

Trinity Presbyterian Church



2019 Advent Devotional



And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

1 John 4: 16

Trinity Presbyterian Church's 2019 Advent Devotional

Isaiah 40:3 A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Advent, the first season of the church year, begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. The word Advent means "coming." Advent is not just a time to wait expectantly but also a time to prepare for the gift of Jesus Christ.

This is the 15th issue of Trinity's Advent Devotional. Since 2005, the Christian Education Committee has provided the congregation each year with a collection of devotions written by members of the Trinity family. This year, our theme is Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love which follows the lighting of each Sunday's Advent candle.

Each devotion begins with a suggested scripture reading and is then followed by a personal reflection written by a member of our congregation. We give our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors who have shared their inspirational thoughts to help all of us better prepare once again to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

A special thanks to Shelley Wheeler for her hard word editing and putting together this year's edition and finally a thank you to Paula Benham for her donation to cover the cost of printing the devotional.

We pray that these devotions will bring you hope, joy, peace and love during this Advent Season.

Blessings

The Christian Education Committee

Ordinary Eyes

Luke 2: 36-38 *"There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Ash'er. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."*

In Luke's scripture, Anna is a seemingly ordinary woman. She is in the shadows waiting, praying, hoping, and looking. Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple for the ceremony of purification and she is able to see the divine while looking at the child. She is able to see Jesus and recognize the Messiah while others walk by not sensing anything special.

Two summers ago my family went on a vacation to Costa Rica. It was a dream come true, Costa Rica was one place that I had always wanted to see and it didn't disappoint. We took a day trip to Manuel Antonio National Park. It is a public park and you are granted access through a small park visitation fee or you can pay to have a professional guided tour. The guided tour was included in our package, so we followed our guide into the park. Many families had chosen to have a personal guide, while others chose to walk and explore the park by themselves. There were plenty of monkeys to see and sloths and birds, but the amazing thing was all the wildlife that I would have just walked by and not even noticed had it not been for our guide. He would stop out of nowhere, peer into the vegetation, get out his binoculars, focus them and call us over to look inside. There would be the most beautiful frog, or elegant spider, or colony of colorful ants. All right in front of our faces as we were walking but we had no clue they were even there. People without the guides would walk by, see us stopped try to see what we were looking at, but then shrug their shoulders and walk away. The beauty of the park was right in front of us the whole time, but it took keen eyes and a sense of where to look to reveal the park's entire beauty.

Advent is a time for seeing, for watching and waiting with hopeful eyes and alert senses. We don't have to have special binoculars or a personal guide to see God. We simply have to have hope and the desire to experience the divine.

What will your "ordinary" eyes see this Advent season if you open yourself up to hope?

God, this Advent, give us the eyes to see You. Help us to slow down and use all of our senses to experience your hope this season. Amen

Brooke Tucker

December 2, 2019

Hope, As I Know It

Psalm 130 *Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*

We first started visiting Palm Coast in the 1970's. My in laws had chosen to move here after their retirement, and we were happy to return here every year to visit them. Our children had the opportunity to get to know their grandparents, and my husband, who had ALWAYS wanted to live in Florida, was able to live out that fantasy.

On one of our visits, I was pleasantly surprised to read in the local paper that the Presbyterians were meeting (temporarily) at the Community Center. I sneaked out of the house on a Sunday morning and went to check it out, hoping that I would not feel like an outcast. I felt completely at home there and was happy to claim a bulletin for my efforts. The bulletin contained names of many of the new members and I lived with the hope for many years that one day we would move here and I could join the ranks of members of Trinity Presbyterian Church.

In the years since then, I have had many occasions to be hopeful for the future, and that has always included Palm Coast and Trinity Presbyterian Church. Having relocated many times in my "growing up" years (10 states with 15 different addresses in 18 years), and always trying to be hopeful about God's plan for my "new" location, it's nice to be somewhat content with who I am and where I am in my life. Thank you, Lord!

My dad, if he were still living, would be turning 100 years old today. I never asked him for a recitation of where and how long he had "lived" anywhere. That list would have had to include Vietnam, Korea, Europe, and Hawaii, before it was a state. His dad had served in the military, so he had learned his own way of being "hopeful", and that attitude was passed on to us.

Lord, thank you for answered prayers! Amen

Maudie Parker

Hope

John 1: 3-5 *"What came into existence was life and the life was light to live by. The Life Light burst out of the darkness and the darkness couldn't destroy it."*

The word for this week is "hope." We have Jesus' life to live by and His resurrection for eternal life. He was the Life Light showing us who we are and how to live. These verses from John read that no darkness can put out God's light. We are surrounded today with darkness and negativity. It's hard not to get caught up in it and feel defeated. The darkness takes many forms, greed, loneliness, hate, and negativity. We Christians have hope knowing that God's in control. There is much goodness in the world and many people living with God's light and showing love. This news we seldom hear about.

Our hope is in what Dr. Beebe reminds us of every Sunday. To have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to feel. To hear, see, and feel that Life Light. It gives us hope and well-being in God's abundant love.

This light enables us to give hope and love to others; also to see God's helpers in fulfilling His purpose.

Gracious God: Thank you for the Life Light you have given us. You give us hope in ourselves and others. We pray for this world, this country, and Your church. Amen

June Carlson

December 4, 2019

A Stroke of Insight

Ephesians 1:18 *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.*

Early one morning, in the fall of 2008, I woke up struggling to untangle my legs from the blanket at the base of my bed. I tried the usual maneuvers, like kicking and turning, with no success. I then attempted sitting up, but found that I could not. I better get to the gym, I thought. Unfazed, I reached down with my right hand to free my legs. My arm did not move. I must be dreaming. I tried again. Stillness. Now fully awake, I realized that I could not move ANYTHING on my right side. Terrified, I grabbed my right wrist with my left hand, lifted it off the bed and let go. My right arm fell lifeless. OMG I was having a stroke! I knew I needed help, but my hubby was not in our bed, and I did not see a phone nearby.

As I lay in the darkness weighing my options, a strange light began to form around my bed and spread upwards onto the ceiling. To my surprise, three forms slowly began to take shape above me. To the left was my late husband, Joe. In the center was my mom, who had passed away in 2004. To the right was a faint human outline obscured by fluctuating, blazing white light. It seemed too bright to keep staring into, but nonetheless, I could not stop myself, and continued gazing into the beautiful, white light. It must be my time to die I thought, and I guessed that I was going to be escorted out of this life by these three. I was strangely calm, and uncharacteristically, I did not think about those I would be leaving behind. I was going to meet God. I closed my eyes.

I waited for some time, but nothing seemed to be happening. Hmmm. I opened my eyes. I was still in my bed, in my room. I looked up. They were still above my body, smiling at me so sweetly. I smiled back. (I thought leaving the body would be quicker than this.) And then from above, barely visible, oscillating ripples of light descended, like gentle waves in a bay, coming ashore. I was surprised that these waves of light felt solid, like warm water, as they hit my chest and spread outward. And then came such happiness, joy, ecstasy, completeness, like a thousand loves all rolled into one. This was bliss and love multiplied by a zillion. It was unbelievable. They were still smiling at me as the waves continued to roll over my whole being, again and again. How much love could I hold? My heart felt like it would burst from "Joy Overload". All I wanted was to lay there forever and bask in this bliss. This must be what God is. This is the love of all loves. At that point my reverie was interrupted by a sweet voice from above saying that I needed to get help now. And then they were gone. It was not my time to die after all.

I do not know why this wondrous encounter came to me. What I do know is that none of us knows when we will have an experience of God. In the days and weeks that followed, I made an amazing recovery, and returned to my beloved Hand Bell Choir where I love to ring His praises, and give thanks for so many blessings.

Heavenly Father, we are grateful unto Thee for thy holy presence, thy guidance, thy protection and thy blessings. May thy love shine forever.

Janet Schaaf

December 5, 2019

Hope

Romans 15: 13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace. As you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

As we progress through the Advent Season awaiting the birth of our dear sweet Lord, Jesus Christ, joy fills my heart in anticipation of the blessed event. We all sing the hymn, Joy to the World, The Lord has Come, to honor His birth. The happiness and sense of peace I feel at this time of year is because of the joy surrounding the birth of the baby Jesus in the manger. The shepherds came and the Magi came to worship the King of the Jews.

On a logical level, I know it happens every year, but on a spiritual level, there is a sense of excitement as Joseph and Mary approach Bethlehem. The thrill of recreating the scene in the manger in my mind of our dear Savior's birth gives me hope and joy for all that comes in the future.

One of my favorite authors is Ann Weems. In her book of poems from "Kneeling in Bethlehem," there is one called The Child is Born Again and I quote, "each year some new heart finally hears, finally sees, finally knows love. That is why this Advent Season is filled with hope and joy for all of us."

As we sit in the church on Christmas Eve with our candles lit and quietly sing Silent Night, these words give us the wondrous beauty of what happened that night. "Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia, Christ the Savior is born." I will keep that on my heart for always.

May our Gracious Lord fill all of us with joy and hope during this Advent season. Amen

Carol Graff

December 6, 2019

Hope

Romans 12:12 (NIV) *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction faithful in prayer*

Disappointments, hurts, burdens, these afflictions are what I take to God to help me be patient while afflicted. The patience I strive for leads me to feel God's hope and love while I journey forward. My prayers to God throughout the day praise him for the beauty he shows me right now. My faithful trust in God has relieved my burdens of afflictions. God's goodness is in all things whether in disappointments, hurts, or burdens. Peace is in my heart, knowing God is always with me.

As I remember my last 60 years, the tears of sorrow, disappointments, and regrets, are in each decade. But so is ecstatic joyfulness, overwhelming gratitude, and eye-catching beauty. I choose to keep the positive close to me. That is what God has given me. My patience grows strong while God is making all things for the good.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth is removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea...Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:1-2 NKJV

Kelli Jebbia

The Rest of the Story

Psalms 130 *Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*

If we read only the lines above and the cry for mercy that precede them, we would be left with the picture of a man in the depths of fear in an attitude of waiting. But in the next verse, the psalmist asks Israel to put its hope in the Lord for with him is "unfailing love and full redemption." In Scripture one can follow this hope to the end of Matthew and Christ's Great Commission which he ends by saying, "for surely I am with you until the end of the days..." Here Christ clearly states the promise of redemption for which the psalmist hoped.

At the end of Matthew when the two Marys go to the tomb, they encounter the angel dressed in white who says, "I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified...He is not here. He is risen just as he said."

Many Sundays our pastor asks us to focus on what God has done, is doing and will do in our lives. To me this says that God is ever-present and working in our lives forever. As we read the two passages cited above, we could stop at several times in the stories that they tell, but it is important for us to read the entire story, all of the scripture. The women look for him in the tomb but he is already gone and working in the lives of the people. In our lives we cannot get stuck in our equivalent of the despair of the psalmist or in our equivalents of the tomb. There is always more to the story. God is ever-present in our lives. We need to wait for, as Paul Harvey used to say, "the rest of the story." This is the season in which we celebrate the birth of hope which is Christ the Lord.

Gracious and Loving God, help us to wait patiently and faithfully for the rest of the story.

Hawley Rogers

December 8, 2019

Peace.....Brother

Philippians 4:6-7 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Have you ever worried about something or someone? Most likely the answer to that question is YES. But was the subject of that worry, yourself? Did it cause anxiety? Was the source of that anxiety, guilt? Did you ever consider the fact that guilt is the result of sin? And do you know that God forgives sin?

I know a woman who experienced a life-altering event that haunted her for years. Her mother was gravely ill and died in this woman's home in which she was the caregiver. She worried and wondered about things she should or shouldn't have done. She was harboring guilt. It was relentless. She lived her life wondering why she wasn't more attentive to her mother's needs, forgetting that she provided the very best of care that anyone could have offered. Worry resulted in stress and anxiety. Her health declined. She simply could not forgive herself. Do you think she realized she was sinning? Although a devout Christian, she never made the connection that, in fact, she was. She knew that God forgives sin yet SHE could not forgive her own sin. In essence, she was putting her own authority above God's! That "false authority" was her constant mindset until one day she listened to the voice of someone who loved her very much. Her countenance was transformed and her entire body relaxed. It was like an awakening. It was precisely what she needed to hear. Today she is at peace with herself.

That woman is my sister and that "someone" who spoke to her was God. But God didn't speak to her directly.....He spoke to her through me.

Father, thank you for speaking to us and for using us to communicate with others who need to hear Your peaceful assurance. Amen

Bob Mack

December 9, 2019

Faith, Hope, and Joy

Romans 12:12 *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

God has blessed me with three beautiful daughters. Our first daughter, Allacyn, was given the middle name of Faith after my husband's mother and also my mother. When Megann was born, she was given the middle name Hope after my husband's aunt's name. And when Erynn was born, she was given the middle name of Joy because it gave her the same initials as my mother. With all three daughters, Jeff and I ended up with our beloved Faith, Hope, and Joy.

Each one of our daughters have lived out the meanings of their middle names fairly well over the past years. Allacyn constantly reminds us to have faith in a God who is in control. Megann shows us to have hope in what God has planned for us. And Erynn brings joy to everyday by putting Jesus first, others second, and herself last.

However, over the past fifteen plus years, we have cultivated a laugh over the fact that our children bring no peace to the matter. Not even our son, Benjamin, whose middle name is my maiden name, can fulfill this one.

The chaos of life, and especially during the holiday season, can tend to cause our family to lose focus of why God sent us His son in the first place. We look to this this verse which reminds us to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer for Jesus has come to be with us always.

Even amidst our uncertainty of what is next, we know that God will be there to bring us peace when He knows that we have faith, hope, and joy in His plans. We do not need to worry about what is next because we know that God is already there, and that is what brings our family peace during the best and worst seasons. We are able to take time to breathe and enjoy the time we have with our family because the gift of Jesus allows us to be free from the chaos and experience peace on earth.

Dear God, help me to show joy in your hope, patience when I am going through trials, and let my prayers show my faithfulness to You. In your name I pray. Amen

Cyndy and Erynn Beebe

December 10, 2019

"67" What's in a number....

Isaiah 26:3 *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

It's been quite a journey. . . . 67 years of marriage to the same man, three wonderful children, many houses, in many different places, New Jersey 9 years, Pennsylvania 21 years, Florida 37 years and still counting.

Lots of memorable times (good and bad) with family and friends and lots of animals. Caring times, sad times, but lots of happy times.

I guess the best times were when our children were growing up and experiencing everything new and wonderful the world had to offer, beginning with all the lessons, music, dance, instruments,

theater, sports, recreation, organizations, Sunday school, boy scouts, girl scouts, friends and the list goes on. And then the graduations, High School, Penn State, Bucknell University, and William and Mary.

Reaching out to experience the Rotary Exchange program, housing students from Bolivia, South America, Sweden, Chile, India, and two of our children going to New Zealand each for a year of study.

And all their accomplishments, too many to count.

How do you measure a life? Is it the time? Is it the place? Is it knowledge? It's everything and so much more. God chose to take our daughter when she was only 60. She so wanted to live a long life but that didn't happen. Her husband joined his beloved 4 months later we think from a broken heart.

Is it a good day or is it a bad day...we'll never know until all the chips are in. Bless you, and love one another.

Love one another, accept and forgive one another as we each have our own journey to follow and life is too short not to.

Edwina J. Tabit

December 11, 2019

PEACE

Colossians 3:15 *Let the peace that Christ gives control your thinking, because you were all called together in one body to have peace. Be thankful.*

During my yearly trip to Vermont I stopped in a small country store in the Northeast Kingdom near the Canadian border. While wandering around I picked up a local paper that had a photo of two loons on a nearby lake on the cover. Below the picture was a poem by Glo J. Breisach of Lowell, Vermont. It was entitled "Breathe". (Of course I had to look up the difference between breathe and breath. The poem is about the verb breathe) It goes as follows:

"How can I describe that feeling... Being alone, silence, smooth, coasting along with the loons! Gliding peacefully, paddling softly in the sunshine, not too hot, not a chill either. Just right – perfect! The loon understands, he knows this solitude, this absolute peace. It's me that needs to grant myself this gift. I need this silence, this beauty, complete relaxation. To quietly take in all the natural wonder, the shades of green and blue and to just breathe!"

In two weeks we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Christ. It is a joyful time as we prepare, entertain, and perhaps travel to see family and friends. Our inner peace may be shaken. On a daily basis we read and hear about the recent natural disasters, political unrest and economic upheaval in the United States and around the world. Even though we may not be directly involved with these events, we do internalize them and need to continue to pray for those impacted and for peace. During these times I remember a few of the lyrics of a song by Vince Gill: "Let there be peace on earth, Let it begin with me, Let there be peace on earth, The peace that was meant to be ..."

Dear God, thank You for sharing your Son with us, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Remember the loons and Breathe!

Muriel Fallon

December 12, 2019

Peace I Give You

John 14:27 *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

This past August, Bill and I were fortunate to take a long awaited camping trip to the Canadian Rockies. We have taken many trips with our girls and family members. Our trips have had their ups and down times, as unexpected things always happen. Our memories of those down times often make us smile, as we can now see God's hand was always there.

What Bill and I experienced during our 7 days in Canada was far beyond our expectations. We had one amazing experience after another for the entire time. From the time we started riding our bikes in Banff until the return trip to Banff, I felt the love, joy and peace of God. I was constantly saying to myself and - out loud – Thank you God! On this trip I was God centered the whole time, feeling like he was right with us during our whole adventure. His presence was there and it never left.

When we returned, I really started thinking about how we go through our days hurrying to get things done and don't stop to enjoy the love and peace that is right with us. Yes, I read my Bible in the morning and yes, I talk to God every night, but his love and peace are there 24 hours a day. Just as it was when I was in the Rockies.

Advent is a time that we are encouraged to stop and feel God's love and peace. Yes the Advent season often bring some down moments, but we need to take the time to be God centered during those times. It is then that we can feel his love and peace. He is there waiting to give us the peace that only he can provide.

God, thank you for this beautiful world that we live in. May we always stop to say thank YOU for your love and peace. Amen

Libbie Butler

Peace

Numbers 6:24-26 *The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you PEACE*

There's a place in the Peak District of England that epitomizes the word "peace" to me. While a friend and I drove a country road through the mountains in gray, cold, rainy weather, we were hungry, shivering from the weak efforts of our rental car's heater, and wondering if we were lost forever. No human existence could be seen, but as we rounded a curve suddenly there appeared on the hill above us, a lovely Bed and Breakfast, and our need for warmth and comfort was met instantly. As we sat in the cozy dining room sipping our delicious tea and munching on the fresh warm scones, the hostess told us that at the end of the road on which we had been driving, was the nest of the last surviving golden eagles in England. That was enough enticement to lure us back out into the typical British weather to try to see the last of these eagles. We did reach the end of the road which surrounded a lovely, quiet, calm lake, so we got out of the car to scan the horizons for the elusive birds. Unfortunately, we didn't see the eagles, but what we did experience was well worth the drive. There was such a sense of God's presence in the peace and serenity of that place, that we both felt the need for prayer. We needed to express praise and thanksgiving to our Creator for the beauty and tranquility of that lovely place. Now, whenever I find myself in a stressful situation, I think back to that time when I felt God's peace completely surrounding us, and I immediately feel His presence.

Dear God, in the midst of the turmoil and chaos of everyday life, I thank you for the peace that surpasses all understanding through our Savior. I praise you that this promise of peace will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Shirley Wilson

December 14, 2019

Think, Pray, Peace

Ephesians 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

As a human community we have conflict. Much of it comes from fear. How do we overcome? Placing our faith in God is the answer, of course. The power of releasing our fears to God is even greater when we have a body of faith surrounding us - our own "Cloud of Witnesses". The church is one body, sharing communion, studying The Word, and gathering in service and fellowship. We lean on one another to get through all sorts of troubles. Practicing patience; not lashing out is how we should act. Being introspective and not jumping to conclusions will create unity. Each Presbyterian is a minister. However, we don't always agree on everything. Decisions in the life of the church are necessary for us to grow and become closer to the kingdom of God. I always went in to meetings with enthusiasm for the projects we had in the works.

Often though my enthusiasm was squelched while at the table. Meetings sometimes were side railed with extraneous issues. Work is so much easier if you have support, but when you have antagonism things deteriorate quickly. Often words & emails are exchanged in anger without seeking Holy guidance. Worry, fear and disagreements melt away when we are truly in communion and become one body and one Spirit. This requires serious prayer. Knowing the Lord results in self-awareness. We become alert to our triggers and can remain calm in the midst of chaos. Pray constantly and seriously to make this happen in your life. Seek peace that transcends earthly concerns that divide us. True peace will unite us as followers of Jesus Christ.

"Lord give us peace and make us calm and sure, that in thy strength we evermore endure." Hymn #624 I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art

Tracy Martin

December 15, 2019

The Joy of Sons

Proverbs 23:24 *The father of a righteous child has great joy; a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.*

As the father of two sons, I experienced great joy each Christmas morning. Even on those mornings when the boys were up four hours too early because the excitement of the morning could no longer be contained. Those first few years, I thought that feeling I had as I watched them tear paper from present, seeing the looks on their faces...that was joy.

But as they (and I) grew older, the reactions became more muted. A little smile is about what we can elicit from an 18 and 14 year old. But joy still fills my heart. I don't see the presents they open. I see them. I see in David a man, larger than me, prone to overthinking things. He's in college now, working more, starting to find just who he is. In Andrew, I see his impulsiveness, caught between wanting to be his brother but not wanting to fully "grow up."

Shelley and I both know we're on "borrowed time" when it comes to our boys. We've always had those around us tell us to enjoy them while we have them because those days go by so fast. It's much too easy to dismiss that "warning" when you're changing diapers at 3:00 in the morning. But it's true. Those days of wide-eyed boys waiting for Santa's arrival seem like yesterday, yet seem so far away at the same time. Yet we both know we've got righteous children, raised in the Church and respect others as well as themselves. We know they are wise sons, although we sometimes wonder just how wise they are!

Our house will be empty one day (sooner, rather than later) but the joy of our sons will never leave. My family prays for our Trinity family, just as we know our Trinity family prays for us. We know the joy we feel is the same you all feel watching David and Andrew become what they are to be.

I thank you Lord for the joy of sons you have given me. I thank you for the messes, the tears, the frustrations that go with boys. I thank you for the feeling of pride in seeing them become young men, grown to respect You and Your church. I thank you for the joy they have brought into my life and for the memories they continue to create.

Jason Wheeler

December 16, 2019

I Am Third

Psalms 71:23 *My lips sing for joy when I sing praise to you-- I whom you have delivered.*

It's a lesson I will always remember. I was young, maybe twelve, studying to join the church. My dad did a presentation on selfishness. He illustrated to us how selfishness is the opposite of the lesson to "love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself" Luke 10:27 This is a direct command from God.

My Dad's presentation was simple:

God first, others second, I AM THIRD.

We can apply this to everyday living, if we choose to do so. Love and praise God before all else. Before food and work and phone calls. In the evening, give thanks and praise before sleep.

This was long before the great Gale Sayers made the saying famous in his loving tribute to Brian Piccolo. To me, it is from the Bible many times, by inference. First John 4:19

"We love because He first loved us." I believe that we can never truly love someone if we do not put their needs before our own. In Phillipians 2, Paul reminds us that Jesus said we should consider others better than ourselves.

I see kind and compassionate people all over Palm Coast doing just this.

Starting at Trinity and in my neighborhood of Grand Haven and all over Advent Hospital. I see people giving of themselves for others. I am in awe everyday that I'm at Flagler County Free Clinic by the commitment, sincerity and talents of the professionals there. EVERYDAY there are many patients presenting with problems and obstacles in their lives which are often difficult to solve. It would be easier to turn our backs, giving in to adversity. But they persevere.

I see "I AM THIRD" every day

This is how we can show God's love through our actions to others as Jesus taught us with His life. John 15:13 tells us that "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friend." Every time someone puts others' needs before their own, they are practicing what Jesus taught. When we slip and fail in this walk of life, we are forgiven and can start anew to practice what we have been taught. Hallelujah!

Help me to show to others the love that Jesus showed us so compassionately, so bravely and so eloquently in His life and death on the cross. Please help me to hear His words ring in my ears every minute of every day. Please help me as I strive to be an example of your love to others along my walk of life if it is your will. I ask this in Jesus Name. AMEN

Laurie Harrison

December 17, 2019

Joy Around the Table

Psalms 4:7 *Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.*

We often associate joy with the Advent and Christmas seasons; also, with times around the table; and, even more, with family gatherings. When all three occasions converge it is indeed a memorable occasion. This convergence happened to me just four years ago when all 15 of our family - grandparents, sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren spent the week of Christmas on a Caribbean cruise.

We met for dinner each evening and occupied the same two tables. I always sat at the smaller table because of my hearing problem. But one evening - it was December 26 - I was asked (OK, I was ordered!) to sit at the larger table. The other occupants of that table were my 7 grandchildren. This was a rare occasion in itself, since they were living in New York, Massachusetts, Texas, and California and were rarely all together.

I dutifully (and happily) took my seat. Although my 80th birthday would not be for a few months, they made this time to celebrate my birthday with me. They had a cake, and each had hand-made a card for me. What a joyful time, around the table with these very special persons, who at that time ranged in age from 10 to 25. After the meal we all moved to an area where we could play old family games. You'll not be surprised to know that I had difficulty sleeping that night.

I am aware that not at all times, and not for everyone, are family gatherings, mealtime, and Advent occasions of great joy. Perhaps it is this knowledge that causes us to savor the times of joy when they do happen. I can re-experience the joy just by remembering that special time.

During Advent we joyfully anticipate the celebration of the coming of Our Lord, as well as joyfully hoping for His return. But let's never forget that there are those, and they may not be far away, who are not experiencing joy.

Lord, You are the hope of this messy world. This Advent, help us to slow down, listen to Your voice, and focus on what is really important. Thank You.

Del Smith

December 18 , 2019

A Train Ride

Matthew 7:1 *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge you shall be judged.*

During my life I have tried to be non-judgmental. My father had a pun for every situation. One was "you can't always tell what's in a book by its cover. I always tried not to judge people by the way they looked or dressed before I knew what they were really like.

This year, Sylvester went up to West Virginia, as usual in May. I stayed behind to finish up some upgrades on our 1987 home. After some thought, I decided not to drive or fly up, but instead take a leisurely train trip. As I walked over to the Northbound train terminal in Palatka, Florida, I saw a lone burly looking guy sitting on the bench dressed in a sleeveless leather jacket, shorts, boots, and two knee crutches covered with tattoos.

I 'thought', I'm glad I brought plenty of my word-powers from Reader's Digest and magazines to read. As I sat down he looked at me and said, "Man, it's really hot outside today." After getting a closer look at his tattoos, I could see they were all religious symbols. They were angels, crosses, doves, Jesus, etc. He looked at me, smiled and said, "I don't go to church, but I am a religious biker."

I asked, "Who was the face of the beautiful lady on his right shoulder"? He said his mother who is one of his two idols; her and Jesus. He had been in a serious bike accident in Daytona Beach. His mother had convinced him to take some time off work and come back to Connecticut for a while to rest and recuperate. We had a great time talking and enjoying the scenery. I didn't do any reading or word problems until he changed trains to go east.

Hebrew 18:1 Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers for some have entertained angels unaware. Amen

Queenester Jones

Sparkling Joy

James 1: 2-4 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

Maire Kondo is an organizing expert who uses her KonMari method to help people organize their houses. The whole method is based on one question, "does this item bring you joy?" She has written many books about this method and now has a series on Netflix where she helps couples organize their homes.

Organization is not one of my talents so I keep watching the show hoping that I will get inspired! While my home remains a disorganized mess, what really interests me is that one question, what sparks joy in your life? This has become one of my phases that I use often in my life. I chose my Halloween costume this year because it did spark great joy in me! When someone asks my opinion on something my answer sometimes is, "does it spark joy in you?"

In the first chapter of James, James says in verse 2:

"Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of any kind because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

Let me tell you that trials are not something that I would list first on my list of what sparks joy in my life, but God does bring me great joy. Why wouldn't a time when I have to lean on Him and trust Him fully be something that does bring me great joy. Maybe the key to "decluttering" our lives is to find joy in everything because we can find God in everything. Marie Kondo may not be a fan of this method, but I know that God is and that is all that matters.

God, I pray that you spark joy within us this Advent Season. I pray that this joy is not something that is dependent on our possessions or our circumstances, but joy that comes simply from walking humbly beside you. Amen

Brooke Tucker

December 20, 2019

A Journey to Joy

Isaiah 40:28-31; Luke 2: 4-6,19 Throughout our lives, many summons change our lives: the corporate transfer unexpected and unwanted; enrolling in a new school in a new town where you know no one; getting called up to active duty; the call to care for an ill relative or older parent. Joseph faced such a summons when he and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census. Mary made the trip riding on a donkey, even though she was close to the time to deliver her baby. So much changed for Joseph and Mary. The Inn had no room available for them; they stayed instead in the stable. The time for the baby to be born came with only Joseph there to assist Mary with the birth. Visitors came to visit the new parents. First the shepherds came to see the baby and told of the prophesy they learned from the angels. "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). At the temple in Jerusalem, Simeon predicted an unbelievable future for the baby. The Magi came from the East to worship the baby bringing valuable gifts. Again, Mary treasured these events and kept them in her heart. What joy she must have felt. Then, a dream sent Joseph, Mary, and the baby escaping to Egypt and safety.

Unbelievable stories. Unbelievable actions. All with the supervision of a God who did not "... grow tired or weary. He will give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak"(Isaiah 40: 28-29).

Also, in our lives, a loving and caring God watches over us and helps us keep hope and increases our strength as we face new challenges and journeys in our lives. He steadfastly helps us as we undertake difficult changes in our lives. He is a constant help as we face our new future. So, like Mary, we should treasure all that happens in our hearts and move forward with joy to a new stage in our lives. For "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. (Isaiah 40:31).

Dear Lord, As we continue our journey to Christmas, help us keep our hope in you. Let us bring our gratitude to you for our many blessings. Let us come to you for the help we need as we face challenges in life. With you supporting us, all things are possible. We thank you, Lord, for the help you give every day. Amen

Carol Corson

December 21, 2019

The Power and Mystery of LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:4 *Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful.*

I have often wondered about LOVE. What is it really? Where does it come from? What do we do with it? Are there different kinds of LOVE? When you LOVE someone or something, does it change you? Volumes have been written about LOVE. We all have several forms of LOVE within us - LOVE of family, pets, cars, music, sports, GOD.....

Our scripture verse today tells us "LOVE is patient and kind; not jealous or boastful." Wow! That is a lot to comprehend! Today, let us think about the greatest gift of LOVE given to us on Christmas Eve in the form of a tiny baby. With His LOVE in us, how do we share it with others?

There are many ways - loving our neighbors, giving food or clothing to the needy, sharing our many talents with others and all in the name of our Lord.

I would like to share a Handbell Choir experience with you. We were at a nursing home and a lady in a wheel chair was sitting in the back of the room. She was wearing a turtle neck sweater which she had pulled up over her head. As we rang and sang familiar songs, the sweater slowly came down and she sang with us. Her attendants, with tears in their eyes, said that it was the first time they had seen her respond and pull the sweater down. God's LOVE was in our hearts and music which gave this woman joy and memories! Praise be to God for His abundant LOVE to all!

Dear Lord, our hearts are filled with Your LOVE. Help us to share it with others today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lillian Warner

December 22, 2019

Here am I, Use me

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient; love is kind and love envies no one.

This scripture reminds me of Mary and how the angel told this unmarried, adolescent that she was to be the mother of God. What must have run through her mind all through the years?

What would Joseph and her family think? Could she tell them this amazing secret? Would they believe her? But she remained calm and responded, "Here am I. I am the Lord's servant; as you have spoken, so be it." (Luke 1:38)

Luckily, Mary was validated by Joseph, who after his angelic visit, took her as his wife (Luke 1:18-25); and by Elizabeth, whose baby jumped for joy when Mary came to visit (Luke 1:39-44). Mary was patient and kind through the visit of the wise men and the flight into Egypt (Matthew 2: 1-15). Another time at the Temple when Jesus was 12 and after three days of looking for him, she found him, "surrounded by the teachers...And all who heard him were amazed." (Luke 2: 41-52)

What kindness Mary demonstrated at the wedding at Cana when the family ran out of wine and Mary told the stewards to do whatever Jesus asked them to do." (John 2:3-5) As for envying no one, how about that time when she and the other children came to visit Jesus and when told his family had come, he replied "Who is my Mother and who are my brothers?" (Matthew 12:48)

So who validates us along our journey? Who do we validate?

How do we demonstrate patience and kindness?

Who do we envy and what do we do to change that?

Come, Lord Jesus, Come into our hearts today and give us the courage to practice patience, kindness, and selflessness. Help us respond to your will as Mary did by saying "Here am I, Lord. Use me. In His Name, Amen

Martha Gioielli

Love Never Fails

1 Corinthians 16:14 *Let all you do be done in love.*

What an impact God's love has had on this earth! Love has brought about hospitals, orphanages, churches, nursing homes, soup kitchens, and food banks. Magnificent works of music (such as the Messiah) as well as loving hymns and spirituals expressing endurance and spiritual inspiration have been created in praise and celebration. Many amazing sculptures, and paintings have been done remembering Our Lord and Savior over two thousand years, so many one cannot even count them all. Gorgeous icons depicting the life of Jesus and the twelve disciples are abundant through-out Christian churches world-wide. Architecture has been greatly influenced over the past 2,000 years by church design meant to recognize the magnitude of Christ's life here on earth.

How many caring organizations can you name brought about where the original thought was one of love and caring? Organizations based on caring, loving, helping as was Jesus on his earthly venture. The poor and needy were primary in his ministry, the sick and maimed received his loving kindness. What a dynamic influence!

With all of this, his greatest gift of all was giving his life for all mankind. "Greater love hath no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

And so this is the season when we celebrate His birth. Giving one another gifts of love and showing we care, in gratitude for His gift to us of Grace.

Father in Heaven, we are so grateful you cared enough for us to send us your Son, Jesus. Help us to remember at this time those who need our help and follow His example of loving care. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Lois Settles

December 24, 2019

Setting Our Sites

Isaiah 9:2-7 *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

2020 vision includes, among other things, the ability to track moving objects. Those who place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are enabled to see more clearly through corrected lenses. The birth of Jesus created a pathway of restored vision.

This vision takes us thru a solitary life, an enduring like no other and a promised new beginning. A 2020 vision begins with the Christ Child; the One who showed us how to live; the One who died for us; the One who rose again for us; the One who reigns in power for us; and the One who prays for us.

As we look back on the years we leave behind, might we also look ahead at what is to come, as we pray, "Lord Jesus, come." As we anticipate opening the greatest gift ever given, might our expectations be met with the unwrapped presence of the One who came to give light and life to the World.

"Open [our] eyes, that [we] may see glimpses of truth thou hast for [us] ... Silently now [we] wait for thee, ready, [our] God, thy will to see. Open [our] eyes; illumine [us], Spirit divine." Amen

Dr. Jeff Beebe

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