

December 5, 2022

PrayerCast

Let's take a moment to pause and quiet our thoughts as we begin our time of reflection and prayer.

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

In the church tradition I grew up in we did not observe the liturgical calendar and I didn't even learn about it until my early 20s. I've since fallen in love with this ongoing cycle of observing the historic seasons of the church going back thousands of years. Beginning with Advent and moving into Christmastide and Epiphany and Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and ordinary time, this global and historic tradition of living out the grand story of God in our months and days and years grounds us in the whole story of God as we move through each season as a church body. The weekly scripture readings and prayers bring us through the entire Bible, discipling our bodies and souls in the process as we orient our ordinary days as part of THE sacred story.

We now enter into week two of Advent, and the theme of the week is **preparation**. Some would say the entire season of Advent is summed up in the concept of preparation. This brief season of anticipation and preparation for the birth of Jesus – God breaking through into our humanity to redeem and restore us unto Himself. We remember this coming **and** we anticipate His coming again.

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

Preparation is no stranger to the holiday season. We prepare our homes, make lists, buy presents, wrap presents, decorate trees, make food – all this preparation! But let's pause and ask ourselves – How am I preparing *Spiritually*? Let's meditate on this question as we move to our scripture for today – Isaiah chapter 40.

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

Isaiah 40 is a beautiful passage, and I encourage you to take some time today to go back and read the entire chapter. Today we will focus on verses 3-5.

“A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all the people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

To paraphrase: “Our King is coming! Our **God** is coming to dwell **with** us! Come, let's prepare, let's make a smooth path for His arrival so His light and glory can shine out to all the world!”

“Prepare the way for the Lord.”

How are we preparing *spiritually* this holiday season?

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

What hills in your life need to be brought low so God's light can shine through you?

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

What valleys must be raised up?

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

What's hindering your walk with God this holiday season? Busyness? Stress? Anxiety? Depression? Family troubles?

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

May I propose two simple practices to implement as we consider how we can prepare our hearts this Advent season; **looking** and **listening**.

Jesus is the light of the world. Prepare Him room by **looking** to the light:

- Choose one peaceful moment in your day, whether during your morning coffee or at naptime or during your lunch break or dinner time; and light a single candle. Breathe deeply and watch it burn.
- OR
- As the days grow shorter and darker, pay close attention to the sun. Pay attention and simply notice where the light comes in.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Prepare Him room by **listening** to Him.

- Amidst your busy holiday schedule; while in the kitchen preparing food or in the car on the way to work or activities, play a Christmas hymn playlist and meditate on the lyrics.
- OR
- Turn off all the music and distractions and simply listen to the silence and be still before God.

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

None of this is meant to add extra stress to your already too long list of to-dos this advent season. It's simply an invitation to pause, to look, and to listen to where He's already at work all around you. Because the reality is – no matter how much we prepare, we will never be fully ready or prepared enough for the coming of our Lord.

But,

Isn't that the whole point of the Good News of Christmas? Stated so beautifully by Madeleine L'Engle: "He did not wait till the world was ready. Till men and nations were at peace. He came when the heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release."

(Pause for a moment and reflect.)

Lord, may we pause this holiday season and prepare, not only our homes but our hearts, to receive you – Emmanuel – God with us. Help us to look and to listen for you today and every day as we remember and celebrate your birth. Open our eyes to see your redemptive movements in our chaotic lives and world – believing that you are always moving towards your creation in love.

Amen