretty quickly! It twisted and turned and wrapped itself around a light, a curtain chain and anything it could reach.

I wonder, will you bloom in here? I say to myself no, you can't bloom inside because of course you need the sun, and it's far too late in the season for you to grow and live much longer anyway. You'll probably just fade away. Then, a few days pass by and I notice flower buds, okay I'm hopeful now! Then more buds and they're actually getting bigger! Then one morning, there they are, right there inside my house, big blue happy blooms! I was surprised and amazed that even without the sun they kept on blooming and growing and living. They kept on giving flowers every day for weeks!

(con't.)



Then the frost came, and the outside part of the vine died away, but the inside part just kept on blooming! This is more than special!

This is making me feel special, like this is all unfolding just for me. How could I not feel hopeful and grateful? Watching these flowers grow and bloom where they ought not to be would stop me mid step each day.

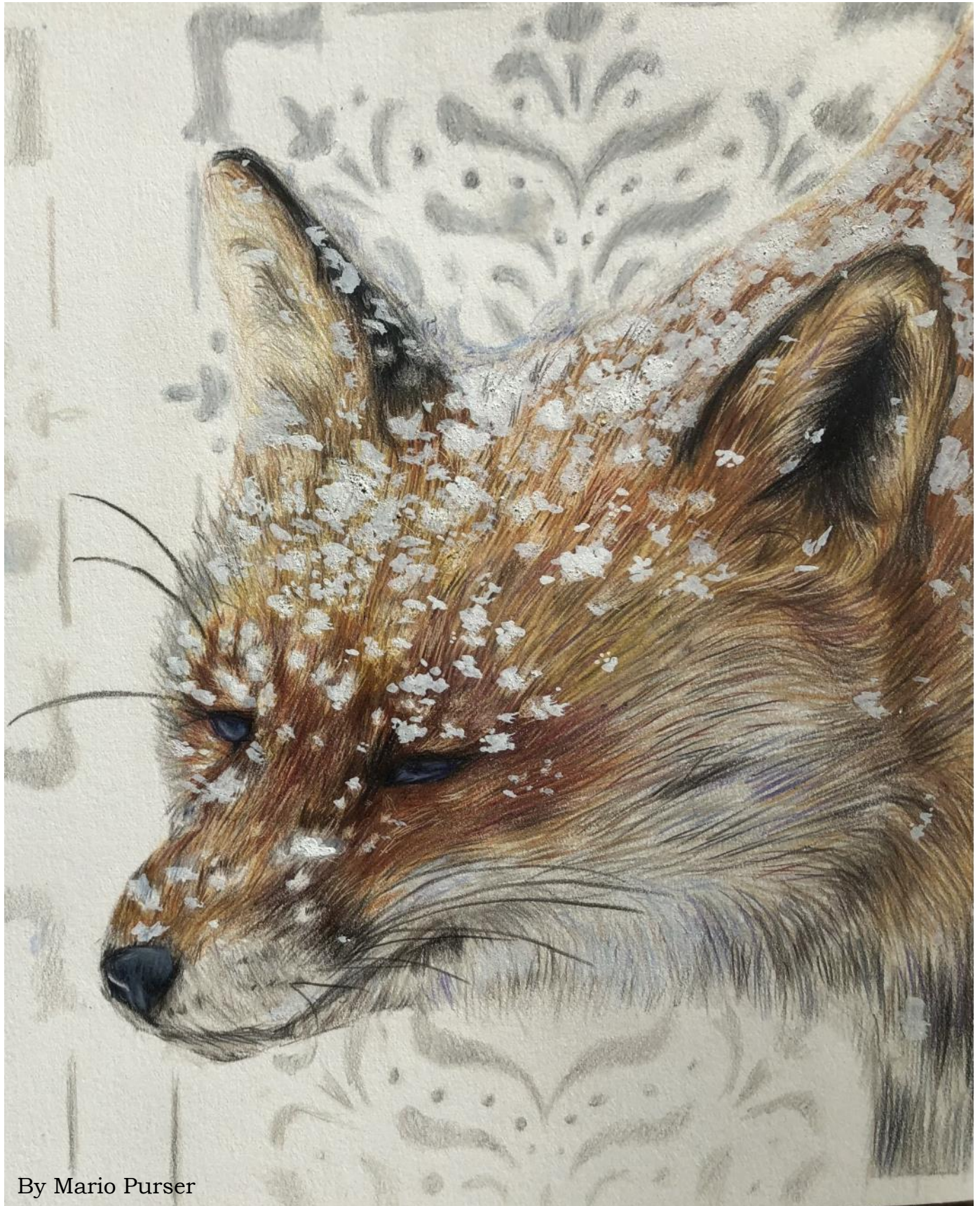
They caught me grieving, sad, or angry. They lifted my sadness and fear. I am so grateful that it grew and bloomed where it did and when it did - right in front of me. I needed this at that time. No matter how I was feeling it's beauty could not be denied. It's presence made me feel special, and made me feel grateful. What a special gift that I've been given. I had to face it, an undeniable gift of hope, beauty, wonder and love.

There's a knowing that there's always going to be something that is good and wonderful reaching out to me. Something to show me what's true - what's right in this world. Even in the mess of all this craziness we are all in.

Living in gratitude is what keeps me up, helps me see the good, and when I forget, it somehow finds me and reminds me to take stock. Like that very determined tiny little vine, it found me and it reminds of how much has been given to me, and I'm so grateful.

Love and big hugs to all,
Judy N.

HOPE



HOPE

WEEK 1

“The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens.

Advent is the name of that moment.”

Frederick Buechner¹



(¹ Contributed by Diane Tillotson from “Salvation Army Santa Claus Clangs His Bell” in Goodness and Light, Orbis Books, Michael Leach, James Keane, Doris Goodnough, editors).

Photos by Diane Tillotson

HOPE

WEEK 1



HOPE

WEEK 1



HOPE

WEEK 1

Advent Reflection and Prayer
December 2020
By Alan Cody

Scripture

Psalm 27: Verse 5:

“For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble
He will conceal me under the
the cover of his tent
He will set me high on a rock”

John 14, Verse 18-19

“I will not leave you orphaned: I
am coming to you. In a little while
The world will no longer see me, but
You will see me; because I live, you
Also will live”

No Season for Fear

Advent is a season of joy and anticipation which I have always enjoyed. Yet the end of another year with its longer nights, always seems to bring on the usual anxieties whether last minute expenses, doctor visits or just getting everything done. While, ultimately, these prove to be trivial, they remind me of other times when my fears have been more real and when that still small voice or feeling came to me when I needed it most.

I have always looked forward to trips, important events and family gatherings. Yet in my 70s, these events began to remind me, with a fear more real, that life is getting on. The quiet time that came with the pandemic, without many of these events, no longer seemed a fearsome progression of time but a still moment when I could put aside fear and find the love and hope that God meant me to find. I found that moment last May when I married Edith with the loving support of my son, David, brother Eric, Stacy and the Union Church.

As the scripture above says, God will give us the cover of his tent and will not leave us orphaned! Advent marks the anticipation of Christ's coming to us to remind us of that cover. May you find quiet moments of love and hope this Advent which remind you of the words of Isaiah 41:10, “Fear not for I am with thee.” I offer a prayer for us to give thanks for this season of love and hope overcoming fear.

(con't.)

HOPE

WEEK 1

A Prayer for Advent – by Alan Cody

Holy one, You have walked with us
Since before our births
And called out to us
In the corners of our lives,
“Fear not, for I am with Thee.”

Your many voices,
Father, mother, brother sister, spouse
Blessed us with love
Overcoming fear with hope.

Your many hands
Teacher, doctor, pastor,
Led us out of every shadow
From our trials to hope.

Your scriptures
Gave us refuge
From our worries in
The timeless words of your prophets.

When passing time
Turned anticipation to
Fear of loss,
You filled each moment
With quiet enduring hope.

We give thanks for every Advent
When You are with us
Filling us unexpectedly
With love, hope and faith
That flows to
Every season of life.

Amen

PEACE

WEEK 2



PEACE

WEEK 4 - READINGS

Reading 1 - 2 Samuel 7:1-11

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.

Reading 2 - Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

PEACE

WEEK 2 - REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS

Last year in my reflection, I quoted a song stating the opposite of fear was hope. While I can still see how this would be so, this year has shown me how peace can also be the response to fear.

When we are in a fearful situation, we often have one of two or three responses. Commonly referred to as the fight, flight, and sometimes freeze natural responses. However, there is one more response, peace, be peace.

Why is this important? Because, not only can we make better judgements, others around us can sense our inner calmness and it is contagious. When we emulate peace, others can sense this peace and in turn they may be able to be more peaceful. As this peace grows, it creates fertile ground for hope, love, joy, healing and so much more.

How do we find that calmness and peace? Rev. Dr. Kirk Jones, a former professor of Andover Newton Theological School wrote the book *Just Because You Are in the Storm, Doesn't Mean the Storm Has to be Inside of You*. In his book, he encourages readers to practice retreat and rest.

How do we practice retreat and rest? Well, that's up to us. A few suggestions that are listed in the book include "listening to a relaxing song taking some deep cleansing breaths, or even simply watching a candle burn". My favorites include doing short meditations, watching movies or shows that are one of my guilty pleasures on tv, and listening to music. Whatever it is, make sure it is something that fills your soul's cup.

Easier said than done, but it also is the key to responding to fear with peace. If we practice being peaceful when our environment is peaceful, we may actually be able to be at peace in more trying times.

Jesus exemplifies this perfectly when he commands the storm to "be still". This miracle can be found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We often focus on the miracle itself when Jesus calms the storm. In all three gospels, it states that he rebuked the wind, and the disciples were amazed. Yet, let's focus on what Jesus was doing before this. He was resting, actually he was sleeping.

How could he be sleeping through such a storm? I and some people in this congregation can tell you that I do not mix well with rough waters and boats, so I can venture a guess as to how the disciples felt that night. But in the normal course of our lives, most of us aren't in any real physical danger worried that we'll perish at sea, yet we often are worried, stressed, or even fearful. This is not to minimize our own sufferings in fact, experiencing these feelings are a beautiful part of being human, but simply to highlight that in the midst of the storm, Jesus' inner peace was so much a part of who he was, that even through a literal physical storm, he was able to go off and sleep in the back of a boat. This to me is just as amazing as the act of rebuking the wind.

So although it won't be easy, I have set an intention to remind myself to take pauses of peace, rest, and retreat. It won't be easy, and there will probably be days, maybe even weeks, that I forget to do this, but hopefully one day, it will become a way of life. I invite you to set your own intention of peaceful pauses which in time can be the start of a peace revolution. Soo Laski

PEACE

WEEK 2

A Prayer by Bart Kelso

O Lord of Light and Glory, great is the news of your coming,
and great is this world's need of what you bring:
sight for blind eyes, strength for weak limbs,
healing for the sick, release for the prisoners,
new life for the dead,
and good news for the poor of the earth.
I know, O Coming One, that I who call upon your Name
am as needy of your grace and power as anyone.
My eyes are often blind to my family,
my neighbors, and my enemies.
My ears are sometimes shut to the voice of your Spirit.
My hands and feet are slow to do your will.
I need to be raised from the death of indifference,
to be cleansed from the leprosy of exclusiveness and resentment,
to believe obediently the good news of salvation.
Deliver me, O Christ, from every lesser bondage
than your own. AMEN.

The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the last sound
In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
Rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
Who do not tax their lives with forethought
Of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
Waiting with their light. For a time

PEACE

WEEK 2

A Prayer—Anonymous

Creator, Redeemer, my rock, my Father and Friend; My life is in your hands; All that I am and all that I have is yours. I give myself to you, passionately, gratefully, unreservedly. May I seek your will, your truth and your justice today and always. Graciously removed all the barriers I create that put distance between us, especially my fears, and shame. Relieve me from the bondage of self. Instill in me a thirst to please you and a resolute belief that in you, with you and through you, I have and am enough.



PEACE

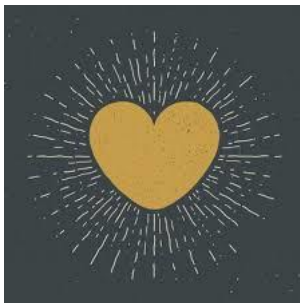
WEEK 2

THE FOOTPATH TO PEACE

*By Henry van Dyke - 1852-1933
with thanks to Phil Fitzpatrick*

Contributed by Tom Vawter

To be glad of life,
because it gives you the chance to love
and to work and to play
and to look up at the stars;
to be satisfied with your possessions
but not content with yourself
until you have made the best of them;
to despise nothing in the world
except falsehood and meanness,
and to fear nothing except cowardice;
to be governed by your admirations
rather than by your disgusts;
to covet nothing of your neighbor's
except his kindness of heart
and gentleness of manners;
to think seldom of your enemies,
often of your friends
and everyday of Christ;
and to spend as much time as you can
with body and with spirit
in God's out-of-doors;
~ these are little guideposts
on the footpath to peace.



JOY

WEEK 3



JOY

WEEK 3 - READINGS

Reading 1 - Isaiah 61: 1-4

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;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ 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.
⁴ 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.

Reading 2 - John 1: 6-8 and 19-28

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.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"

as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

JOY

WEEK 3



“THE INVITATION
by Oriah Mountain Dreamer

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.
I want to know what you ache for, and if you
dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

It doesn't interest me how old you are.
I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool
for love,
for your dreams,
for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own
sorrow,
if you have been opened by life's betrayals
or have become shriveled and closed from fear of future
pain.

I want to know if you can sit with pain,
mine or your own,
without moving to hide it,
or fade it,
or fix it.

I want to know if you can be with joy,
mine or your own,
if you can dance with wildness
and let the ecstasy fill you
to the tips of your fingers and toes
without cautioning us to be careful,
to be realistic,
to remember
the limitations of being human.

(con't)

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling
me is true.
I want to know if you can disappoint another to
be true to yourself;
if you can bear the accusation of betrayal
and not betray your own soul;
if you can be faithless and therefore
trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see Beauty even when
it's not pretty,
every day,
and if you can source your own life from its
presence.

I want to know if you can live with failure,
yours and mine,
and still stand on the
edge of the lake
and shout to the silver of the full moon, "yes!"
It doesn't interest me to know where you live
Or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up after a night
Of grief and despair weary and bruised to the
Bone and do what needs to be done
To feed the children.



It doesn't interest me who you know, or how
you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand in the center of
the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or with
whom you have studied.
I want to know what sustains you,
from the inside,
when all else falls away.

I want to know if you can be alone
with yourself."

— Oriah Mountain Dreamer
(contributed by Linda Lynch)

JOY

WEEK 3

Fear Not—by Julie Heffernan

I was fearless when I was a child. I set sibling records for jumping off the highest perch on the fire escape of the community center next to our parsonage, I won neighborhood bets by climbing to the top-most branch in the community center's enormous beech tree, and I was an early and eager rider on Hershey Park's then new SooperDooperLooper roller coaster. I am no longer fearless - and I attribute that to becoming a parent. Being responsible for a child's well being is a daunting task!

Studies show that people with disabilities are being hit disproportionately hard by the coronavirus. This is not news to me. Ever since last spring's earliest images of overcrowded hospitals in NYC and Italy, I have feared what COVID-19 would mean for patients with disabilities. Many of my friends with disabilities have other underlying medical issues and probably wouldn't fare well in hospitals' algorithms to determine who gets the available ventilators and heroic measures. Plus, the thought of a patient with disabilities being alone in a hospital room, unable to have family members at his or her side, undoes me. These thoughts also activate my tamped-down memories of Brian's childhood struggles with a poor immune system.

Brian was only thirteen months old when we learned that, in him, a simple germ could turn into a serious condition called periorbital cellulitis. He'd get a fever and the area around his right eye would swell and turn dangerously red. The first time we rushed him to the pediatrician for this, we learned that his infection did not respond to oral or even injected antibiotics. Instead, Brian had to be hospitalized for a four-day series of powerful IV antibiotics. Thank heavens for Children's Hospital and its wonderful nurses and doctors!

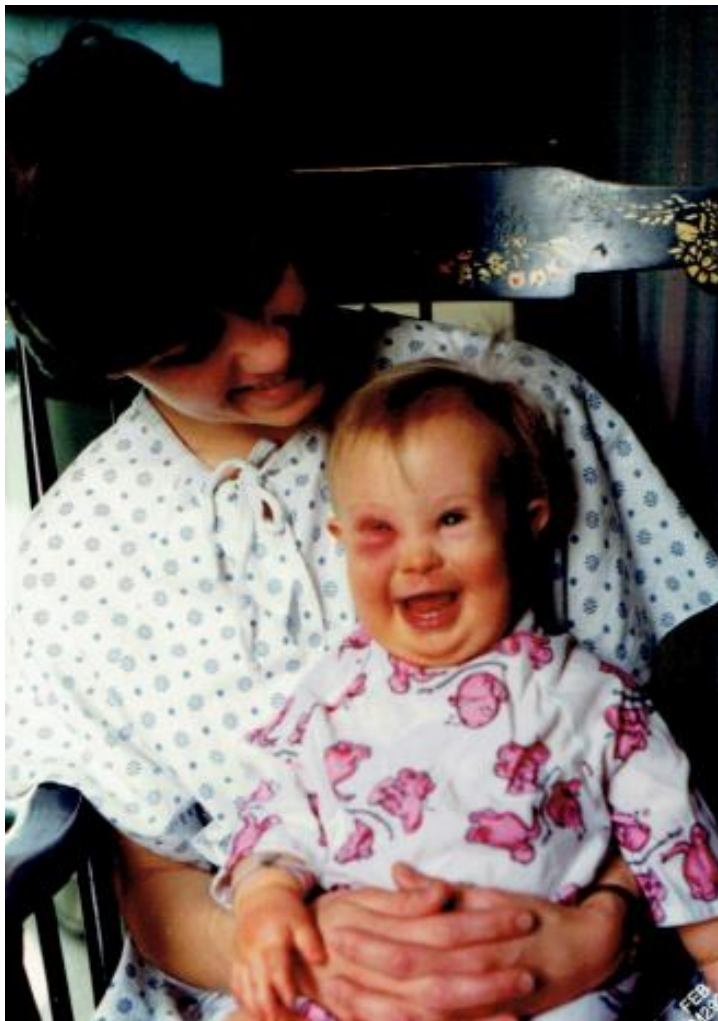
That was just the first of Brian's several hospitalizations for periorbital cellulitis. The one that is perhaps etched most deeply in my memory is one that took place a few months after he turned three. As soon as I noticed the beginnings of the red rash on Brian's face, I popped him and six-week-old Maggie in the car and headed straight to Children's. Brian was immediately whisked into an ER exam room, where I overheard the doctor say that his temp was 105.6° and that the infection was moving dangerously close to his brain. I stood helplessly by, cradling newborn Maggie in my arms, trying to shield her from any germs floating around the ER. This was 1994, before cell phones were commonplace, and I was unable to reach Dan at work. Again the IV worked its magic and four days of it restored Brian to health, but the memory of the fear I felt that day lies buried deep within me.

(con't.)

Another memorable hospitalization took place six years later, when Brian was nine years old. At the first signs of the infection, I left Dan at home with the girls, strapped Brian into the car's back seat, and headed for Children's. It was January and a terrible snowstorm was raging. I was hunched over the steering wheel, gripping it with white knuckles as we crept along the Mass Pike. A clock ticked in my head as I calculated the precious time we were losing. Then, Brian's sweet voice piped up from the back seat: "Mom, don't worry. We can still pray for our friends from my hospital room." While I was consumed with fear, Brian was focused on our friends, on relationships, and on his/our connection to God. He knew how to set fear aside and focus on what's good and holy.

[F]ear not, for I am with you,
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

I would love to claim that I "fear not," but I can't. At times, fear simply overtakes me. However, at those times, I find great comfort in the last line of Isaiah 41:10. When I am so frightened that I cannot even articulate my needs and concerns, I simply pray, "Please hold me/us in the palm of Your hand." Just as Daon sang so beautifully last Sunday, I know God will pull me/us through. He always does.



JOY

WEEK 3

An Advent Reflection by Roxan Peterson

There. I've deleted pages and pages of email messages about pathetic election theatrics, "Dear first name" efforts to raise money for very good causes and hard statistics about rapidly rising covid rates. There remain hundreds from the past month that I'd saved fearing that I might miss important information. There will be pages of new messages in the morning. But I feel a little less weight right now.

The last time that I visited the Union Waban Church was exactly one year ago, and it was so good to stand on home ground. And, for the first time, to bravely sing with the choir! Living in Chautauqua County on the shore of Lake Erie has its challenges, and it was still new to me last November. I am a Black feminist artist living in white rural American- yes, the place you kept hearing about on the news during this past election.

I have met people here who would rather not see me. And there are other people, desperate to be seen with me as proof that all is well. The village where I live now was once a part of the Underground Railroad, and some houses still have secret rooms, unchanged. This history is nothing special or important to people from here, but it seems very important to me. Sometimes I wish that I could talk to ghosts. And sometimes I feel afraid. Which was what happened last November, why my husband encouraged me to fly to Boston for a weekend to meet my brothers for lunch at Haymarket and stop by to visit UWC. My relentless anxiety had even made me anxious that Bertil had to deal with it. Everything made me anxious.

(con't.)

The sermon that Pastor Stacy spoke when I was last there carried the message “Fear not”. How amazing, I stopped to feel my heartbeat. I listened very carefully because it seemed magical that this was the topic. After the service, I got to eavesdrop on a meeting of the new committee to confront racism. Waiting for my flight back to Buffalo later that evening I realized everything I was afraid of was not about me. And, I had seen these things, felt these things, before growing up in Boston.

I just happen to live in rural America now at a time when the alleged ‘melting pot’ is being aggressively stirred up, and there’s all sorts of stuff that’s been unseen at the bottom now becoming visible. Bertil met me at the airport with a midnight snack of Buffalo wings for the long ride back to Westfield and it was wonderful. Solid. Steady. Real. I thought of a song that I found accidentally a few years ago by a group called the Fray, a band I’d never heard before or since. I share this with you here, and hope that you find it beautiful too.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nUuBjz4Vhc>



And now, a year later, there's so much more to fear. The pot's still being stirred, now seasoned with Covid 19. To me, 'fear not' does not mean invincibility. And stillness doesn't mean inaction.

Fear means to me to remember to take care of my heart, to listen, to listen deeply. That's what allows me to see, and to trust, and what connects me to others. And to sit with my heart as the center seals a bond between me and that which is greater than myself.

When I feel that wordless anxiety, I take the dog for a walk and see how beautiful

the vineyards, and deer, and eagles, and first snows are versus, well, things of human construct, like, so many flags for example. There is still something worth looking for behind old fabric. And everything seems better "walking softly" beside Ida Belle, our beautiful rescue dog.

(con't.)



(To view the video please go [HERE](#) or paste the following link into your browser:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jjy1Ouo6K-3lcmrNsGmgkmZfbmp-E6Qu/view>)

Tomorrow there will be way too many emails. But I found this short video that I made walking around Haymarket last year. I didn't think that it was important then, but this year I think that it is.

Remember?

Merry Christmas!

JOY

WEEK 3

A season of blessings

From a Star above

A season of sharing with all those we love.

As season of caring and warmth and good cheer.

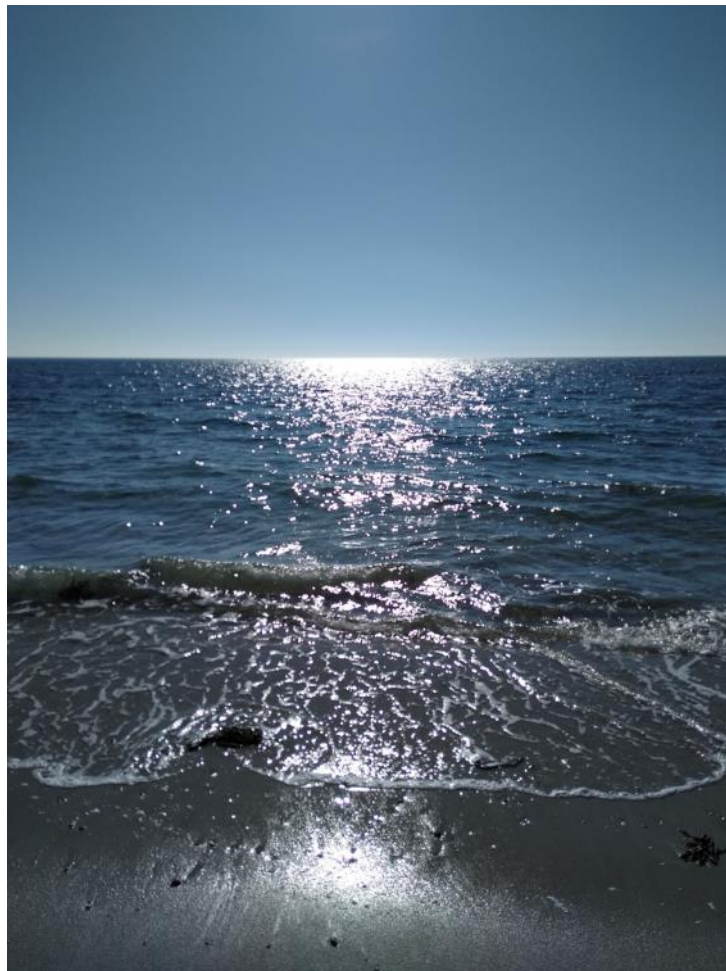
As season of hope for the coming new year.

Tis the season to wish one another Joy

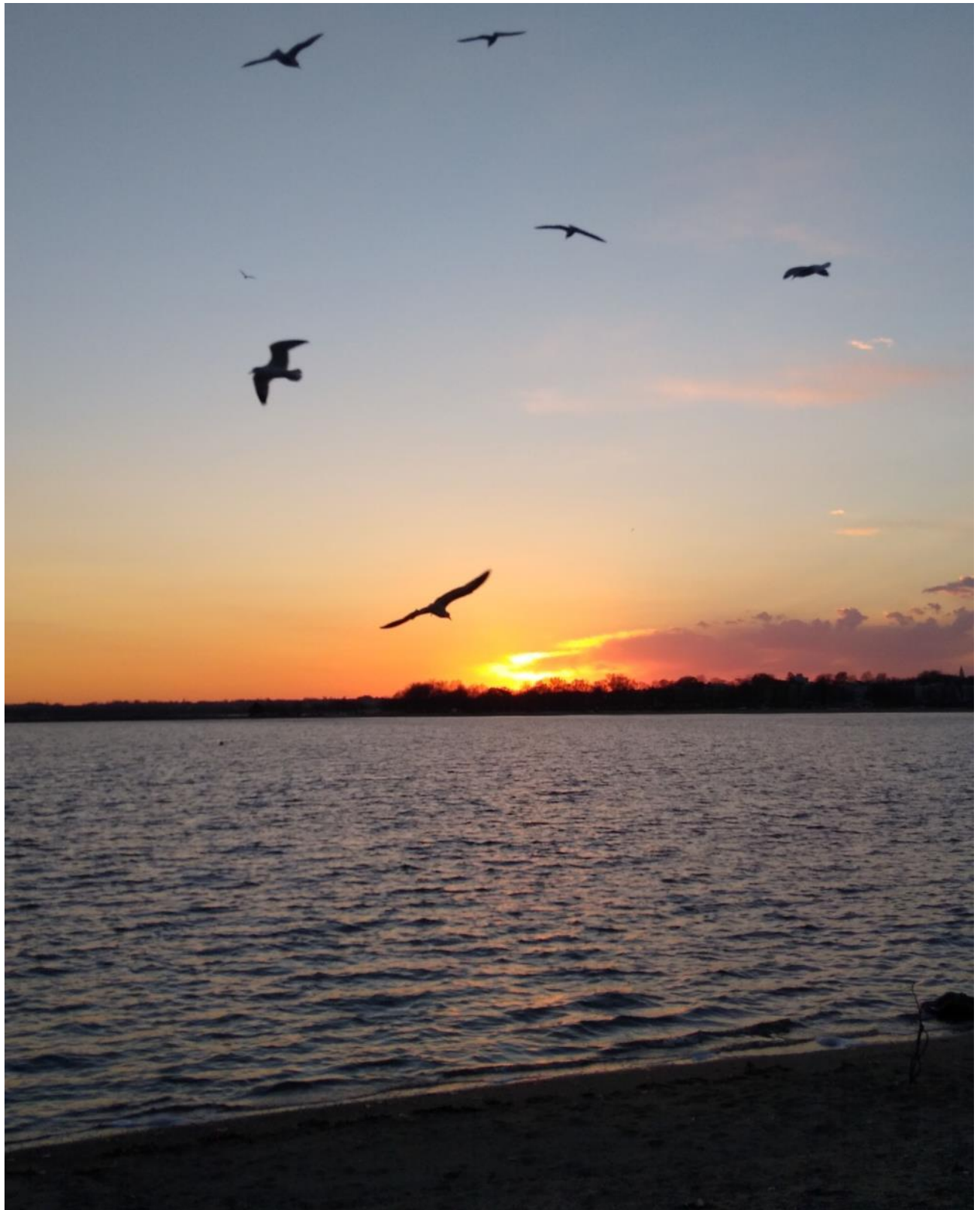
And Peace...these are our prayers for you.

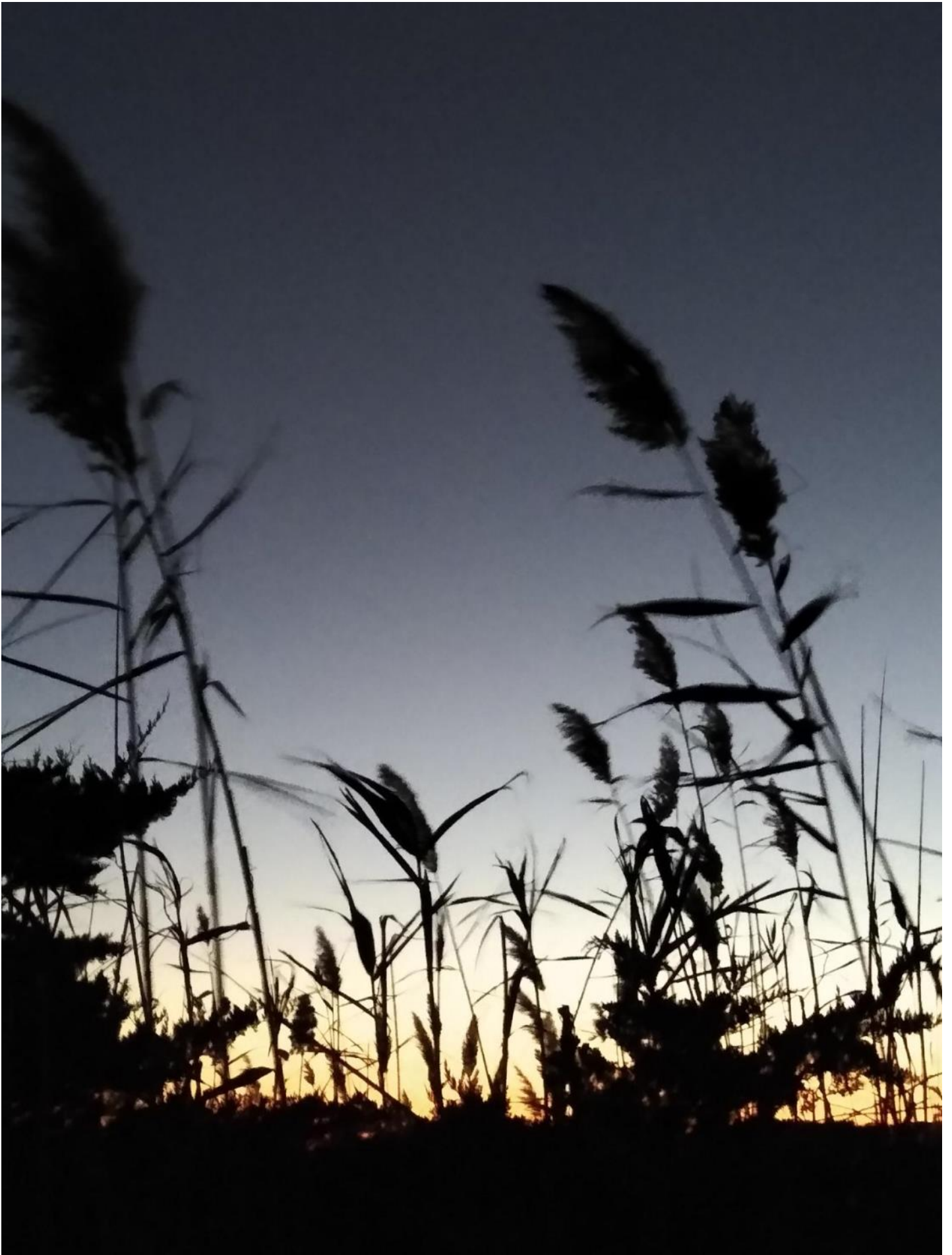
Merry Christmas

Deb McGovern



Photos by Deb McGovern





LOVE

WEEK 4 - LIGHTING THE WAY



LOVE

WEEK 2

Reading 1 - Isaiah 11: 1-10

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins. A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of
the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for
our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the
field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon
it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reading 2—Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

*"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"*

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

LOVE

WEEK 4



By Frank Laski

God hath not given us the spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7

LOVE

WEEK 4

The Saving Words – “Be Not Afraid” by Brita L. Gill-Austern

No human being exists who does not know what it means to be afraid. We are afraid in ordinary and extraordinary times. Yet the most frequently uttered words in the whole Bible are “Do Not Be Afraid.” God must consider them pretty important to a full and flourishing life if they are the most repeated words. In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures thirty-three distinct passages remind us that we do not need to be afraid. The Christmas story begins with the appearance of the angelic presence to Mary, to Joseph and the shepherds saying “Do not be afraid.” But not just here, but throughout the whole of scripture, we hear the promise of God's accompaniment.

Fear not 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. (Isaiah 43: 1-3)

Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God;

I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you. (Isaiah 41:10)

Immediately he spoke to them and said ‘Take heart! It is I. Do not be afraid.’ (Mark 6:50)

We must not confuse, however, these words of comfort and accompaniment with the healthy fear that evokes our full attention in the presence of genuine danger. Healthy fear cautions us away from sailing into ocean breakers as a hurricane is brewing, it makes us attentive when we cross the street, and it spurs us to run when we fear being attacked. Clearly, when fear helps us focus and be alert to danger, it can be life-saving. Masks are healthy way to respect a real fear.

But the “be not afraid” of the Bible is about a different kind of fear. These important words occur during encounters with the Holy – often when the divine energy of the universe or the divine energy within us is calling us to do something new in our lives. We cannot move from where we are – certainty – to where life is calling us – uncertainty – without releasing fear’s capacity to control us. Trust does not require that we let go of all fear, but that we do not let fear have the last word. Often we are so afraid of what we cannot control, predict, manage, calculate and organize that the new has a frightfully hard time being born into our lives. At these crucial moments, the scriptures remind us that the words of trust, “be not afraid” will come to us again and again. (con’t.)

In the Gospel of Luke (5:1-11), the author relays a story of fear and trust. A group of fishermen, who had caught nothing all day, dropped their nets where Jesus suggested and they finally caught so many fish their boats began to sink. They were “amazed”; and afraid. “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.’” (5:8) “Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’” (5:10) Through this comment, Jesus was inviting Peter, James, and John, to cast their nets into the deepest places of all, where they can find people’s hearts and bring them into life-giving connection with God and one another.

As this account of the calling of the disciples continues, we are told that Peter, James, and John left everything and followed Jesus. Their trust is not simply a predisposition of their personalities; it is an act. If they had not said “Yes,” the Good News about the life of Jesus – what some call the greatest story ever told – would not have been told. Radical trust – of the kind demonstrated by these first disciples – is often an act of great courage.

Only when we live out of a trusting center can love be fully born, given and received. Because dealing with fear is never as easy as it was when we were children – turning on a night-light to keeping monsters out of sight and mind, for example – our first inclination is to try to avoid it. We often choose to numb our terror with alcohol, drugs, work or other compulsive activities. Doing this, however, we also block access to the source of our aliveness. The more we attempt to bypass fear, the more it runs our lives. Without willingness to be with all the things that scare us, we remain captives of fear, and it becomes a prime, unconscious motivator in our lives. Fear is always disorienting because it challenges our illusions of being in control. In addition to willingness, facing fear requires courage to enter the unknown, the uncertain and the darkest places of our lives. It requires curiosity about what might be lurking there so we can gently and tenderly comfort the frightened soul within us. We are helped enormously when we learn to trust that a Presence holds us, will be with us, and is for us – no matter what.

Prayer for Advent

Holy One of Presence, let us be with the fear within us, help us to be still long enough to face what is there and then, may we hear the words of your love to us, “Be not afraid, for I will be with you, no matter what.” Amen.

LOVE

WEEK 4

When I was a child, we were told we should have love for God, or so I thought. Since I had a vague idea of who this God was, I didn't know what I was to feel. Years later, when practically middle-aged, I realized that God, or some higher forces, had always looked out for me, that God had cared for me — this was the love OF God. I had mistaken "for" for "of". Know, dear ones, that God's love is there FOR you always. Try to look beyond the outer effects and see the inner workings of God's love for us. They are there if we look deeply.

By Gerry Elion



LOVE

WEEK 4

The Christmas Tree by James Merrill, contributed by Tom Vawter



To be
Brought down at last
From the cold sighing mountain
Where I and the others
Had been fed, looked after, kept still,
Meant, I knew—of course I knew—
That it would be only a matter of weeks,
That there was nothing more to do.
Warmly they took me in, made much of me,
The point from the start was to keep my spirits up.
I could assent to that. For honestly,
It did help to be wound in jewels, to send
Their colors flashing forth from vents in the deep
Fragrant sables that cloaked me head to foot.
Over me then they wove a spell of shining—
Purple and silver chains, eavesdripping tinsel,
Amulets, milagros: software of silver,
A heart, a little girl, a Model T,
Two staring eyes. Then angels, trumpets, BUD and BEA
(The children's names) in clownlike capitals,
Somewhere a music box whose tiny song
Played and replayed I ended before long
By loving. And in shadow behind me, a primitive IV
To keep the show going. Yes, yes, what lay ahead
Was clear: the stripping, the cold street, my chemicals
Plowed back into the Earth for lives to come—
No doubt a blessing, a harvest, but one that doesn't bear,
Now or ever, dwelling upon. To have grown so thin.
Needles and bone. The little boy's hands meeting
About my spine. The mother's voice: *Holding up wonderfully!*
No dread. No bitterness. The end beginning. Today's
Dusk room aglow
For the last time
With candlelight.
Faces love-lit,
Gifts underfoot.
Still to be so poised, so
Receptive. Still to recall, to praise.

LOVE

WEEK 4



Contributed by Linda Lynch

LOVE

WEEK 4

Annunciation

By Marie Howe

Even if I don't see it again — nor ever feel it
I know it is — and that if once it hailed me
it ever does—

and so it is myself I want to turn in that
direction

not as toward a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,

as one turns a mirror to flash the light to
where

it isn't — I was blinded like that — and
swam

in what shone at me

only able to endure it by being no one and
so

specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

(contributed by Tom Vawter)



Art by Nicole Besack

LOVE

WEEK 4

Karla Armenoff – Advent Devotional Offering

Keeping the Lights On

Our Christmas lights have been on every night since December 2019. They have evolved into Hope Lights, and we intend to keep them shining until there is an effective Covid-19 vaccine that is justly distributed to all. To us, these perpetual lights are a determined, tangible sign of what we need most: [hope, peace, joy, and love.](#)



(Our home with hardworking Christmas lights on November 19, 2020)

Lingering Lights—Destined to Help Us Through a Pandemic?

By March this year, we had kept our lights hung far too long—having overlooked the usual deadline of Valentine’s Day for taking down the joyous twinkle of Advent and the hopeful message of Christmas. St. Patrick’s Day was approaching, and still we had Christmas lights. It’s just so nice having them.

And then Covid-19 hit. We’ll never forget Friday March 13, 2020: the day my place of employment, The Price Center, shut down onsite operations for day programs – and Wat’s place of employment began sending out word that the office would shut down soon, dispatching everyone to makeshift home offices.

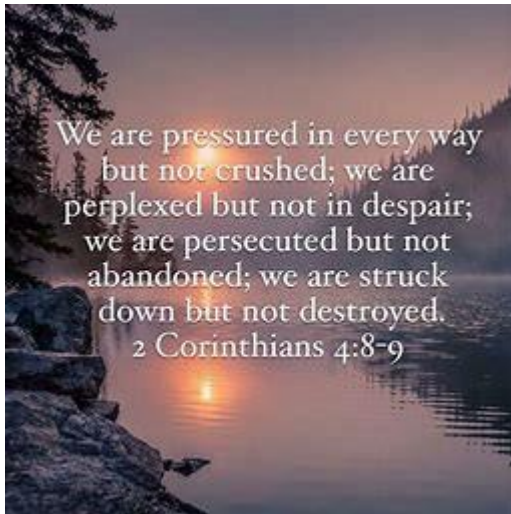
The shock was an assault: fear set in.

(con’t)

Yet, I'm wondering why God *commanded* us to courage. Confidently telling us that we don't have to be afraid could have done the trick—since it's coming from such a strong and loving force and spirit as God. Or, gently reassuring us to not be afraid because everything is going to be OK—that would feel even better.

My Mom's Devotional Bible offers some guidance: "Fear is unfaith. It's seeing only what makes human sense in a given situation. The way out of fear is faith. Where do we need to believe God, and what he is saying to us? Where do we need to give up our fear and replace it with faith?...When we fear, we don't believe and when we don't believe, we fear."

The connection between fear and unfaith is powerful—and warrants God *commanding* us not to fear: because if fear impedes or ruins our faith, then our capacity to find hope, love and peace within ourselves, within others, and within the universe is diminished. And without hope, love and peace, it is much harder to help others, and to be in relationship with others. Surely, fear-induced isolation, restlessness, alienation, and inability to help others is the opposite of what being human is about.



We are pressured in every way
but not crushed; we are
perplexed but not in despair;
we are persecuted but not
abandoned; we are struck
down but not destroyed.
2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Even if Lights Fade—God Bolsters our Courage

God's love has also witnessed our reflex to (often quickly) slide into fear-induced hopelessness; and so, *commanding* us to reject fear is also a way of halting that slide—of shaking us into hope.

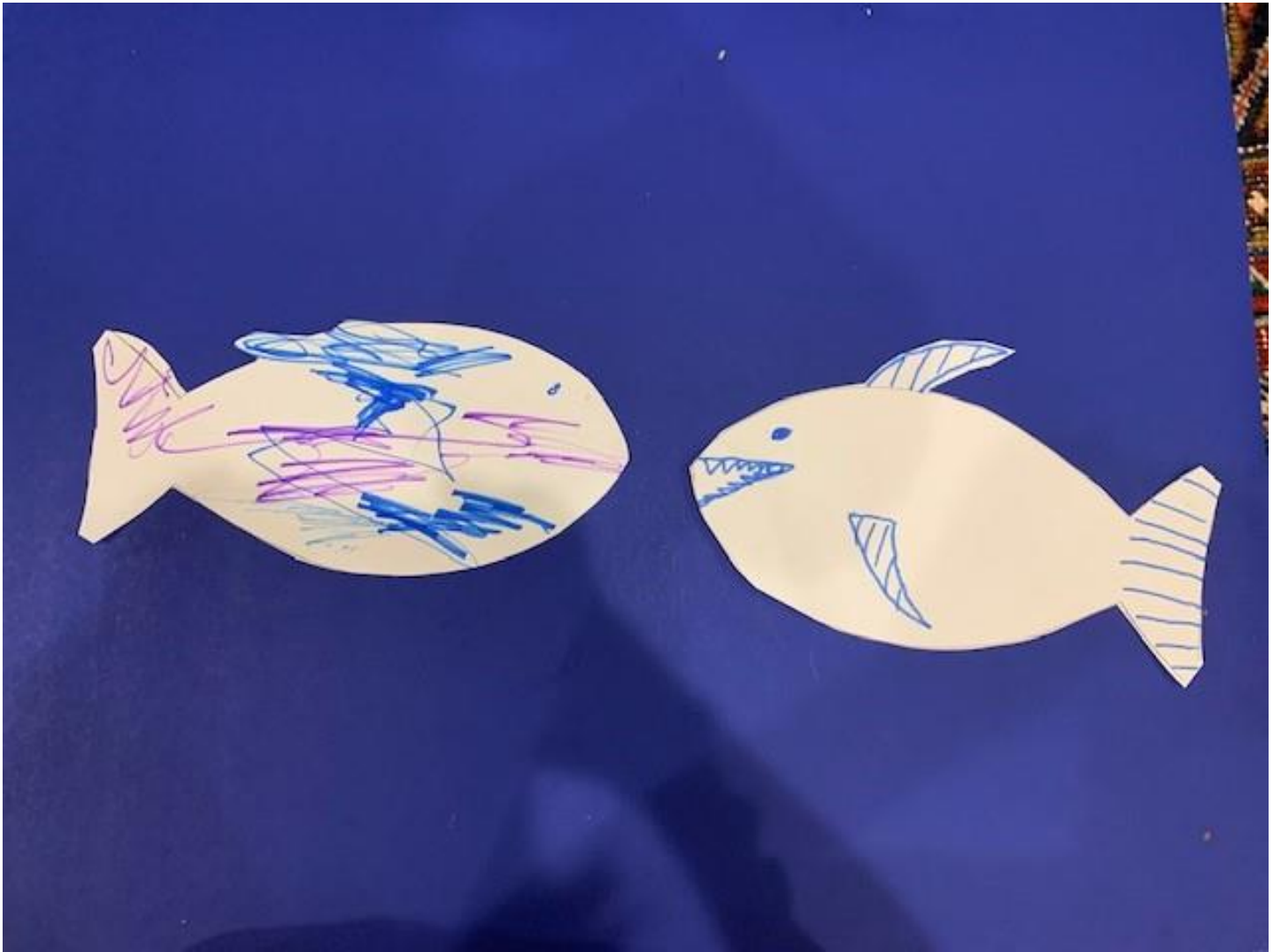
This call for steely faith rings out from a passage that Priscilla Kelso shared with women who attended the UCW Wellspring group in November this year: "We are hard-pressed on every side but not crushed; perplexed but not

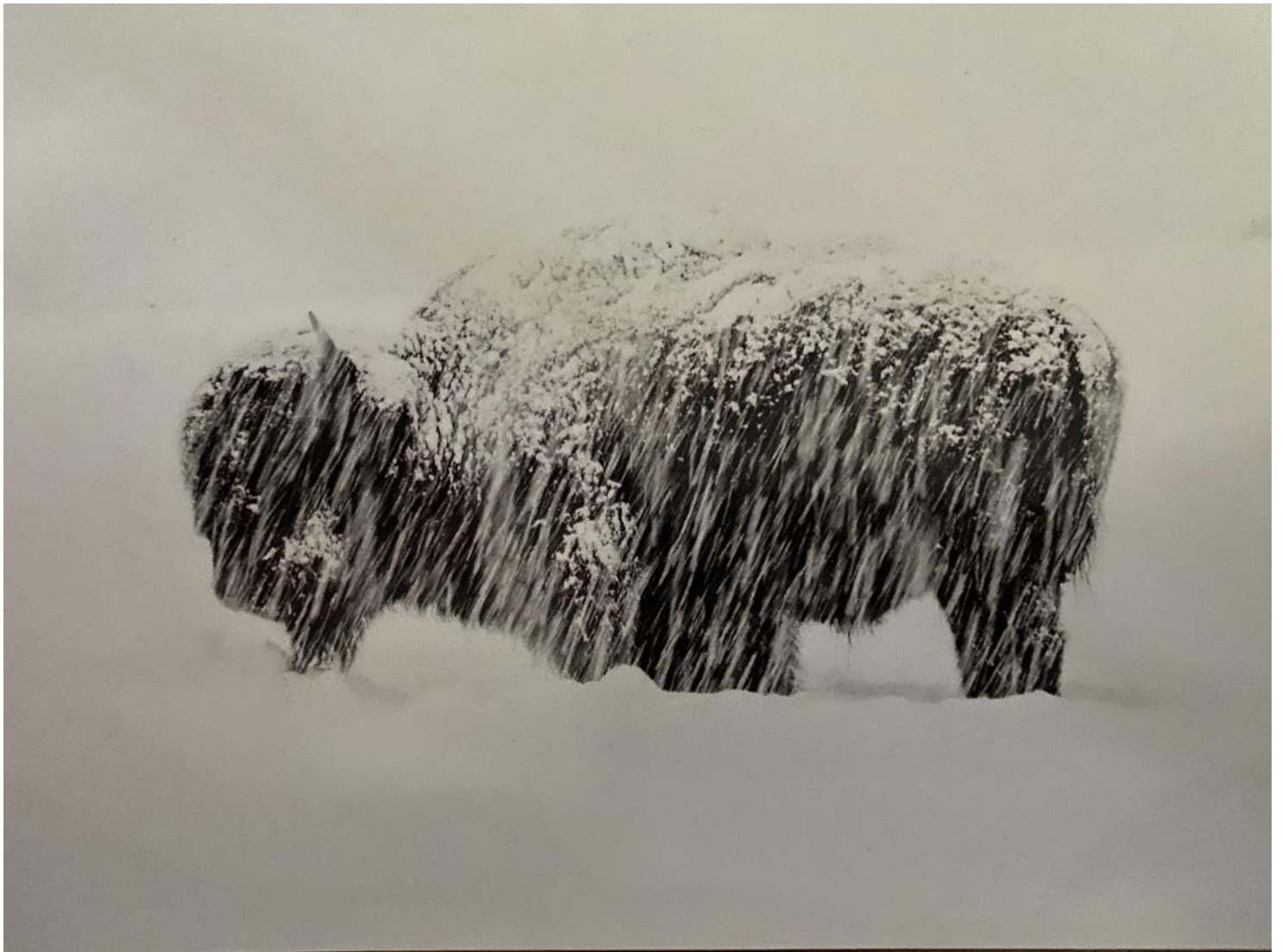
in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Even if Christmas lights fade this season and beyond, God's will for us to live and help others can lead us get through the pandemic—and beyond. In order to hold onto lessons we are learning during the pandemic, perhaps we should add Humility and Resolve (to save Earth and her people) to the Christmas values of : hope, peace, joy, and love.

LOVE

WEEK 4





Winter Bison—Max Waugh 2019

Contributed by Tom Vawter

CHRISTMAS EVE

Re-Framing Words in COVID Times by Priscilla Lasmarias Kelso

This is going to be a different Christmas for us all. Never in our lifetime have we faced a modern plague, economic distress, a government in flux, all at once. These are extraordinary times that call on stronger faith resources from with us individually and collectively.

“Fear not” has deeper resonance than “Merry Christmas” or “Fa-la-la-la-la.”

“Fear not” assumes that the problems are larger than we can muster beyond positive thinking or nostalgia for better days.

“Fear not” takes us to the deeper places of our faith where we may not have gone before.

The Filipino word for this is “Panaggang.” It refers to the strength needed to resist an assault, to the guarantee of safety when danger is overwhelming. “Panaggang” in the name of the Lord is what my family in the Philippines depended on during World War II and 15 years of martial law under a lawless dictator.

“Panaggang” is what we need now as we dig into the depths of our faith to live through the ravages of 2020 and beyond. “Fear not” assumes that fear is real, but it is not ultimate. “in this world you will have tribulations, but be of good courage, I have overcome the world.” is a promise straight from Scriptures. More than ever, we need to believe this now.

So this Advent I am juggling words, re-framing them in light of the challenging circumstances.

“Fear not,” repeated several times in the Advent and Christmas story, is for us today.



CHRISTMAS EVE

Advent Devotional – Karla Armenoff

The Physicality of Appealing to God

Since March this year, I've turned to very physical prayer to quell anxiety and respond to a strong compulsion to: thank God for every millisecond of life; to thank God for everything in our very fragile and beautiful world; and to ask for God's loving mercy and help for all who are sick, for all who are healing, and for all who are afraid.

This physical seeking to connect with God has taken two forms: praying on my knees, head down (the stretching of the spine, the release of tension, and becoming one with the ground, when outside, have all helped me to feel God's presence); and jogging slow but hard, forcing full oxygen intake to open my mind and robust blood flow to reattach to the life force. The rhythm of body, trunk and limbs working together to propel forward movement creates in my mind a mantra: "Thank. You. God. Thank. You. God. Thank. You. God."

As wonderful as the running is, I am new to jogging and need a lot of energy and help to keep going with it. Music is my answer. I will not jog without music.

Sometimes when I am lucky, a song pours music into my ears that is actually a prayer, an anthem to hope, peace, joy, and love. My favorite is Bruce Springsteen's [Land of Hope and Dreams](#).

Though unconventional as a Christmas song, please enjoy the music and the artistry – and feel free to ignore any political philosophy that "let freedom ring" might bring to mind. Imagine Springsteen's "train" as being a metaphor for planet Earth—or a caravan of all the people, in all the countries, hoping for help, crying for an end to suffering, offering hands to every soul and every heart: from saints and sinners, to loser and winners, to fools and kings...broken hearted, thieves, and sweet souls departed...faith will be rewarded.

[Update: Cold weather does not have to halt physical prayer! Wat and I have purchased a teeny-tiny, low-tech exercise bike that folds up: perfect for small living quarters and—at \$138.00—a modest financial investment.]

During this Advent and all the days beyond, I offer encouragement and solidarity, that you enjoy whatever form of prayer that helps and sustains you, and that helps you grow closer to God.

(con't.)

Land of Hope and Dreams

Oh oh this train, I'm riding this train

Don't you wanna ride

(This train)

Oh get on, get on (this train)

Grab your ticket and your suitcase

Thunder's rolling down the tracks

You don't know where you're goin' now

But you know you won't be back

Darlin' if you're weary

Lay your head upon my chest

We'll take what we can carry

And we'll leave the rest

Big wheels rolling through fields

Where sunlight streams

Meet me in a land of hope and dreams

I will provide for you

And I'll stand by your side

You'll need a good companion

For this part of the ride

Leave behind your sorrows

Let this day be the last

Tomorrow there'll be sunshine

And all this darkness past

Big wheels roll through fields

Where sunlight streams

Meet me in a land of hope and dreams

This train carries saints and sinners

This train carries losers and winners

This train carries whores and gamblers

This train carries lost souls

I said, this train dreams will not be thwarted

This train faith will be rewarded

This train hear the steel wheels singin'

This train bells of freedom ringin'

This train carries saints and sinners

This train carries losers and winners

This train carries whores and gamblers

This train carries lost souls

I said, this train carries broken-hearted

This train thieves and sweet souls departed

This train carries fools and kings

This train, all aboard

I said, this train dreams will not be thwarted

This train faith will be rewarded

This train hear the steel wheels singin'

This train bells of freedom ringin'

Come on this train

People get ready

You don't need no ticket

All you got do is just get on board

On board this train

This train, people get ready

You don't need no ticket (oh I know you don't)

You don't need no ticket you just get on board
(people get ready)

You just thank the Lord (people get ready)

Come on this train (people get ready)

CHRISTMAS EVE



By Mario Purser

You think this happened only once and long ago?
Think of a summer night and someone
talking across the water,
maybe someone
you loved in a boat, rowing. And you could
hear the oars dripping in the water, from
half a lake away, and they were far and
close at once. You didn't need to touch them
or call to them or talk about it later.
—the sky? It was what you breathed. The lake?
sky that fell as rain. I have been like you
filled with worry, worry—then relief.

You know the wind is sky moving. It happens all the time.

Sent to Anya Bassett during a dark time by her dear friend Courtney

CHRISTMAS EVE



Image from the Jesus Storybook Bible

A Prayer — by Brita Lynn Gill-Austern

Holy One cradle our heart this advent in a manger
a lowly, humble place where we may come to know You.
Just for this Advent help us to shift perspectives.
Help us to imagine the gift you would most like to receive.
Convince us we cannot buy it at a store and wrap it up.
Rather awaken our heart to welcome you into the center of our Advent by:
Cultivating peace within and without,
Finding joy in the simplest of things,
Bringing into our homes the lonely and broken,
Feeding the hungry, rather than our appetites for more of what we don't need,
Visiting someone who needs a warm presence,
Letting go of the resentment we have held far too long,
Opening our heart to someone to whom it was closed.
Remind us you were born in a humble place,
Waiting to be found by kings and shepherds in this vulnerable place.
Help us to look for You in holy vulnerability where you will reveal Your love.
Bless us with the gift of finding You.
Amen.

**With gratitude for all those who so generously contributed
to this Advent Booklet.**



