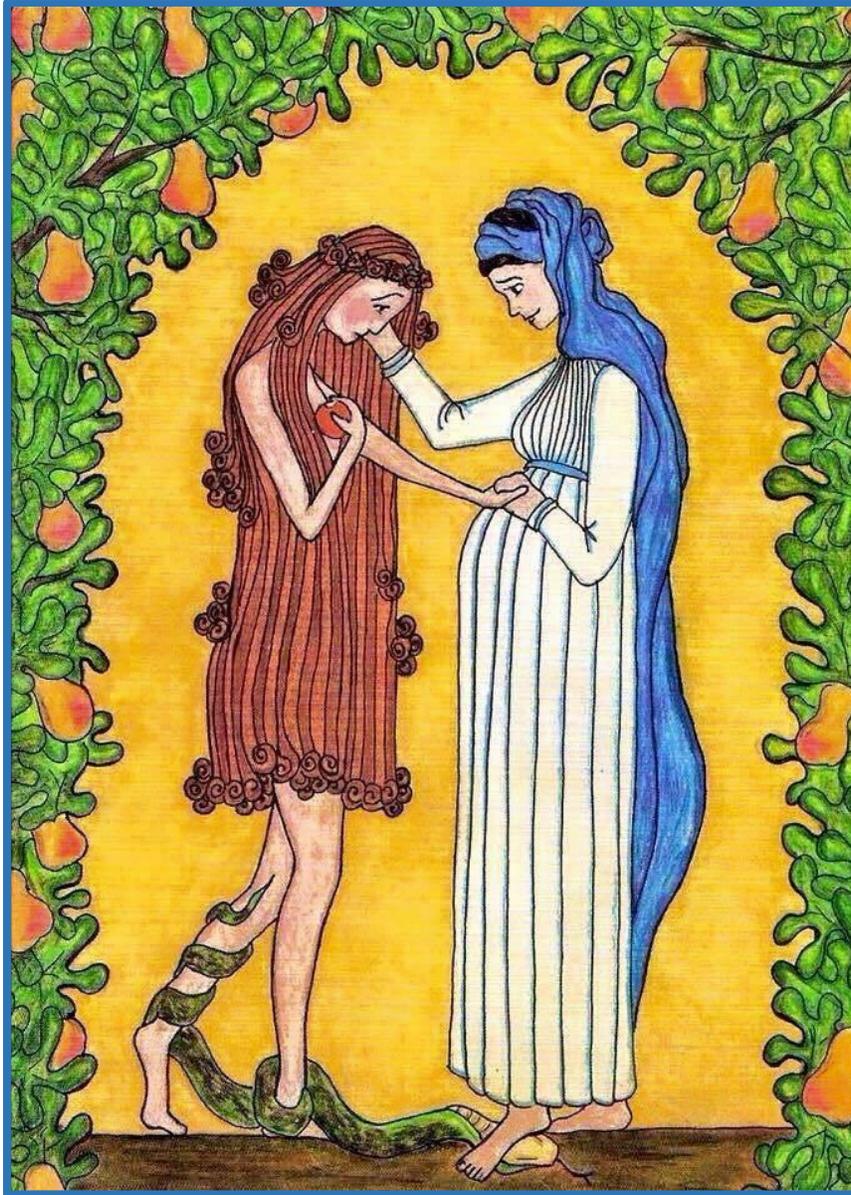


# Advent 2016: Wait/Hope



*“Virgin Mary Consoles Eve” Sister Grace Remington, OCSO*

Liturgies for Justice: A worship resource

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**O Eve!**

My mother, my daughter, life-giving Eve,

Do not be ashamed, do not grieve.

The former things have passed away,

Our God has brought us to a New Day.

See, I am with Child,

Through whom all will be reconciled.

O Eve! My sister, my friend,

We will rejoice together

Forever

Life without end.

— Sr Columba Guare © 2005 Sisters of the Mississippi Abbey

Greetings from Love Mercy Do Justice!

Even though Advent is still a month or so away, in the local church we know that planning for thoughtful Advent worship begins well before the first Sunday after Thanksgiving. In these days, planning engaged and engaging worship is a challenge, all the more so when you desire to incorporate the themes of justice into your worship, liturgical elements and preaching.

For some churches, the themes of justice come naturally and have been a regular part of your community and corporate gatherings for a long time. It is our hope that this resource is an encouragement to you and reflects our gratitude for the ways your churches have set an example for all of us in creating space for lament and longing for justice in our broken world.

Others of us are just getting started. We recognize that God is a God who calls us to be people who seek shalom in the communities to which we are sent. We understand that the nature of true discipleship calls us to be people who live out the truth of the gospel among those most likely to be overlooked and oppressed in our world. We want to engage the world in such a way that our proclamation of the good news is enhanced by our raised voice against the injustice we see around us. But sometimes, how to engage in that work in a wholistic way, a way that involves our worship, discipleship and community engagement, is not as clear. We are all on the road toward pursuing God's vision of justice and righteousness and so no matter where we find ourselves on that path it is our hope that that this resource provides you with some tangible ways of weaving the themes of justice and shalom into your worship this Advent season.

The season of Advent is an amazing opportunity to explore God's heart for justice and his intention to make all things new in Jesus. As we rehearse the story of the incarnation of Christ, we do so by leaning into the experience of Israel's longing for the Messiah who would establish a Kingdom of righteousness, justice and peace. That historical longing helps us to tap into our own longings, for a world made right, for a deep sense of new life in the midst of death and destruction, for our communities to reflect God's original intent.

In Advent, we learn how to long for these things in a way that cultivates our hope in Christ. We don't despair, we don't put our heads in the sand, we don't brush injustice and violence under the rug, instead we allow the pain and brokenness of our world and in our lives to nudge us closer to Christ and his promise of new life.

The challenge is steering clear of the sentimentality that overwhelms us during this time of year. To counter that, our encouragement is to make your planning as human as possible. What we mean is that, in each of our contexts, there is a particular human expression of injustice, etc. These are the people, named and storied, that God calls us to stand alongside in the face of a world who refuses to do so. This resource is offered in a general sense, but we want to encourage you to make your worship as specific as possible! There will be current events, in your city and/or our nation, which will provide opportunities to reflect, pray, lament and cry out *Come Lord Jesus! Make everything new!* in concrete ways. Incorporating those events into your worship is helpful to the entire congregation because the more human and particular our worship is the more we learn to lean into the real invitation of Advent.

We offer this resource, not as a definitive collection of Advent ideas, but as a springboard to your planning and thinking as we enter this season together. We've included examples and ideas for various elements of worship gatherings but feel free to use these suggestions as a starting point for your own creative engagement in worship. May the light of Christ shine on all of us as we worship together this Advent season; declaring our longing that God's justice would reign through Messiah Jesus on earth as it is in heaven.

## Song Selection/Introductions

### **\*A note for worship planners\***

When celebrating the season of Advent, we are worshipping and singing about the arrival of Jesus Christ while anticipating His second coming. We are also worshipping and singing about Jesus Christ as our Judge and Advocate. We celebrate Him as the One who brings justice, peace, and righteousness to the world and His people. Through Christ's example, we as Christians strive to exemplify the mentioned attributes through our worship and faithfulness to Him.

As a Worship Leader, similar preparation is given to preparing songs for worship as a pastor does for delivering a sermon. Specifically, for special times of worship such as Advent, more time is given to not only ensure that the music presented leads the church into worship but to also make certain the message of the season is emphasized. Before preparation begins, the focus of Advent along with the vision of the pastor (church) is received. Following is prayer and the studying of scriptures relating to the meaning of Advent and the key themes to be imparted through song. If time allows, commentaries and books are also helpful aids for preparation.

**Scripture samples:** Deuteronomy 16:20; Psalm 100; Isaiah 1:1; Isaiah 11:1-10; Zechariah 7:9

**Potential themes:** Hope, joy, love, justice, righteousness, peace, faithfulness, redemption, waiting for Christ, Christ our Advocate, Christ the King

In leading songs selected for the Advent season, it is important to introduce the songs to the congregation before singing or while singing to guide their thoughts towards the message of the song and the season. Repetition of choruses, verses, or certain lines of a song that speak about the chosen Advent themes is major during worship to also direct the church to this time of celebration. If the Spirit leads you to sing without an introduction letting the song introduce itself, submit to the Holy Spirit.

Lead outside of the box as the Spirit leads you. Change the lyrics, planned or spontaneously, to fit the season and/or flow of the service.

Came to My Rescue – Hillsong

At our church, great focus is given to justice, serving our community, racial reconciliation, and living by Christ's example.

Adding to the bridge of the song, we now sing:

*In our church, be lifted high*

*In Bronzeville, be lifted high*

*In Chicago, be lifted high*

Leading from a personal place of adoration and devotion where time has been spent seeking Christ is key to effective and impactful worship during this time and always. Force nothing. Lean on Him. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and show you how to unselfishly yield your song selections to Him and be that vessel that executes with Godly excellence through proper preparation, practice, and prayer. Lastly, being submissive to the flow of the Spirit during each service may require less or more singing, less or more physical worship, making a joyful noise or being silent in His presence. As confident as you are about your call to lead worship, I am confident that you will be led by your Heavenly Father and Creator (God), your Advocate and King (Jesus Christ), and your Guide and Comforter (the Holy Spirit) in each season as you take your stance as a Levite and usher His people in His presence.

### Examples of songs which could be incorporated into Advent justice themes

*God of This City- Chris Tomlin*  
*Hear Our Praises- Hillsong*  
*Break Every Chain- Jesus Culture*  
*From the Inside Out- Hillsong*  
*Your Grace is Enough- Matt Maher*  
*You Are My King (Amazing Love)- Chris Tomlin*  
*Now Behold The Lamb- Kirk Franklin*  
*Jesus Messiah- Chris Tomlin*  
*Hosanna- Hillsong*  
*Everlasting God- Chris Tomlin*  
*You Alone Are God- Daryl Black*  
*I Give You My Heart- Reuben Morgan*  
*Light Of The World- Matt Redman*

### Examples of traditional Advent hymns with justice themes

#### ***O Holy Night***

*Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,  
Let all within us praise His holy name.  
Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,  
His power and glory evermore proclaim.  
His power and glory evermore proclaim.*

#### ***O Come O Come Emmanuel***

*O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Come, bid our sad divisions cease,  
And be thyself our King of Peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to you, O Israel!*

***Come Thou Long Expected Jesus***

*Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.*

***View the Present through the Promise***

*View the present through the promise, Christ will come again.  
Trust despite the deepening darkness, Christ will come again.  
Lift the world above its grieving through your watching and believing  
in the hope past hope's conceiving: Christ will come again.*

*Probe the present with the promise, Christ will come again.  
Let your daily actions witness, Christ will come again.  
Let your loving and your giving and your justice and forgiving  
be a sign to all the living: Christ will come again.*

*Match the present to the promise, Christ will come again.  
Make this hope your guiding premise, Christ will come again.  
Pattern all your calculating and the world you are creating  
to the advent you are waiting: Christ will come again.*

# Scripture Reading/Preaching

*\*These resources are closely based on the Revised Common Lectionary with a few variations\**

Recognizing that not all of our churches follow the liturgical calendar in the same way, we developed these readings, prayers and sermon prompts in a way that allows for both expressions to access and utilize the tools here provided.

Each week, we provide some Scripture readings that put the themes of justice front and center, prayers that can be utilized in various places in your gatherings, and short reflective essays by Covenant pastors and leaders aimed at helping preachers ignite their imaginations toward justice as they pray and prepare to preach.

## *Week 1- November 27*

### **Isaiah 2:1-5**

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

<sup>2</sup>In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established

as the highest of the mountains;

it will be exalted above the hills,

and all nations will stream to it.

<sup>3</sup>Many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,

so that we may walk in his paths.”

The law will go out from Zion,

the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup>He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,

nor will they train for war anymore.

<sup>5</sup>Come, descendants of Jacob,

let us walk in the light of the LORD.

## Psalm 122

<sup>1</sup>I rejoiced with those who said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”

<sup>2</sup>Our feet are standing  
in your gates, Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>Jerusalem is built like a city  
that is closely compacted together.

<sup>4</sup>That is where the tribes go up—  
the tribes of the LORD—  
to praise the name of the LORD  
according to the statute given to Israel.

<sup>5</sup>There stand the thrones for judgment,  
the thrones of the house of David.

<sup>6</sup>Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
“May those who love you be secure.

<sup>7</sup>May there be peace within your walls  
and security within your citadels.”

<sup>8</sup>For the sake of my family and friends,  
I will say, “Peace be within you.”

<sup>9</sup>For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,  
I will seek your prosperity.

## Corporate Prayer

*A Prayer to the God of PEACE*

*A responsive prayer with the leader praying the non-bold lines and the congregation praying the bold lines. If a written copy is not available for the congregation the prayer can be simplified so the congregation prays “God, our faith is in You to bring peace” each time and the leader would read the italicized script.*

*God of Peace we have gathered here to worship You*

***because our hope is in You for a future when all people will live in peace.***

*Peace inside of us*

***so that fear and anxiety do not control us***

*Peace in our homes*

***so we seek each other’s good and relationships are healed***

*Peace in our church (churches, The Church)*

***so we are united in our witness for Christ***

*Peace in our neighborhoods*

***so young and old are cared for with love and respect***

*Peace in our towns and cities*

***so that safety and long life are normal***

Peace in our country (*this could be anyone's country, not just the United States*)

***so that Your justice replaces human injustice***

Peace in our world

***so that weapons of death become tools for life***

Peace in our universe

***so that all people will join creation to worship you.***

*God of Peace, hear our prayer, in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, Amen.*

## **Preaching prompt- Isaiah 2:1-5**

Every year, the season of advent always reminds me that we are still waiting. We are waiting, not for the birth of Christ in our world, but for Christ to give birth to a new world. A world, “not of all new things, but where all of the old things are made new”; past trauma is healed and God’s shalom, justice, and righteousness are eternally realized. In advent, we wait for Christ’s return and the dawn of a new day. And the waiting isn’t easy- it requires tremendous determination to conjure up the spirit of Christmas and imagine a final consummation between Christ and the world, when we are still yet experiencing the injuries of the in-between; the now and the not yet. Thus, to wait oft necessitates lament. Lament is an expected part of waiting and anticipating things to come.

The people of Israel knew the experience of waiting and lamenting well. Conquered and increasingly marginalized under Assyrian imperialism, the people of Israel were in their own season of “advent” waiting on God for a savior to heal them & lead them into deliverance and fullness of Life. And so, in the midst of their very raw pain, God gives them a vision of the future. At the center of that picture, at the center of the new world, is a new city. What is this city like?

Isaiah tells us that this city is filled with God’s presence which will be as light, permeating and filling every corner and dimension of the city. He describes it as a city with the advantage of higher ground; eliciting perhaps the image of an unassailable city, and out of reach. But here Isaiah makes certain to confound any sense of militarism we may be imposing upon the text. Though the new city be exalted to the highest plane, it will be far from an impregnable fortress- separate from the world. Rather it will be a central gathering point accessible to all those making pilgrimage from all the nations seeking peace.

In this city there will be no instruments of war; the new city will be defined by peace. Not only will its urban geography be constructed for peace, but its human relations will be as well. No more will concrete walls with barbed wire divide us. No more will violence, implicit bias, anti-blackness, misogyny, and ableism split us. These “weapons” that we have employed to grant us security will be obsolete, and political “sagacity” and politics based on the misuse and abuse of the power such weapons will cease (Heschel, *The Prophets*). The Holy city becomes the template for all systemic and interpersonal relationships in the new world. And for the people of Israel, the city is the epitome of the hope to come.

Isaiah provides this new vision as an encouragement to the people of Israel, for he knows the conditions of their waiting and lament. The vision therefore serves as a balm for their pain in liminal space. And yet, His vision to the people is somehow more than an encouragement, but also an exhortation- a challenge to provoke the people into transformative action! Isaiah’s picture of the new city is not just for tacit consumption. It is meant to engender true change in the hearts and minds and alter the lived behavior of the hearers/ receivers of this vision! The prophet speaks proleptically with a clear mandate; Go and live

rightly into the reality of God's preferred future right now. For the peace of the city will NOT come about through further complicity in unjust empire, but only by pursuing the righteousness of God. Don't waste time, but make haste, for God, is an angry God who ever concerned about the righteousness of this people and ever intolerant of injustice.

Colonial subjectivity and eventual exile, for the people of Israel- and advent, then, for us are not simply seasons of passive acceptance/reflection, but active lament and resistance. God in His Grace has seen fit to provide for us the eschatological endgame- the very vision of a new city, the Holy City. And with this City in view, the season of Advent takes on new ethical dimensions. No longer ought we see Advent through the lens of consumer demand for Christmas lights and tree ornaments. Rather, Advent and our own civic, religious, and familial contexts looks different in the greater economy of God's transformative justice. It is a time to both lament the pain of the now and not yet, *and* to give birth to a new spirit of resistance within us. To practice the subversion of empire, to dismantle systems of oppression, to refrain from placing our trust in political leaders promising political salvation through military gains, and to endlessly labor for the peace of our cities as we continue to hope for a new day where we will enter the gates of the New Jerusalem together. What will the quality of our waiting be this Advent?

## *Week 2- December 3*

### **Isaiah 11:1-10**

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—

<sup>3</sup>and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

<sup>4</sup>but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

<sup>5</sup>Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

<sup>6</sup>The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.

<sup>7</sup>The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup>The infant will play near the cobra's den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

<sup>9</sup>They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.

<sup>10</sup>In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

## **Psalm 72:1-7**

- <sup>1</sup> Endow the king with your justice, O God,  
the royal son with your righteousness.
- <sup>2</sup> May he judge your people in righteousness,  
your afflicted ones with justice.
- <sup>3</sup> May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,  
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
- <sup>4</sup> May he defend the afflicted among the people  
and save the children of the needy;  
may he crush the oppressor.
- <sup>5</sup> May he endure<sup>[a]</sup> as long as the sun,  
as long as the moon, through all generations.
- <sup>6</sup> May he be like rain falling on a mown field,  
like showers watering the earth.
- <sup>7</sup> In his days may the righteous flourish  
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.

## **Corporate Prayer**

### *Waiting in hope for Justice*

(During this prayer, there is space for the congregation to speak requests for justice in specific situations. Please provide directions for this time of silence followed by intercessory prayer verbally or in print. This prayer requires a leader who is sensitive to the church's context as well as the Spirit to lead this intercessory prayer time well. This prayer can be simplified by having the leader speak the specific situations and allow a short silence between each one.)

Jesus, Son of God, we worship You.  
You are full of wisdom and understanding.  
You always know what is best.  
You are strong and mighty.  
You are righteous.  
You are faithful.  
You do not judge according to human sight and hearing.  
You judge according to the Spirit.  
You are good news for the poor.  
You are release for the captive.  
You are sight for the blind.  
You are freedom for the oppressed.  
You are our hope.

In these days of violence and victimization,,  
We wait for You to bring justice that turns the systems of this world upside down.  
We wait for You to bring justice so that provision is made for the poor.  
We wait for You to bring justice that frees the captives and the oppressed.  
We wait for You to bring justice so that victims are healed.  
We wait for You to bring justice so that victimizers no longer destroy lives.

We wait for You to bring justice so that the righteous flourish and peace abounds.

We wait for Your righteous justice.

We wait for you, Lord Jesus.

We wait...

(10-15 seconds of silence, the leader keeps the time. It will feel like forever, but let it be.)

We wait for Your justice in these situations:

(Spend a few minutes in intercessory prayer for justice in specific situations. Allow space and time for the congregation to bring their concerns or the leader can name specific situations. Adjust this for your context.)

Thank you for hearing our prayers, Jesus, Righteous Judge, our hope for justice. Amen.

### **Preaching Prompt- Isaiah 11:1-10**

In this commonly used Advent text, Isaiah is calling the people toward a future hope; not a fool's hope but a kind of eschatological promise that fills the present with an expectant longing. The central theme of that promise is, of course, the coming Anointed One, a Messiah whose presence and power will usher in a new era marked by (v. 10) the nations of the earth flocking to him, he himself standing as a banner (a rallying point) for all peoples. There is this grand image of global reconciliation of peoples gathered around this Root of Jesse, and it calls us to consider the parallels between this vision and the images given to us by John in Revelation 7:9-10. This image of reconciliation with the Messiah at the center is particularly comprehensive in this passage with the famous images of wolves, leopards, calves, lions, children and cobras. The thematic continuity calls us to focus our longings in the same direction Isaiah calls Israel... toward the eschatological hope of the Kingdom of God; a future reality, having broken into the present in Messiah Jesus.

The advent themes of longing and hope, an expectant waiting for the Messiah to be revealed are natural outflows of a text like this, and yet, before we move toward that, there is a point to consider particularly when thinking about preaching. The temptation for us, in a passage like this, could be (this would not be a temptation for all of us certainly) to focus on the incredible image of reconciliation without drawing our congregation's attention to the kind of activity that stands as a precursor to that grand gathering of the nations.

Notice that the Root of Jesse, before becoming the rallying point of the nations, is the one who creates righteousness and justice for the 'needy' and 'poor.' The OT couples righteousness and justice together so often that we ought to pause for a bit and see the connection between the words and the comprehensive view of holiness that the text gives us; blameless toward God and toward others (particularly those on the margins). The Root of Jesse comes and overturns the tables of injustice by girding himself with righteousness, faithfulness and justice; creating space for those on the margins of society to experience true justice and shalom.

It is in doing this work of calling the unjust to account for taking advantage of vulnerable people that we celebrate the first fruits of this new world of peace and justice. Advent longing must include training our hearts to hope for this divine justice for the beaten down and oppressed. If it were otherwise, Jesus would not have come declaring that his mission was 'good news for the poor'. To that end, as people who have

rallied to the Root of Jesse, it becomes our honor and privilege to bear witness to this eschatological hope, realized in Jesus. Not simply with our words, because the Root of Jesse will not judge on appearances, or by what he hears only (v. 3). Instead, our pursuit of righteousness and justice for the 'poor of the earth' (including repenting for our complicity in their oppression), is a form of prophetic evangelism, a declaration of the intentions of a God of righteousness, faithfulness and justice.

So what will our Advent Hope look like in action? During Advent, we daily fight against the rampant commercialization of the season and the sentimentality of tradition and secularized warm fuzzies. In the wake of that onslaught of Santa, it becomes easy to sentimentalize the Advent of Christ, to indulge ourselves in Hallmark home movie-ized versions of the story and to settle for spiritual abstractions. This is a text that could easily fall prey to that kind of superficial treatment. But instead of reducing this text, our preaching can stand in the face of the general stupor of the 'holidays' and shake us awake and alive to the radical proclamation of a coming King who establishes justice for the poor and oppressed. Standing in his wake, we are called to be a much different kind of people, actively working to root out injustice in our homes, in our churches, in our neighborhoods, cities and nation. This kind of active presence in the world is fuel for an Advent hope threatened on all sides by competing stories and less sweet songs.

## *Week 3- December 11*

### **Isaiah 35:1-10**

The desert and the parched land will be glad;

the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus, <sup>2</sup>it will burst into bloom;

it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,

the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;

they will see the glory of the LORD,

the splendor of our God.

<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the feeble hands,

steady the knees that give way;

<sup>4</sup>say to those with fearful hearts,

“Be strong, do not fear;

your God will come,

he will come with vengeance;

with divine retribution

he will come to save you.”

<sup>5</sup>Then will the eyes of the blind be opened

and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

<sup>6</sup>Then will the lame leap like a deer,

and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Water will gush forth in the wilderness

and streams in the desert.

<sup>7</sup>The burning sand will become a pool,

the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

In the haunts where jackals once lay,

grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

<sup>8</sup>And a highway will be there;

it will be called the Way of Holiness;

it will be for those who walk on that Way.

The unclean will not journey on it;

wicked fools will not go about on it.

<sup>9</sup>No lion will be there,

nor any ravenous beast;  
they will not be found there.  
But only the redeemed will walk there,  
<sup>10</sup> and those the LORD has rescued will return.  
They will enter Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy will crown their heads.  
Gladness and joy will overtake them,  
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

### **Psalm 146:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God.  
  
<sup>6</sup> He is the Maker of heaven and earth,  
the sea, and everything in them—  
he remains faithful forever.  
  
<sup>7</sup> He upholds the cause of the oppressed  
and gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets prisoners free,  
  
<sup>8</sup> the LORD gives sight to the blind,  
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
  
<sup>9</sup> The LORD watches over the foreigner  
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,  
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.  
  
<sup>10</sup> The LORD reigns forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
  
Praise the LORD.

### **Corporate Prayer**

#### *REJOICING in God Who is our Help.*

(Call and response prayer based on Ps. 146:5-10. Leader reads the non-bold, congregation reads the bold. It would be helpful to have someone lead the congregation who is joyful and reads with good expression.)

God, You are our God and we rejoice in hope today because of You.  
You are our help at all times.

**We rejoice in you!**

You created heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them.

**We rejoice in you!**  
You keep faith forever.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You execute justice for the oppressed.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You give food to the hungry.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You set prisoners free.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You open the eyes of the blind.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You lift up those who are bowed down with trouble and grief.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You watch over the strangers.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You uphold the orphan and the widow.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You bring the wicked to ruin.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You love the righteous.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
You are our God and you reign forever, for all generations.  
**We rejoice in you!**  
**Amen.**

### **Preaching Prompt- Isaiah 35:1-10**

My heart ached when I saw the picture of young Omran Daqneesh sitting dazed in the back of an ambulance in Aleppo, Syria, with his face and body covered in blood and dust. You probably know the picture of which I write because that image caught the attention of so many of us. Omran's country has been at war four about the last five years. Even so, Omran's predicament is only one solitary example of the pain and devastation that many humans have inflicted on fellow humans. The suffering as well as the movement of people because of war, famine, and political unrest has always been a reality of human history—since the days recorded in Genesis. People have long struggled in their attempts to stand up under oppression. There have been millions who risked traveling across deserts in hopes of a better situation. Injustice has caused countless fellow human beings to suffer and even die from illnesses that in many cases could have been prevented or cured.

Even a cursory reading of human history reveals how traumatic life has been for people without power and privilege in the world. Those marginalized, trivialized, and victimized need an advocate. They need deliverance. At the very least they need hope.

Isaiah 35:1-10 offers hope to people who had been traumatized. In context, Isaiah writes to the people of God that their distant relatives, the Edomites, would be judged because of the way that had treated God's people. When Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians in 587 BC, which included the destruction of the magnificent temple that King Solomon had built, as well as the exile of the brightest and best citizens, Edom failed to stand with its distant relative, Judah. In fact, they actively supported the destruction of Jerusalem. Obadiah 11 reads, "On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered

his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.” Ezekiel 35:10 suggests that Edom sought to expand its own territory as a result of Judah’s desolation. But God did not forget his people! A remnant would return (Isaiah 10:21). Yahweh, the God of justice, would powerfully intervene in the lives of his people.

Joy breaks out when God’s justice reigns. Isa 35:1-4 calls those whose hands are weak and whose knees are trembling from fear because of injustice to be energized when the glory of the LORD appears. God will come to bring justice, to set things right!

Deliverance is part of God’s justice. Isa 35:5-7 promises healing for the blind, the deaf, the lame and the mute, the same categories of people that Jesus healed (see Matt 15:30). Furthermore, these first seven verses also note that the land, which had been a harsh adversary, would become a glad and nurturing place.

The final part of Isa 35, vv. 8-10, picture everlasting joy for those who make their way to Zion, the city of God. No longer would the traveler, the refugee or pilgrim, have to face fear on the road. Rather than traversing a rigorous desert, the people of God will travel on a highway, a holy road, the Way of Holiness. No bandits or predators will have access to that road. Even the animals that threatened the life of weary travelers will not be on that holy road. When the justice of God breaks in, there is gladness and joy and no more sorrow or sighing (v. 10). These last verses picture safety for those whose lives had been in danger. And joy pervades all of Isaiah 35. Isaiah 35 shows us that God comes to reverse the pitiful state of his people. This is the same God who sent his unique Son, Jesus, to reverse the pitiful state of people once and for all.

Advent is our time to remember that our God is the God who comes to rescue, to heal, to vindicate, and to save. When my children were little, we tried hard to make Christmas less about our desires and more about helping others. Consequently, during the Advent season we did things like giving gifts to children who had little, or visiting places like Senior Citizen homes where some people needed to be encouraged during the holidays. Can we allow this Advent to be a time when we participate in God’s work of bringing justice? Can we take a break from the frenzy of shopping, decorating, and feasting to connect with those who are reeling from injustice? There are so many ways to be agents of justice, giving our world hope that God is indeed a God who is not far away but draws near, through his people, and ultimately through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## *Week 4- December 18*

### **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.  
<sup>3</sup>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.  
<sup>4</sup>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.  
<sup>5</sup>Every warrior's boot used in battle  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.  
<sup>6</sup>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.  
<sup>7</sup>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.

### **Psalm 36**

<sup>1</sup>I have a message from God in my heart  
concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:  
There is no fear of God  
before their eyes.

<sup>2</sup>In their own eyes they flatter themselves  
too much to detect or hate their sin.

<sup>3</sup>The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful;  
they fail to act wisely or do good.

<sup>4</sup>Even on their beds they plot evil;  
they commit themselves to a sinful course  
and do not reject what is wrong.

<sup>5</sup>Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the skies.

<sup>6</sup>Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,  
your justice like the great deep.  
You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

<sup>7</sup>How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!  
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

<sup>8</sup>They feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give them drink from your river of delights.

<sup>9</sup>For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.

<sup>10</sup>Continue your love to those who know you,  
your righteousness to the upright in heart.

<sup>11</sup>May the foot of the proud not come against me,  
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

<sup>12</sup>See how the evildoers lie fallen—  
thrown down, not able to rise!

## Corporate Prayer

*Praying to the Lord of LOVE for mercy and relief from the wicked.*

(To simplify this prayer if there is no written format for the congregation, change the non-bold print lines to “Lord of Steadfast Love, hear our prayer for mercy” have the congregation say that line with someone leading them. Have the leader, single voice, read the bold print.)

Lord of Love, hear our prayer for mercy.

**The wicked are steeped in evil and they have no fear of you.**

**The wicked flatter themselves, thinking their evil ways will not be discovered.**

**The wicked speak lies and deceit.**

**The wicked never act wisely and never do what is good.**

**The wicked plot mischief even when they sleep.**

**The wicked embrace all kinds of evil.**

**The wicked cause suffering and pain everywhere they go.**

But you, O God, are the Lord of Love.  
**Your steadfast love is as vast as the heavens.**  
**Your faithfulness reaches the clouds.**  
**Your is like the mighty mountains**  
**Your judgments are like the great deep of the oceans.**  
**You save humans and animals alike.**

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
**All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.**  
**All people may feast on the abundance of your house.**  
**All people may drink from the river of your delights.**  
**All people may find life in you.**  
**All people may see your light.**

Continue your steadfast love, O God, to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!  
**Lord of Love, have mercy on us and do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on us, or the hand of the wicked drive us away. Amen.**

### **Preaching Prompt- Isaiah 9:9-7**

Thanks to Handel's Messiah, most of our church will be humming along to the Scripture reading this week! That grand piece of music draws our attention to, who else, the Messiah, and for good reason. This Messiah, coming as a child, will establish a new Kingdom marked by justice and righteousness (a favored pairing of words in the OT) and there will be no time from then on when that Kingdom does not stand and that King himself does not reign! That is, truly, good news of great joy.

But before Isaiah calls Israel to put their hope in that future reality, he draws their attention to two other themes worth focusing on ourselves, namely, the themes of liberation and shalom. This kingdom will be established through the working out of liberation and peacemaking.

Looking at v. 4 we see that liberation is a central plank in this new King's 'party platform.' The act of liberation is dramatic; shattering yokes that have burdened the backs of these oppressed peoples. The King who will be called wonderful... mighty... everlasting; comes to the throne surrounded and celebrated by those he has set free from their oppression. A stirring image that reminds us of the triumphal entry and the celebratory 'Hosannas' that follow Jesus into the city.

But what kind of liberation? Yes, there is no doubt this liberation is what we might, artificially, call 'spiritual.' Sin binds and oppresses us and leaves us without hope for freedom and flourishing as God intended, and so this is an appropriate text from which to call for celebration at the freedom we have experienced in Christ who shatters the yoke of our bondage to sin. That also leads us to also long for our full redemption because, as Paul says in Romans 8, all of creation groans for liberation to its bondage and we ourselves eagerly wait for our full freedom. However, an exclusively 'spiritual' reading of this text stops short of the full view of what Isaiah had in mind. This liberation is intensely physical, thereby making it intensely social, economic, geographic etc. as well. And so this is one reason why Jesus' proclamation of good news for the poor is such good news, the Kingdom of God carries with it the eschatological reality of liberation from all forms of oppression.

So...to what degree does our presence in the world reflect that liberative action of the king? Are we out to see women and men made free; to ensure that the bar that batters them is shattered so that they can flourish in the world as God intended? Tragically, we will encounter local expressions of systemic oppression in every community and we will find daily examples of the rod of oppression in our national and global community as well. The total liberation of all of creation is still a future reality. However, each of us who has encountered this Prince of Peace, has experienced this liberation ourselves. That means, for us, to cultivate our Advent hope is to nurture a hope that reflects that future and current reality. A hope that works itself out in the pursuit of liberation of oppressed people and people groups.

Then looking at v. 5 we see that peace is also core to the Kingdom of God established by the Messiah. Every garment and implement of war will be destroyed. (or those things used for war purified for use in peace?) This verse, and many others like it, force us to deal with the reality of violence and conflict in our world, in our churches, in our personal relationships; and to lay that violence over the promise of shalom. That cognitive dissonance should call us to reflect, repent and realign our values, actions and aspirations with the one who champions peace. Particularly in a season of great political violence and enmity, what might this political text have to say in regard to how we fashion our political engagement and public presence in the world?

Finally, ending where Isaiah begins, there are two images of light and dark. Those living in darkness long for the light (more than the watchmen wait for the morning! Psalm 130:6). The light of Christ dawns with liberation and peace, many of us live in the long night of violence in our cities, neighborhoods, and homes. We know all too well the hopelessness that lies just around the corner in our communities that are hit hard with various forms of shattered shalom. This passage is a necessary counter narrative in our communities. Against those who may throw in the towel and write off a community as God-forsaken, may this text teach us to train our hearts to hope for the one who rules with true justice and shalom! May it revive our hearts' longing for a world made right, relationships renewed, peace restored and oppressed people set free.

## ***Christmas Eve/Day- December 24/25***

### **Isaiah 7:10-16**

<sup>10</sup>Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup>“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

<sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

<sup>13</sup>Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup>He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, <sup>16</sup>for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

### **John 1:1-14**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup>The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

### **Psalm 96, 97, 98**

<sup>1</sup>Sing to the LORD a new song;

    sing to the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup>Sing to the LORD, praise his name;

    proclaim his salvation day after day.

<sup>3</sup>Declare his glory among the nations,

    his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

<sup>4</sup>For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;

    he is to be feared above all gods.

<sup>5</sup>For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.

<sup>6</sup>Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

<sup>7</sup>Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup>Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering and come into his courts.

<sup>9</sup>Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth.

<sup>10</sup>Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."  
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.

<sup>11</sup>Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

<sup>12</sup>Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;  
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

<sup>13</sup>Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,  
he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

<sup>1</sup>The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad;  
let the distant shores rejoice.

<sup>2</sup>Clouds and thick darkness surround him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

<sup>3</sup>Fire goes before him  
and consumes his foes on every side.

<sup>4</sup>His lightning lights up the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.

<sup>5</sup>The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,  
before the Lord of all the earth.

<sup>6</sup>The heavens proclaim his righteousness,  
and all peoples see his glory.

<sup>7</sup> All who worship images are put to shame,  
those who boast in idols—  
worship him, all you gods!

<sup>8</sup> Zion hears and rejoices  
and the villages of Judah are glad  
because of your judgments, LORD.

<sup>9</sup> For you, LORD, are the Most High over all the earth;  
you are exalted far above all gods.

<sup>10</sup> Let those who love the LORD hate evil,  
for he guards the lives of his faithful ones  
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

<sup>11</sup> Light shines on the righteous  
and joy on the upright in heart.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous,  
and praise his holy name.

<sup>1</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things;  
his right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD has made his salvation known  
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his love  
and his faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music;

<sup>5</sup> make music to the LORD with the harp,  
with the harp and the sound of singing,

<sup>6</sup> with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—  
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea resound, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands,  
let the mountains sing together for joy;

Let them sing before the LORD,  
for he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples with equity.

## Corporate Prayers

### Immanuel, God with us.

On this *Christmas Eve*, we are transported back to that Holy Night when the Creator of the Universe was born a created being. When the Word – Let there be light – entered the darkened world and angels split the night sky with song. When the glory of God was revealed in a lowly stable.

Thank you, Jesus, for becoming flesh and blood like us.

Thank you for giving up the glory of heaven for the dust of earth.

Thank you for sacrificing the riches of heaven for the poverty of Bethlehem.

Thank you for coming to walk the paths of the poor, displaced and marginalized in order to bring us grace and truth.

Thank you, Immanuel, God with Us, Jesus. Amen.

King Jesus, we celebrate your birth *today!*

We rejoice with the whole earth –

the oceans and coastlines,  
the storms and the seasons,  
the mountains and the valleys,  
the sun and the moon,  
the stars and the planets,  
the animals and plants,  
the people of every tribe and nation.

All of creation praises You, Prince of Peace, Righteous Judge, our Hope, Healer and Helper, Lord of Love, King of Kings, Wonderful Counselor, God with Us, Immanuel, Jesus. Amen.

## Preaching Prompt- Isaiah 7:10-16, John 1:1-14

Joseph waited years for God's promise to be fulfilled in his life. Abraham and Sarah waited decades for God's promise to be fulfilled in their lives. But the pairing of these two passages of scripture remind us that God's chosen people waited *centuries* for His greatest promise to be fulfilled. Waiting, for humans in general, appears to be a difficult task. How many of us have the testimony of falling victim to the telltale "hot cheese burn" because we couldn't wait a couple of minutes for a slice of pizza to cool off before taking a bite? We know, from various passages of scripture, that God's people don't wait well. As you read through the Major and Minor Prophets, you see the result of God's people not waiting well. Waiting often results in creating more messes for God to clean up.

I don't know about you, but I have a list of things for which I am tired of waiting. While I won't bore you with the entire list, one thing I've been waiting on for years is to see my community rise up from its pit of despair and hopelessness. It's one of many Chicago neighborhoods that fell victim to white flight and has continued to be negatively impacted by the unjust systems that have enabled some segments of our society to flourish while oppressing others. Reading these Advent passages through the "social justice" lens helps fan the flames of the fire that sometimes struggles to burn within me. I have grand notions of what my

neighborhood can be, but it's a struggle to "wait well" on God's promises when I know that some "quick fixes" could possibly alleviate some of the pain I see. But "wait well" we must.

Yet, as I extol the virtues of waiting, I must also offer a word of caution.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is famously known for rebuking a group of white clergymen for telling him that he should wait. So which is it, wait or don't wait? There are times when waiting honors God, and there are times when waiting is just a cover for disobedience and/or false piety. (Side note: Ahaz provides a good example of false piety when he refuses to heed Isaiah's instructions to ask God for a sign in Isaiah 7:10-12.) I can't provide an exhaustive list of either. When in doubt, listen to the Holy Spirit's direction. However, I believe that common sense and general decency tells us that it's never okay to wait when it comes to pursuing God's shalom. You may need to wait when it comes to particular methods of pursuit, but the pursuit itself is absolutely necessary.

As we arrive at Christmas Eve/Day, our waiting has ended; yet, it is just beginning. This is the tension of the theological concept of "already/not yet." We celebrate the first coming of Christ, but all of creation is still desperately longing for His second coming. *What "already/not yet" moments (some promises fulfilled but others are not) exist in your context?*

The Message translation of John 1:14 reads, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish." *When it comes to hope being realized and longing being fulfilled, what role does our physical presence play? At what point do we have to get some "skin in the game"?*

In your ministry context, *what are some "quick fixes" that you've seen as responses to systemic injustice? Have they been helpful? What might be some ways that you can "wait well" in these situations?*

*Are there ways that you as an individual or your church/organization has used waiting as a cover for disobedience and/or false piety?*

*What promises of God are yet to be fulfilled in your church/organization and in the neighborhood in which you serve?*

*What hopes do you have for your church/organization and the neighborhood in which you serve?*

## Benediction/Sending

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships  
So that you may live from deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of God's creations  
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war,  
So that you may reach out your hands to comfort them and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with just enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done:  
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and all our neighbors who are poor.  
Amen.

*A Franciscan Benediction (Consider converting the language here to incorporate "we/us" and doing the benediction all together)*

## Throughout the week

As your congregation moves through the season of Advent together, you might consider ways in which your community might live deeper into the longing for justice as a community. Many churches have space carved out for some kind of midweek gathering, and it might be appropriate to focus those times for praying specifically for God's justice to take root in light of the current events we see all around us.

A simple idea would be a midweek, *Pray and Break Bread*, where your church organizes a simple meal together accompanied by a focused and intentional calling out to God together. You could focus on praying for...

- peace in the face of violence in your community
- real justice in the criminal justice system
- compassion and just solutions for immigrant communities
- local events that highlight the brokenness of our world
- among others