

ADVENT 2021



Your Guide To The Advent Season At Broadway

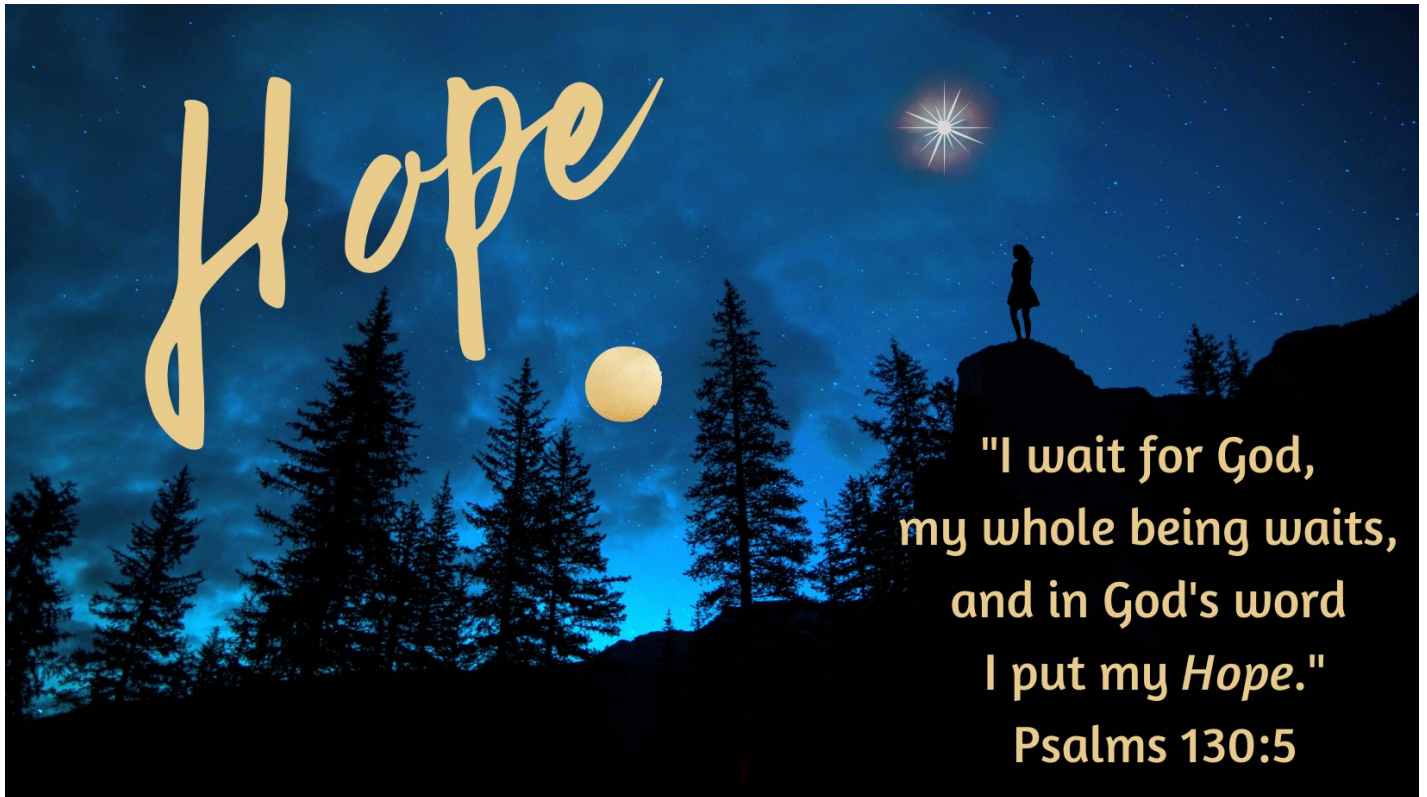
The Journey Begins November 28, 2021

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH 2601 W. BROADWAY COLUMBIA, MO 65203

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First Sunday of Advent ~ HOPE

November 28, 2021



"I wait for God,
my whole being waits,
and in God's word
I put my *Hope*."
Psalms 130:5

Learning From Trees

Job 14:7-9

***For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that its shoots will not cease.
Though its root grows old in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a young plant.***

I love the tradition of bringing trees into our homes—and our church—during this season. I can relate to this verse from Job because we have many trees on our property.

Sometimes we need to chop one down to keep the house or power lines safe. A seemingly lifeless stump explodes in sprouts come spring.

What can we learn from trees? Scientific research now shows trees are interconnected and even help one other, instead of our old view of them as competitive loners.

When I walk in the woods, I soak in God's presence. I can feel Jesus—our living water—healing my heart when I feel chopped down.

Whether you delight in a sparkling Christmas tree or visit a forest this season, take hope from the vitality of trees. Think of the trees in Isaiah 55 that are so joyous they even clap their tree hands. Tree hands! Didn't that make you smile? I did. Right here and right now let the people—and the trees—praise God!

God of acorns and ancient forests, thank you for the gift of trees. Even in winter, you sustain us with this good earth. Bless us and renew our hearts so we grow in hope with new ways to love and praise you. Amen.

Genevieve Howard

Despair To Hope

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from far away, You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them – they are more than the sand; I come to the end – I am still with you.
Psalm 139:1-18 excerpts

Years ago there was a period in my life when I had almost completely lost hope. Each night I would say to God, "It's really okay if I don't wake up in the morning." There seemed to be no reason to go on, no hope. It was the love and prayers of many hearts that carried that hope for me when I had none. Psalm 139 reminded me that I am known to God, that God is ever with me. That experience taught me that hope is vital to our lives. From that experience I now try to live each day with gratitude, joy and hope for what was, is and will be. To be that carrier of light and hope for someone else when the need arises.

In this painting the figures begin at the bottom left of the piece lying completely prone, face down, hands and feet hanging off the edge in a dark, black space. Slowly the figure rises as the space becomes lighter, as hope returns until the figure is lifted to a fully upright, reaching up position of joy, thanksgiving and rebirth. The star represents the Holy, the Sacred, Hope. In each figure, in the center of the chest is a spiral of hope that continued to swirl even when things seemed darkest. The fully hopeful figure at the top right is composed of pieces of the various chains that were what the preceding figures were made of, symbolizing how we are who we are because of where we've been.

Holy Waymaker, as we anticipate the arrival of the baby Jesus may it remind us of the eternal hope you have for our lives and all of creation.

Belinda Davis

Walking in Hope

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I put my hope.” -Psalm 130:5

Our world carries a strong message these days about the need for hope. Global warming, the pandemic, and human suffering are all in the news. I remember when the news covered only terrible things happening to people in another state or a distant country. These days, our fellow human beings right here in Columbia are being impacted by the ravages of the pandemic, combined with other conditions, and the mental toll taken by dealing with these things over many months.

I've learned in just the last few weeks that not one, but three, friends are dealing with heavy, life-changing situations, affecting health, mobility, relationships, and family stability. It's a time that truly tries our souls. Words of scripture urge us to keep going. *“I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”* Where do we find the resilience and strength to persevere?

I offer what I can to them, but it's so little. The really big fix needed by these friends is not within my power. I conclude that this pandemic time is a spiritual call to prayer. Paul said to pray without ceasing. That idea makes more sense than ever these days. Can a community unified in daily prayer make a difference? I hope so! Daily prayer is one of the keys of discipleship. Please join me in the practice of daily prayer this Advent season, and let's place our hope in God's power to carry us through.

Loving Creator, we thank you for being our shelter in the storms of life. Please fill us with overflowing hope that each of us will reach a new place of love, joy, and peace. ~Amen

Deb Ward

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hope is a gift from God. We don't even have to earn it. And sometimes we don't appreciate it. Often our so-called hope comes from fear. That leads to worry. Worry causes us to hold back, to be timid when we should be courageous, let the negatives overwhelm our ability to experience peace and joy, and often leads to disappointment. God loves us anyway with a love that transcends our ability to fully understand or appreciate it. We can find God's true hope if we live our faith and put our trust in Him. That is not an easy assignment as we look around our world and see division, poverty, health issues, and crime. But maybe if we take a few minutes each day, push out our negative thoughts and fears, and let God calm us, speak to us in his gentle way and fill us with the hope of the Holy Spirit, we will be renewed. If each of us makes one other person's life better, and then another, and another, we can rekindle the hope that God offers. Once hope starts, it is contagious, lifting hearts and inspiring more giving, and strengthening our hope even more. We can trust that our God will be with us, no matter the circumstances. He will fulfill our ultimate hope, to be with him for eternity. We can rejoice and be filled with hope as we begin advent. God will not fail us. We can trust that his promises will be fulfilled. On that first Christmas, God sent us hope in the form of a baby, born in a barn with a manger for a bed. Hope doesn't require earthly trappings, just faith and trust.

God, as I navigate the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, help me take time to calm down and let your love enter my conscious heart. Fill me with the hope of the Holy Spirit that I may share the Good News. Give me strength and courage to help change lives and instill the gift of God's hope in others. Thank you for your greatest gift of hope, Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray.

Karen Weaver

Sharing Hope

Isaiah 40:31 But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

While walking with, Dodge, I noticed a plaque on a bench. Hope is Big – Auggie Lark, it said. Yes, I thought, it certainly is to lead a happy life. Later reading an article about a 34 hour kettle ringing marathon; it mentioned the Salvation Army slogan ‘With your help, hope marches on’.

Every earthly day is not a great day, but I have hope for both my temporal and eternal future. It takes faith, and some today effort, to have a sense of hope. Sad that some would not experience this sustaining emotion. What can I do to reach out to them?

We each possess strengths that are our gifts to share and provide others the opportunity for hope. What is our unique ability that can be a tool for lifting up others? In my case, it is as simple as taking a long walk. Doing walks to support CropWalk and Enlace seemed achievable to me. Both organizations I am familiar with through Broadway. By helping people achieve self sufficiency, hope is restored.

God of Hope; help me know and use my unique gifts bestowed by you. Give me the courage to start, not always certain the outcome. Just the effort gives me hope to continue trying. Try, I will, with the power of the Holy Spirit within me. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Don Harter

If You Say So

Right Here, Right Now: Hope

Sunday Scripture: Psalms 25: 1-10 “...my hope is in you all day long

“No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame ...”

Meditation Verse: Luke 1:38

“And Mary said, ‘Yes, I see it all now: I’m the Lord’s maid, ready to serve.

Let it be with me just as you say.’”

How many times have we heard a prediction, or a game plan, or a scheme and wondered how realistic it really was? I know when I hear things that sound outlandish, I have been known to reply with a roll of my eyes and a less than hopeful, “If you say so.”

You know ... “The Tigers are gonna take it all this year!” Suuure ... if you say so.

Or ... “It will be done before dinner – I only have 23 pages left to write.” Mmm hmmm ... if you say so.

Or, what about this: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” Yeah. Right. If you say so.

But, that isn’t how Mary responded when the angel came to tell her she would be the mother of Jesus. Sure, she had her doubts. And, she expressed them. But, the angel comforted and reassured her right from the start – and continued to do so even as her doubts crept into the encounter. Every word of reassurance offered to Mary pointed to the presence and guiding hand of God. The angel opens with, “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God.” And, at the end, “For no word from God will ever fail.”

And, just like that, doubt was replaced with ... *hope*. True, Mary had to wait. So did Elizabeth, the soon to be mother of John the Baptist. And the rest of the world. But, the *hope* of God’s involvement transformed the anticipation into a celebration. Mary and Elizabeth got together after this announcement and they both had such joyful things to say! They knew there would be a wait. It was promised, but not yet arrived; it was foretold, but not yet fulfilled.

As we enter the first week of Advent, we wait, too. Right here. Right now. It is the very essence of the season. And, knowing that God is in the waiting; that we have all found favor with God; that no word from God will ever fail ... it can be an eager, *hopeful* anticipation. There really is no other place I want to be.

God of All Things,

We know You have wonderful things planned, and we eagerly await the Big Reveal!

Help us, as the rest of the season's hustle and bustle begins, to keep our focus.

Help us to be, as Mary and Elizabeth were, in the moment. Right here. Right now.

In the Name of the One You Sent,

Amen

Eric Lybeck-Brown

Mary's Moment of Courage

“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of the father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, his kingdom will never end.”” – Luke 1:26-33

The first idea that came to mind when I heard “Right Here, Right Now” was the theme for Advent (after that song ran through my head) was a quote about courage by Rita Dove, “Courage has nothing to do with our determination to be great. It has to do with what we decide in that moment when we are called upon to do more.” With all of the courageous actions of our leaders in response to the pandemic, her words have been echoing through my mind lately. What moments come to your mind? I also think of Mary, in the moment she learned she was carrying the Savior of the World. Of course, she did not excitedly begin savoring her future greatness; like scriptures that countless churchgoers would cherish, paintings and statues of her that would adorn the most magnificent cathedrals, or billions of prayers and countless songs that would honor her name. No, the scripture says she simply replied to the Angel “May it be as you have said”. Mary, in that moment, drew upon whatever ounce of courage she could muster from her tiny teenaged soul and humbly proclaimed her hope for the future. How could she know that over 2000 years later an ordinary gal like me would draw hope from her courage and write about it on a thing called a laptop in the middle of a land called Missouri? Mary reminds us at Christmas every year to be brave and to harness courage right here and right now because you never know when one courageous moment may ignite hope among our fellow troubled people in our very troubled world.

Mother Mary, we are right here, right now, in this spot, in this place, at this time, for a reason. Help us find the courage to humbly realize OUR purpose in OUR moment. Amen.

Lynelle Phillips

Second Sunday of Advent ~ PEACE

December 5, 2021



Philippians 4: 6-7 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

My best friend has a Philippians scripture tattooed on her left arm that is just a few phrases away from this one about peace. We sing so many hymns with her arm scripture as a foundation: “*For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*” Such a familiar scripture, so comforting and powerful, yet I have spent 2021 questioning it and maybe even angry with it. I have questioned God’s strength, love and offering of peace when faced with the challenge of walking alongside my best friend while an aggressive type of brain cancer – glioblastoma – sets about taking her away from me, bit by bit. I have found bad news, confusion and upset at every turn; peace evading me each passing day. The phrase “gnashing of teeth” seems better suited for my mental state, and I don’t know how many times, “Lord, take this cup away from me,” springs to mind in this time of uncertainty. In my unsettled grouchiness, phrases such as, “Let go and let God,” make my eyes roll to the very back of my head. Where to experience God’s peace when every bone and tendon and organ in my body feels anxious and ready for revolt?

If God’s peace “exceeds anything we can understand,” I have tried to search for this peace right here, right now. I have found that sitting quietly in a prayerful state has alluded me, so I have turned to walking prayer. Like many of you, I wear a watch on my wrist that tracks steps, and when my watch tells me it’s time to move, instead of ignoring it, I stand up from my desk, walk away from googling glioblastoma treatments and clinical trials and consider this interrupting buzz on my wrist a formal and official call to prayer. I have a list on my phone of people I want to pray for, many of them sent to me by our BCC CareLink leaders, but many of them family and friends, and at top of the list - my BFF. While strolling along, I mentally announce each name and wait as a few words of prayer rise up from the depths of unconscious thought. It does set my heart at peace – even briefly - to take that short walk of prayer.

Taking one liberty with my mom's favorite song as a word of prayer this day and every day:

*I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.*

*And He walks with me and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am his own;
And the peace we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

Dana Rissler Fritz

How Do You See Peace?

John 14:27 (CEV)

I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give.

It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid.

How do I have real peace of mind, peace with God, right here, right now today?

A question I have asked myself many times in the past but have learned since, through scripture, to put worries aside and be content. You either have peace or you don't! All or nothing. At times, it may seem like a steadfast, tireless trek for the Christian. There is plenty of scripture to remind us of the peace Christ promised us with the help of the Holy Spirit (John 16:33, Phil 4:7, Is 26:1-12, are a few) AND to our children (Is 54:13,14).

We only need to receive it and thank Him. It is reassuring to know Christ is our refuge and our haven; always with us, never failing, unchanging and working everything out for us **for good**. Like the song, "*It is Well with My Soul*", we find comfort in its words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way

When sorrows like sea billows roll

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say

It is well, it is well with my soul.

Recently, on my weekly sisters' phone call, we shared with each other what it looked like to be with God's peace. For my oldest sister, it was trusting Him wholly and knowing that she would sit at His right hand someday. For me, it is envisioning His loving arms around me - protecting, comforting, guiding me throughout my day. Lastly, my other sister wakes up every morning at dawn's early light and reaches towards the heavens... reaches for His hand... and grabbing ahold of it, asks Him for His loving help through her unimaginable day ahead. Peace,,,like a river. Right here, right now...How about you?

Giver of Peace, we are so grateful for your promises of peacekeeping. Forgive us for our worrying and not seeing opportunities to let go and let God. May your peace continue to guard and rule our hearts, creating in us peace and harmony.

Cyd Coil

Peace that Passes Understanding

Philippians 4:7

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever had a song pop in to your head at the perfect moment? Recently a song from childhood Sunday school popped into my head, it goes like this: *I've got the peace that passes understanding down in my heart, (where?!), down in my heart to stay.*

As a kid I enjoyed this song, it is very catchy! However, I didn't fully understand what it meant until I was well into my adult years. All the responsibilities start piling up and a person, if they are not careful, can be completely overwhelmed with all the things and all the worries. Worry, can mean the opposite of peace. But there is hope, (another Advent word) we can be at peace in Jesus Christ! We can be worry free in Jesus Christ!

Imagine you are in a very dark room, you are alone and anxious. Then through the darkness you can see the outline of a curtain. You pull back the curtain and light floods the room! This is like the Peace of God. Open your heart, and His peace will flood your heart, and there will be no room for all those negative emotions. Just Peace.

So think about the future, but don't worry about it. Worry ruins the right here, right now. Choose peace and enjoy where you are today, and then just like the song says, you will be: *"Happy, so very happy! I've got the love of Jesus in my heart!"*

Lord, THANK YOU, for your Son Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace! We ask that Jesus fills our hearts with His peace, the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that helps us when we are struggling, and drowns out our worries. Guard our hearts and our minds so we can live in peace, right here and right now. Amen

Kate Stecklein

Peace Be With You

Right Here, Right Now: Peace

Sunday Scripture: Luke 1: 68-79

“In the shadow of death, guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Meditation Verse: John 20:21

“Jesus repeated his greeting: ‘Peace be with you. Just as the Father sent me, so I send you.’”

It may seem curious that I have chosen a post-resurrection verse for an Advent devotion. Perhaps something more Christmas-y. Maybe “Peace on earth and good will to all” or something would have been more fitting. But, there is a power to peace that can be easily overlooked.

It is nice to think of peace as a content, warm, cozy *feeling*. It’s a crackling fire and an overstuffed armchair on a cold winter evening. It’s a Christmas album playing while you watch the kids decorate the tree. It’s gathering around the kitchen table sharing a steaming cup of hot chocolate after a family snowball fight in the back yard.

Maybe it is those things. But, I think it’s also something else. I think peace is powerful. When Mark tells the story of the storm-tossed boat, he recounts that the disciples were in the middle of the lake when the storm blew in – isolated and afraid. He says that Jesus “woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.” Jesus said, “Peace” ... and the storm was silenced. Without the threat of the storm, Jesus and the disciples were free to carry on with their work.

Likewise, when Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection – He greeted them not once, but *twice* with, “Peace be with you.” The world was in turmoil. The powers that be within the Jewish leadership were hot. There was a storm. And the disciples were locked in a room – isolated and afraid. Jesus knew the storm needed to be silenced so they could carry on with their work.

Even in Sunday's scripture, (Luke 1: 68-79), we met Zachariah. Prior to the verse we heard, an angel of the Lord had appeared to Zachariah and he was afraid. The angel reassured him, then prophesied a son, but Zachariah was still not ready to hear the good news. He was stuck. Perhaps his own doubts and struggles created an internal storm that was stopping him. Then the angel spoke again and Zachariah was mute. It was almost as though the angel said to Zachariah, "Peace!" and Zachariah was silenced – isolated and afraid. During these months, Zachariah had the storm raging around and within him shut out. This time of peace for him cleared his mind so that he could carry on with the work God intended for him – as hear his beautiful prophesy about all that was to come.

What is in our way ... keeping us from what God intends? What storms keep swirling in our path, cutting us off, isolating us, ... making us afraid? Can you listen for the powerful imperative of our Christ, "*Peace! And so, as I was sent, I send you.*" Peace so the storm stops hindering us. Peace so we can, without fear, come out from behind locked doors. Peace so we can spend time talking less and listening more. Peace so we can go forth.

God of Comfort and Action,

Speak your peace into our lives that we can go forth and speak your peace into the world.

Erick Lybeck-Brown

Kindness

Galatians 5:22-23

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Ephesians 4:31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Jesus Christ has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12

Since God chose you to be the holy people whom, he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Kindness has been on my mind a lot lately. My late husband was one of the very kindest people I've ever known. His birthday, our anniversary, and his death all occurred in November, so that may be why I am focusing on kindness. As I write this, I am in Branson, MO with my grandson and his family consisting of five children under the age of eight. They are squabbling as they attempt to erect a tent using sofa pillows, blankets, a big chair and a large footstool. It isn't going well judging by the squeals, tattling and bossing. As soon as they get it almost done, the toddler jumps into the middle ruining it all. Obviously they have a lot to learn about kindness, cooperation, and teamwork.

But they are children, with many life lessons ahead. What about us adults? Do we seize every opportunity to practice kindness? There is so much rage in the world when a little kindness would be the better path. Recently I was in the checkout line at a big box store when I witnessed an exchange between a customer and checker that left me staring dumfounded! The customer was on her phone, and loudly demanded that the checker turn the turnstile so she could reach her bag. The checker in the same angry tone told her she could reach it where it was. An angry exchange including profane name calling followed.

Finally the customer grabbed her bag and left muttering. The entire time he was scanning my purchases the checker told me how badly he was treated and he didn't have to take that, etc. I listened without responding. The incident could have been easily avoided if both parties had demonstrated a little kindness. Just a friendly "please" and a sincere "you're welcome" would have turned a potentially volatile situation into an opportunity to practice kindness.

The following day I observed a minor temper tantrum because a door that was supposed to be unlocked wasn't. I calmly pointed out to the person spitting nastiness that the door behind her was standing open. Such a foolish waste of energy on something so simple.

My husband taught me a lot about kindness. He never raised his voice. His words were always gentle and sincere. He asked for what he wanted in unambiguous language. He never held grudges. He practiced kindness in simple ways. When a colleague was terminally ill, Charlie visited him every week for the rest of the man's life. And he brought me a cup of coffee every morning before I got out of bed. He did that every morning for 24 years until a brain tumor stole his ability to remember how to make the coffee. Together we have 10 grandchildren and he always loved them equally regardless of whether they were his biologically.

I am now in my sunset years of life and I find that I don't want to spar with anyone; I just want peace. Peace in my personal relationships, peace between nations and political parties, and peace in my relationship with God. You may be thinking, "I thought she was talking about kindness and now she brings up peace." I believe that kindness is a direct path to peace. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

God of peace, create in each of us a burning desire to make peace. Fill our mouths with words of kindness, fill our minds with ways we can make peace, fill our hearts with love, and fill our spirits with peace in Jesus Christ. Amen

Dixie Lenau

Disarmed by Peace

***Then Jesus said to him, “Put the sword back into its place.
All those who use the sword will die by the sword.” –Matthew 26:52***

Sister Maureen awoke in the night to a masked man standing over her bed. He had a knife in his hand. He stood silent and threatening. “Oh. There you are! I’ve been waiting for you!” she said. “You must be hungry. Come. Let me fix you something to eat.” She sprung out of bed, put on her slippers and robe, and proceeded to the kitchen. Her intruder was astonished! His stance softened. Quietly, he sheathed his knife and followed Sister down the hall where she proceeded to feed him and talk.

I heard Sister Maureen share this story in a workshop she was leading on personal nonviolence. Her audience was a room of convicted offenders at the Omaha Correctional Center, and those of us who were there to observe and help. Sister was well-trained in the practice of inter-personal peacemaking, and her story was to illustrate the disarming power of creative nonviolence in the face of personal attack.

Of course, personal attack can take many forms most not as extreme as Sister’s experience or the men she was instructing. More common is the angry co-worker who unloads via email. Or a raging motorist with a penchant for hand gestures. A defiant toddler or teen testing a boundary. An online bully looking for a fight.

For Sister Maureen, peace achieved through the practice of nonviolence is the only way to successfully navigate conflict be it personal, political, or otherwise. It is no wonder that the Prince of Peace entered this hostile world with all the disarming love and humility of a newborn child. Our Prince would grow to practice what he preached constantly thwarting conflict with creativity, love, and self-sacrifice.

A voice in the wilderness. A light in the darkness. A hope for the world.

This Advent, allow yourself to be disarmed by the peace of Christ, a peace that surpasses all understanding. And in so doing may we put down our swords and bring greater peace to a world longing for just that, right here, right now!

*Let there be peace in the world, and let it begin with me! Should conflict find me this day,
I pray to respond with a creative and disarming love worthy of You. Amen.*

John DeLaporte

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13)

This passage from the pen of Paul covers all the bases. Paul names a God of *hope* who fills us with *joy* and *peace*, *faith* in *believing*, *power* of the *Spirit*, and a second dose of *bounding hope*. Given the season, a partridge in a pear tree may be the only thing missing. To be honest, I'm amazed how positive Paul is in his wishes for all who would read his letter. He's been through a few things after all, imprisonment and physical abuse to name a couple. And yet he is so clear that he is called to speak to the world the peace he has come to know in Jesus Christ no matter the circumstance. That's peace at its best. How are you doing with peace this season?

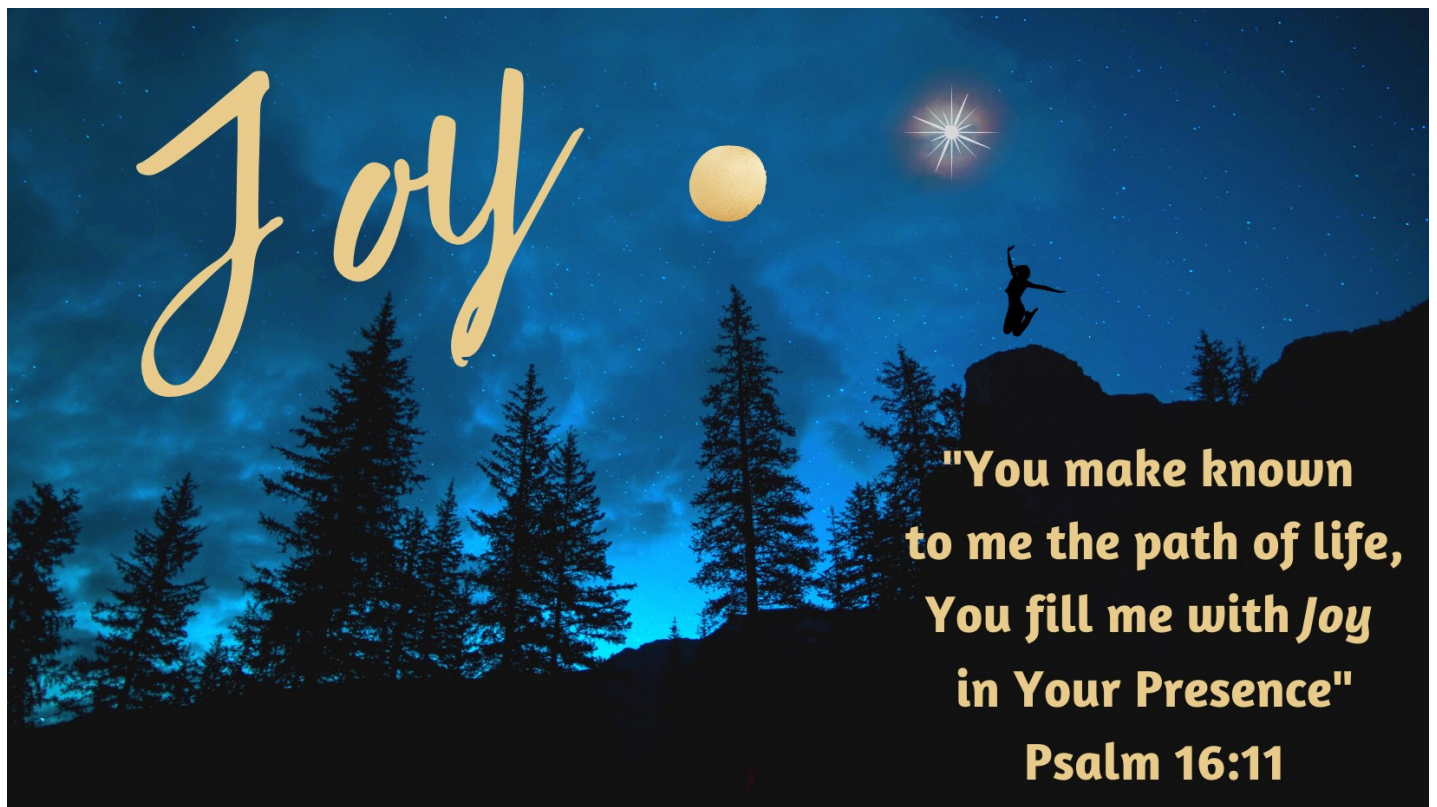
Moving through a second pandemic'd Advent, peace hasn't been a ready companion. When I think of peace, I think of a settled spirit – an unrattled calm in the face of adversity. Instead, I feel a constant angst and wrestling in our society which feels more unsettled all the time. How do we stay grounded in peace in such a season? Ironically, it is the unsettled nature of things; the pain of such stressful times that remind us what the lack of peace feels like and how we long to find it again. Into the struggle, I pray these words of Paul that he was able to offer out of his own struggle. May we repeat the words, like a mantra, until we can't help but embody each phrase as a gift, prayed for ourselves; prayed for the world.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Amen."

Mark Briley

Third Sunday of Advent ~ JOY

December 12, 2021



To You Is Born This Day

“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.” (Luke 2:10-11 NRSV)

John 3:16 is perhaps the best-known verse in the New Testament: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” It is indeed the “good news of great joy for all the people” declared by the angel of the Lord. But the angel’s message to those shepherds watching their flocks was also personal: “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.”

This good news for all people is to you, sang the angel. It is to you, this day: TO YOU, RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW. And in the realization that Christ is with you is good news of JOY, wherever you are, whatever your situation. Frederick Buechner wrote, “Joy is a mystery because it can happen anywhere, anytime, even under the most unpromising circumstances, even in the midst of suffering, with tears in its eyes....”

I am bringing you good news of great joy: Christ is with you this day, right here, right now.

(from O Little Town of Bethlehem)

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray,
cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. Amen*

Ed Varnum

Scatter little acts of Poinsettias Kindness

John 6:9 9 “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

My wife, Linda, loves to give things to others. These include e-cards, food, flowers, flower bulbs and especially poinsettias. She's a great shopper and watches for where she can amass several dozen from a store. Her selection of ribbon gives the poinsettias special appeal with their red, green and gold plaid.

Now these are not huge plants and over the years she has received remarks about these gifts because they are the David compared with some of the Goliath poinsettias you sometimes see. “It's just the right size for our dinner table”, “Now I have Christmas in my house”, “It reminds me of...”, and obviously lots of thanks.

Linda's approach is that these are for enjoyment and composting, so she often is surprised when someone says “I still have the one you gave me two years ago” and point to a plant that has been loved and cared for way past it's expectancy as a gift. I'm always intrigued at the result of her gifts, much like the boy in the passage said ... but how far will they go...?

God and Giver of all gifts, help us to always remember that what we do right here, right now can be blessed and multiplied by your love in many, many ways.

John Poehlmann

Recognizing Joy Right Here, Right Now

Don't remember the prior things; don't ponder ancient history. Look! I'm doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it? I'm making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness. – Is 43:18-19

I'll never forget the first time I served grilled cheese to my son, Simon. He was around two years old. After a busy morning of playing outside, we sat on our porch to enjoy two grilled cheese sandwiches (cut diagonal!) and two cups of steaming tomato soup. I watched as he took his first bite. Melted cheddar squished from between two perfectly toasted slices of sourdough. He laughed as he pulled the sandwich away and the cheese stretched as far as his arms could reach! He crunched the bread, licked buttered fingers, and twirled the cheese with playful delight. He dipped his bread into the crimson cup – an act of toddler intinction if ever there was! After twenty minutes of total absorption, he emerged from his moment covered in Kraft and Campbell's and joyful satisfaction! The Wisconsin-born father in me couldn't have been more proud!

When was the last time you found joy in a simple thing set before you? When have you ever been so absorbed in the present that your past faded and your future was of no concern...time and space melting away like mild cheddar between two slices of bread?

This Advent we are invited to recognize and receive joy right here, right now.

Should ancient history or desert moments distract you from your present simply pause, breathe, notice and receive. What new thing is God offering you? What joy-filled moment is sprouting up? Do you recognize it?

Maybe it is a candle's flicker, or a single star beset in the night sky. Perhaps it is the scent of cinnamon, or a random act of kindness, or the voice of Bing Crosby serenading from your stereo.

Maybe it is in the sight of a newborn child sleeping softly in the arms of his blessed mother, a vision of joy and love to behold right here, right now. May it be so!

Spirit of Joy! May I be present to you this day. I pray to recognize you in the small and simple experiences of this season as I prepare to receive that Greatest Joy of Christmas.
Amen.

John DeLaporte

The Fear of Joy

“They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” Psalm 112:7

The fear of joy is a vague uneasiness that one feels when things seem to be going too well. If we are honest, some of us must admit that we experience fear in a way that seriously hinders our ability to live life as we would like to live it.

There are many reasons why we may have learned to feel uncomfortable with joy, and these reasons are primarily rooted in our childhood or traumatic experiences throughout adulthood. We may also have a distorted view of God. Our rational concept of God as good and gracious may be very different from our emotional or heartfelt view of God that may reflect the personality of a hurtful parent or other authority figure.

How can we move beyond the fear and into the fullness of Joy that this season promises? When I am frightened by joy

1. I examine my view of God and I make space to connect with the God of Love and Grace.
2. I clean out the closets of my past. The truth is that the starting point of healing is to go back and face the past. Something there may have taught me to be anxious when I feel joy.
3. I focus on living in the Here and Now. Joy has to be experienced right here, right now. I am learning to resist asking myself “What if...? What about tomorrow? What if I mess up? What if I lose even more?” That’s tomorrow. If I have joy today, then I’m going to let myself feel it!

Affirmation: I embrace joy and gently release anything that is not joy. The life I've dreamed of is created by my choice to be joyful *right here, right now*.

Casey VanDyke

Trust and Security Right Here

Psalm 125

***As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people,
from this time on and forevermore... Psalm 125:2***

Can you imagine a place so secure you have no fear or anxiety? A place that would keep you from harm both physical and mental? I imagine this place would look much like an impenetrable fortress. Those who wish you harm would find no access and any attempts at penetration would be foiled. With all the uncertainty we face in this world, wouldn't it be wonderful to live in a place where you feel so secure?

When I travel to mountains, I am in awe of the beauty but also draw strength from the feeling of being encircled by the strong, rigid rock formations. The psalmist sets a similar image using the city of Jerusalem and the protection provided by mountains.

Geographically, mountains are secure, and, in many ways, Jerusalem is more protected because of the fortification provided. The psalmist again writes, just like Jerusalem, the Lord surrounds his people with this same immovable protection. Finally sharing, the righteous and those who trust will also see the end to evildoers.

I know of no place on this earth that fulfills this same promise, a fortress from all danger and evil. As we read this psalm, and you should read and re-read it when you feel anxious, we experience that while there may not be a *place* to provide security and stability, there is a *who*, God. What immense joy we should feel because we really do have that impenetrable fortress in God, even *Right Here, Right Now*. Through the implicit trust and conviction, we find the safety, like a mountain, security and refuge we desire and need in this uncertain world and there is "no other place I [would] want to be".

Creator and Protector God, We give joyful praise for Your grace and the security we find when we trust in You. When we forget promises of immovable protection, quieten our doubts and fears, so we may be reminded of the impenetrable fortress only You can provide. Amen

Leslie LeSieur

Show Your Joy

1 John 4:7 ⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

When we love- we take joy in the person, activity, experience.

JOY! It bubbles up, it overflows.

Abby (my friend's doggo) has a reminder for us to show our love in our joy. Abby, and many dogs, readily show their feelings- especially joy. Our canine friends sometimes seem to be unable to contain all the joy in their body- their feet tippy tapping, bodies wiggling with sheer joy.

Joy in waking up and seeing their people, greeting them, joy in all the things shared in a typical day. Joy when simply looking over and seeing their people looking back. They let their joy soar every morning they wake up and see us. Every time we come over.

Uncontained in the moment. How that joy makes us feel loved, seen. Imagine if we didn't withhold our joy from each other.

As we think about "Right Here, Right Now"; remember what our canine friends teach us: To not hold back in showing our joy and delight at seeing those around. Those we see in our congregation, on a virtual screen, beside us on the couch. Joy in being with each other. Joy that someone we love has just walked in. Let us see and share unbridled joy. Look through the eyes of joy this week.

Show joy because someone you love has just walked in.

May we not hold back in showing our joy- no matter how many times we do the same routine, see the same people, go to the same places. We know that all too soon, the present has moved on, our paths have veered; we no longer have the chance to show the joy, delight in seeing our loved ones. See the world, and those we love, through the lens of joy this week.

Tabby Lane

Joy

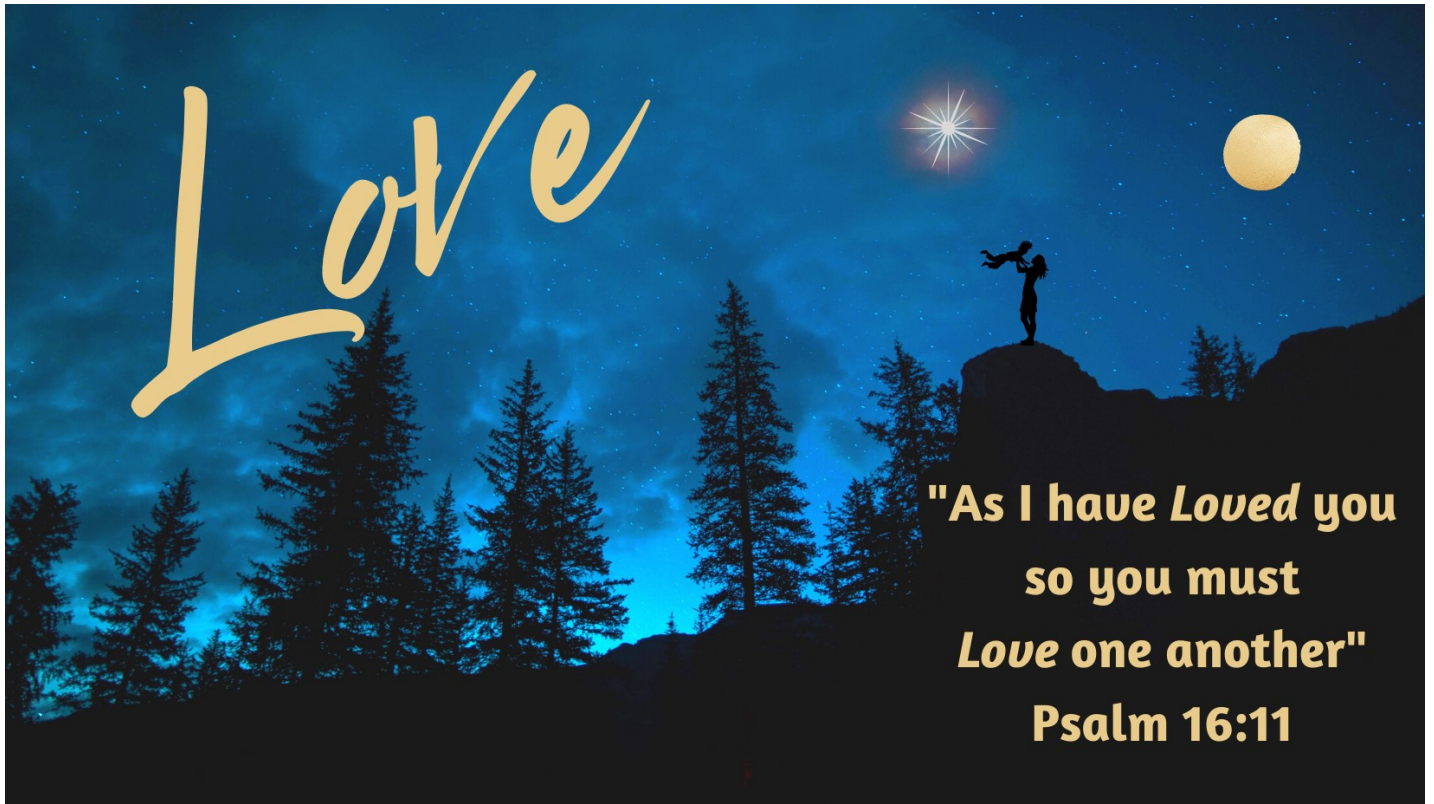
Joy, a feeling of great pleasure and happiness, the emotion of great delight caused by something exceptionally good, at least that's what it says in the dictionary. As I think about life and I reflect on the joys of life, I realize that joy isn't always there, and I need it to always be there. As I see my mother getting weaker and weaker, my joy got weaker and weaker. Not realizing that real joy stands or rises in the face of adversity. I believe it comes from way down on the inside. I think God puts it in all of us at the creation of man, because this joy comes up at the strangest times. As I remember asking myself how was I going to officiate my moms home going? The joyous feeling was not there, so I thought, because in the middle of the funeral service, there was this joyous feeling of gratitude and pleasure. In Hebrews 12:2 it talks about the Joy, the happiness, the pleasure, the delight that was set before Jesus and He endured the cross despising the shame, all that for you and me. So this joy we have, the world didn't give it and the world can't take it away. Remember, this season and the season to come, as said in ***Nehemiah 8:10, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.***

Be Blessed,

Jay Dudley

Fourth Sunday of Advent ~ LOVE

December 19, 2021



Love Be With You This Christmas

“My commandment is this: Love one another just as I love you.”

The Gospel of John 15:12

“Hope and faith will both come to and end when we die. But love will remain. Love is eternal,” wrote Henri Nouwen. These words are prophetic! God’s love for us, for all of us, will never die! And Christmas is the time when we stop, remember, and recognize with deepest gratitude – God gave us His pure everlasting love with the gift of his Son!

Love is such a big action word! It is a call to act! But what are we doing with that love? I should pass it on! Am I doing that? Sometimes? When it’s easy? What about when it’s hard? At Christmastime? All year round? Yes! Right here, right now, Broadway Christian is gifting us with love and helping us grow toward broader minds, a broader reach, a broader love for us to share.

John Rawlings wrote a song entitled “In All You Do” when he was Director of Music for our Daybreak service. It has become a prayer for me (I did make a couple of pronoun changes). It speaks of the gift of God’s love and what you and I are commissioned to do with that love.

Heavenly Father,

Let your love flow in me,

Let your love shine in me,

Let your love flow in me,

Love be with me, in all I do.

May love be with us in all we do!

Amen.

Karen Rawlings

A New Season, A New Change To Love

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother, for this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
1 John 3:9-11

Love. A small word – four letters to make a word with enormous life-giving power.

This Advent, we are celebrating God's love given as a God-child born to earth to teach and model love. In the ultimate act of un-conditional love, God allowed His Son to be killed to save us. Love. God's act of tremendous, life-changing care for us.

We're preparing to celebrate the hope and opportunity that Jesus' birth brings. Find a moment of peace to sit with God. Close your eyes. Take a slow deep breath. Sink into the calm. Think of how God has shown His love to you. Think of what Jesus taught you about love and how to express it. Now the hard part. Think about how and who you love. Imagine standing at the pearly gates and justifying your actions on how your prejudices influence your thoughts, speech and behavior; your political leaning reflects equity and justice; your response when it's hard, scary, or irrational to love? Just thinking of having this interaction with God to justify my behavior makes me feel nervous. Take this season to see YOU with clear sight and ask God to show you how to really love like Jesus did.

Right here, right now, we have a new opportunity to start again. Take off the blinders, shelve the ego, humble your heart, call on the Spirit within. What changes do you need to make to turn that uncomfortable conversation with God into a celebration of a life lived in love?

God of love, it sounds so simple, this love that you ask us to share, yet we find it so difficult to genuinely live your love. Thank you for your unconditional love. Thank you for sending your Son to show us how you want us to live and love. We justify our unloving behaviors and hope you will overlook them. Right here, right now - help us see you as Jesus did in every decision we make, in every person we see, and in every response we make. Amen.

Luci Fichter

Choose Love

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

***⁸ Love never fails.
1st Corinthians 13: 4-8***

When I got married almost 20 years ago this was the guiding scripture in our ceremony, it sounded sweet and good and appropriate for the occasion. I printed it on the little tags that we attached to the candles and gave out as favors. I tucked the remaining ones away and never thought about them again until I was recently visiting a relative out of town who had one in her curio cabinet. As I held it in my hand and read the scripture it caused me to reflect on how the words had become more real to me in the years that have passed since that day. I have come to realize that love is not just a feeling, but an action, and one that we need to choose every single day. Otherwise, we become bogged down with the other things mentioned in the passage. Things that run contrary to the love that Gods word assures us never fails. Unkindness, envy, pride, boasting, selfishness, anger, and pettiness. It's so easy in our busy day to day lives to forget that even when we are angry, and frustrated for whatever reasons that it's perfectly natural to feel that way but to not let those feelings dictate how we respond. I heard a pastor once say that those feelings can be in the car with you but you should never let them take the steering wheel.

My prayer is that God will grant us the wisdom to stop and pause even in the midst of those feelings and gently remind us that we have the option to choose....and we can always Choose Love.

Adonica Coleman

God's River of Love

***John 7:3- Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"***

***John 13:35- By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another."***

Whenever we have the chance, one of Brenda's and my favorite activities is to load the 16 ft Old Town canoe on the car and drive to one of the beautiful spring fed rivers we are so blessed with here in Missouri. We are not fond of weekend floating that involves lots of beer and loud music blaring from bluetooth speakers. We much prefer the weekday quiet and solitude of floating on our own or with a small group of like minded people who appreciate peace, patience, and paradise that God has provided for all of us. We float not only in the warm summer days but have spent days on the river in spring, and fall, (we even floated last year on Thanksgiving day). Our time on the river renews our lives and souls with gentleness and refurbishes our hearts for the "every day" of our lives. Brenda and I both chose to become Occupational Therapists and work(ed) in hospitals to aid and assist people as they were in temporary or sometimes permanent dysfunction in being able to do the things they need and love to do.

I believe that God's love is abundant in providing for us opportunities to "love one another" and to care for ourselves by being ever present in the here (maybe a few hours drive away) and now (if it isn't raining today) to be filled with his spirit in love.

Loving, Giving Father, Thank you for the ever flowing river of your love that continues through all the seasons of our lives. May we be awake to your beauty and serenity in this hectic holiday season and be at peace with taking time to "go with the flow".

Amen

Jim Dunne

Love Came Down at Christmas

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 1 John 4:16 (NIV)

Genesis 1:2 tells us that the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters at creation. God who is Love was moving across the earth, present. And God, who is Love, has been present over this world that God so loves.

The good news in Christ is that God has come into this creation as part of creation, here with us in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us. Christ is with us, Love in human form. And as we love, as we bring to others the love of God in the name of Christ, that love is born again and again, made present, God with us, Christ through us.

LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS by Christina Georgina Rossetti (1885)

Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas, Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead, Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus: but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token, Love shall be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and to all men, Love for plea and gift and sign.

God who is Love, Creator, Redeemer, help us to receive and to share in the love of Christ. May our love be made whole in your perfect love, through Christ we pray. Amen.

Ed Varnum

Christmas Eve

Screaming and Bellowing

Luke 2:

6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child...

15 Let us go NOW to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place...

16 So the shepherds went with haste...

Waiting is at the heart of Advent: Mary pondered, Joseph dreamt, Angels sang, and Kings charted. This year in the gestation we have been singing *Jesus Jones'* song, *Right Here Right Now*. We've tuned into the harmony of the Holy Spirit, "Pay attention in this moment, **now**, be alive and waiting for this!"

The uniquely paradoxical framing coaxed us into the immediacy of realizing what is laboring with us in the expectant here and now.

There are two times in our beloved natal narrative where the "Right here, right now!" halted everything, while the *Advent* or *coming* action, shouted, NOW!

"Get me over to that straw pile, the baby is crowning!" screamed Mary.

I'm sure she screamed because although the angel Ultrasound told her the gender of her child, the angel Epidural did not appear.

"Right here?"

"Right now!"

and

"Let us go now!" bellowed the shepherds.

I'm sure they bellowed because they were joyously deafened by the angel chorus of Gloria and Herald and the accompaniment of the bleat keeping sheep.

The birth of a child immediately stops the world and sets stars in our eyes.

*Deliverer, Thank you for the crowning of the Prince of Peace. Make us expectantly alive **and** waiting! ~right here, right now.*

Terry Overfelt

Christmas Day

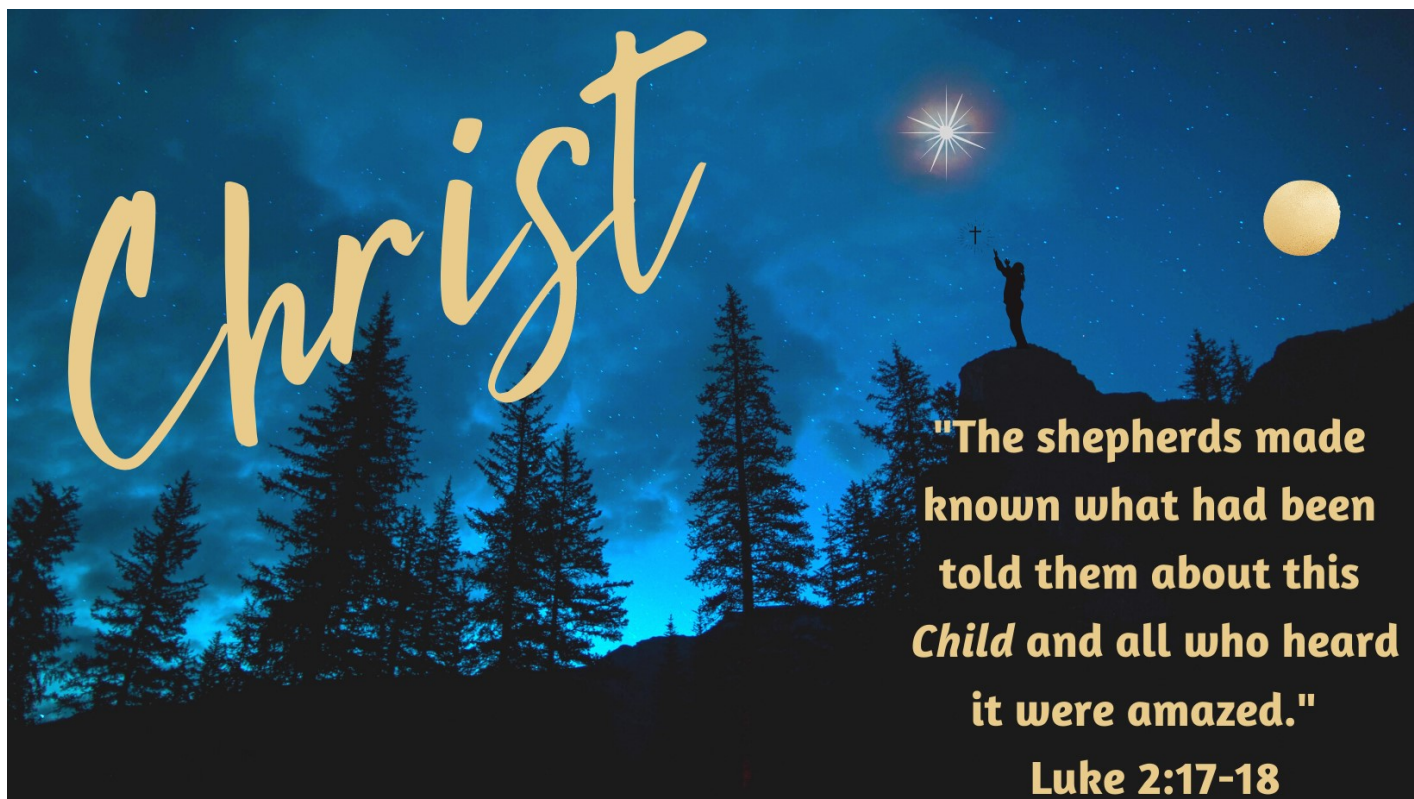
"The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood." (John 1:14 MSG)

There has been a lot of construction on the street where my family lives. New houses were being built all year long and we were daily witnesses to the whole process. We saw vacant lots leveled, foundations poured, frames raised, and more – all the way to the final detailed work of artistic craftsman and landscapers. Seeing it every day meant, at times, the progress felt small. *"Not much movement at lot 225 today,"* we'd say. But for all the mess and noise and starts and stops, when that sod is laid and a new family rolls up to the place with a truck full of stuff, it's as if we forget all that it took to get to that moment and simply embrace the excitement. There's new life on the block and a new chapter to be written. If the weather has played nice with us, we'll be out on the street today sure to engage those new to the neighborhood, eager to explore their new world on Farleigh Court.

There was a lot that went into constructing that first Christmas too. There was the foundational work of getting key people on board, working through the hardships of change orders, and the ridicule of many who felt Mary and Joe were going about this in all the wrong ways. But today? A baby is born and it's as if all that struggle and strife now drift away for new life is unleashed in the world! We stand here on this day with the same opportunity to embrace the new life Jesus represents. It's time to write a new chapter. Get out of the house today if you can, soak in the fresh air and smile because Jesus is here! Won't you welcome him to your neighborhood, to your home, to your life? Merry Christmas!

"Thank you, God, for gifting us with Jesus at Christmas. We celebrate that the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood. Help us be the neighbors you long for us to be! Amen."

Mark Briley



**"The shepherds made
known what had been
told them about this
Child and all who heard
it were amazed."**

Luke 2:17-18

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH