



IT'S THE END  
OF THE WORLD  
*as we know it*

ADVENT 2012

## Advent READER

As we enter into the Advent season we encourage you to take time each day to pause, pray, reflect and focus your thoughts on the real reason we celebrate. We hope this Advent Reader is a helpful resource for you and your family. Each day consists of scripture, a devotion, prayer and personal applications. Spend time alone or with your family reading and working through the practices. Use the pages at the back of the booklet for any notes, ideas, or journaling that you would like to do.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2012

### A GAME OF THRONES

today's scripture reference

Revelation 4, Psalm 25:1-10; Advent Candle—the World

The message of Revelation 4 can be hard to understand in today's culture. We're so far removed from the world of kings and thrones that the whole idea of asking "Who's really on the Throne?" seems old-fashioned.

But even though we don't live in a world of kings and thrones, we understand authority. We all have parents, bosses. We all live under laws and rules. We all live our lives according to a set of values, priorities. And what Revelation really wants to ask us is, Whose values do I live out? What Way does my life follow?

So Revelation gives us a picture of kings and thrones, but we could imagine offices. Or homes. Who sits behind the desk of your life? Or who runs your household?

questions for discussion

1. If someone were to look at your life, what values would they see? If they only had one guess, who would they say was "on the throne" of your life?
2. It's easy enough to say that it's God, but when we measure our lives against the standard of Jesus himself, that question gets challenging. Does my life really demonstrate that I value justice for all people? That self-sacrifice is my highest goal?
3. Reread Revelation 4. Listen as all of creation sings worship to God. And spend a few moments in honest reflection: Does your life join in with that song? Or does the way you're living create a different song, a false melody?

MONDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2012

written by Randy Scott

today's scripture reference

Luke 20:19—26

Why is it that the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees - “religious leaders” – questioned the motives of Jesus while He walked in our world as a human? Why is it that these “religious leaders” tried to trap Jesus into committing a violation of “their” laws and norms? Why is it that we question Jesus in our daily lives – when our prayers are not answered in the way that we want them to be answered?

The answers to these questions can be challenging to work through. In the case of the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees – it could have been a case of jealousy as they collectively positioned Caesar in much higher standing than this “so called prophet” named Jesus. His teachings did seem contrary to what they were taught to believe. It's easy for us as Christians today to shake our heads at these religious leaders and mock their disbelief but yet we are sometimes guilty of doing similar things when it comes to questioning Jesus and/or questioning His perfect plan for our lives.

Luke 20:26 states, “But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.” The answer referenced here is when Jesus said in versus 25, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” Isn't great that when Jesus explained things He was always simplistic and spot on? He could have gone a different direction – belittling those that questioned him but chose the wiser – simpler path in delivering His answer.

When life gets tough – or does not go as planned – what is your initial response to God? Is it to question His motives, His plan for your life? Do we think we are doing all of the right things – praying, reading the Bible, following the 10 Commandments, going to church, etc. – just as the Bible teaches us to do – and yet we just can't seem to get where we want to be in life. Despite “our” best efforts, God has a perfect plan for our lives. This perfect plan may seem to be less than perfect in our human eyes but if we fully trust God – He will reveal His plan for us and when we accept His plan – we being to live life to its fullest. God is just and caring and He will take care of us as long as we fully trust Him and fully recognize that He is God and is in charge of our lives.

this week's prayer & application

1. **Prayer Walk:** Pick a route to walk. Aim for at least 10 minutes. As you walk, ask God to reveal Himself to you. Prayerfully respond to the following questions: Where do I see God as I walk? What is God saying to me as I walk? In light of God's revelation to me, how am I going to respond?
2. **Silence:** Life is filled with noise. Take a few moments today to silence the noise and hear the still small voice that is speaking to you. To begin, sit or stand still, take a few deep breaths, and sit in silence inviting God to speak to you.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2012

written by Becky Brown

today's scripture reference

Psalm 24

When I was growing up, music was a huge part of our family life. My dad served as the “minister of music” at our local church and our extended family were all musically gifted. It was a rare occasion when we didn’t begin singing at a family gathering. The songs were from the hymnal as well as old traditional songs and occasionally a popular song would get in the mix! Christmastime was always one of those occasions when we would join in celebrating the birth of Jesus with singing! Of course the traditional would be mixed in with the popular, “Jingle Bells” followed by “O Holy Night” and of course “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” then “Joy to the World”. Family reunions filled our stomachs with good home cooked food and our hearts with love for each other. Another Christmas tradition was to attend a performance of Handel’s “Messiah”. Many are familiar with the “Hallelujah” chorus as it is now used in commercials, but when Handel wrote it 300 years ago, it was a testimony to the great gift of Christ to man. The “Messiah” has always been one of my favorite pieces of music; it’s even on my iPod!

Psalm 24 is full of songs! As I read through it, I am reminded of choruses and hymns, as well as the “Messiah”. In verse 4 the chorus “Give us clean hands, give us pure hearts; let us not lend our soul to another” is easily seen. The “Messiah” has a piece based on verse 7 “Lift up your heads, O you gates”. And in verse 10, “Who is this King of glory?” has been made into a popular song played on Christian radio. King David wasn’t writing this Psalm to praise his own name, but to give glory to God! Some commentary’s say David wrote this as the Ark of the Covenant was being brought into the Tabernacle. It was a celebration and declaration of the LORD Almighty!

Is there a question in today’s culture who the King of Glory is? If you did a survey of shoppers at the local mall of what or whom would they say is ruler of their life? A movie or music star? Professional sports player? Or could it simply be themselves as they seek their own nobility through success and adoration. Who is this King of glory that David wrote about in my life? He is the strong and mighty LORD of my life. The LORD who is creator of all! He has filled my heart with a song and is my hope and my future. Because of his grace and mercy, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the earth is the LORD’s and everything in it. *Who is this King of Glory in your life?*

this week's prayer & application

1. **Examine:** At what moment today was I most like Christ? At what moment today was I least like Christ? At what moment today was I most alive? At what moment today did I feel most drained? Where was God most active/least active in my day? God, grant that I may know You more fully and allow you to live through me today.
2. **Slowing:** Life is lived at such a fact pace. Take a few moments to reject the notion that your value in life is dependent on how much you produce. Intentionally seek ways today to slow life down. Drive the speed limit, wait in the longer lines, etc. As you slow yourself, allow God to speak to you as a being, not a doing.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2012

written by Sheila Slone

today's scripture reference

Isaiah 2:1—5

In this vision, Isaiah sees a glimpse of what is to come. He is given a vision of the world where God rules over all of creation. His kingdom is established on earth. He rules with peace. God comes to the earth and brings peace amongst all nations.

This is the season that we sing about peace on earth and good will towards men. We can anticipate the holidays in a couple of different ways. We look forward to a time of peace that Christmas brings us. We are excited to spend time with our family and friends. There is excitement in the thought of gathering together. We look forward to the birth of the Savior, which brings hope and peace to our hearts and to our world. Another way to anticipate the season brings us nothing but stress. All of the preparations, and the cooking, and the family gatherings, and the gift giving, and the office parties are all reasons to cause anxiety and stress. It can end up with something that we stop looking forward to and begin to dread or just wish that it would come and go quickly. Often we will rush through the holiday just trying to get through without much damage or hoping that the season will pass quickly.

The promise of this passage found in Isaiah is that God brings peace. He brings peace as a baby in a manger. He brings peace into our busy and hectic lives. God's peace is for us to live in now. We can have God's peace in the midst of our everyday life. We can experience all that God has for us. God calls us to rest in Him and to find peace and strength for our lives. We have to recognize that we need God's peace in our life and ask for it. Christmas is the reminder that God's plan for us is peace. His plan for peace is also for the world.

Isaiah reminds us that as we anticipate the birth of Christ for advent we also are anticipating the coming of Christ again. God's intention was to change the world as we knew it through the birth of a baby; a Savior who would bring peace and hope to a dying world. God had plan for redemption and a plan than brings peace. What are you doing to experience peace during the advent season? Take some time to reflect on all that God did and will do to bring peace to our lies and our world.

this week's prayer & application

1. **Jesus Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.... (repeat as many times as desired)
2. **Drawing:** God is often expressed to the world through art. Take a few moments to be creative. As you read your daily scripture and reflection, think about how you can artistically express what God reveals to you. Write a poem or draw a picture to describe what God is speaking to you.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2012

written by Lorrie Moeggenberg

today's scripture reference

John 18:33—37

Jesus was born into our world, a baby wrapped in rags and sleeping in a trough, his true identity known by a chosen few. It's hard for us to comprehend the enormity of God leaving the glories of heaven to live among us as an unrecognized king. In today's scripture, Jesus says his kingdom is "not of this world." In Revelation 4 we get an astounding glimpse into Jesus' realm: "...and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads." Jesus chose to leave that splendor and start at the bottom of our culture as a helpless babe, born to a poor family. He never intended to come to earth to be heralded a king. He came not only to save us from our sins, but also to live a life of example, so that He could identify with us, and we could identify with Him—so that we could learn to hear His voice.

When I went away to college, I traded my comfortable bed, home-cooked meals, and worst of all, my car, for a cramped dorm, a bathroom shared with twenty other girls and—gasp—campus transportation. I had lived at home my freshman year and attended a local college. So, arriving at a new school after almost everyone had established friendships the first year, made an uncomfortable situation even worse. Terribly homesick, I struggled to fit into this new, unfamiliar world, living for those brief phone calls from home, when I could hear my mom's voice. The very cadence and tone of her speech reminded me who I was, her words telling me that I was not alone.

We can probably all remember a time when we've traded the familiar for something uncomfortably foreign. Or felt alone, and struggled to find an anchor. Amazingly, we have a Savior who knows exactly how we feel. The Bible shows us many examples of Jesus stopping everything to find a quiet place to listen to his Father: Then Jesus went with them to a garden called Gethsemane and told his disciples, "Stay here while I go over there and pray." (Matthew 26:36). I love the line in today's scripture that says, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." As one of God's children, we belong to Him, and no matter where we are or how we're feeling, we can choose to stop and hear the voice of our King.

this week's prayer & application

1. **St. Francis Prayer:** Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. God grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
2. **Serving Others:** The needs of others around us often go unnoticed because we are too preoccupied to see them. Intentionally look for a way to serve someone today.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2012

w r i t t e n   b y   K a t i e   F u l k

t o d a y ' s   s c r i p t u r e   r e f e r e n c e

Hebrews 10:11—25

Advent is a time of reflection, hope and, most of all, celebration! Hebrews 10:11-25 breaks down for us the life Jesus calls us to live in the light of His redemption. He came to us with the purpose of sacrifice, not so that we would be ridden with guilt, but be filled with joy!

***Celebrate! We're free!***

God's word says, "Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." That's us! What Jesus sacrificed for us took care of all of our sin.

The scripture continues, "I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." We all struggle when others hurt us. It's likely that you know what it's like to hold a grudge. Knowing this, God shows us His true power because He doesn't just say that He forgives us, he says he won't even remember our sins. He holds no grudges.

Now, if that's not something worth throwing a party over, what is? Celebrate! When you're dedicated to following Christ; when you have his law in your heart and in your mind- you're free!

***Now, act like it!***

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

God did the dirty work for us. What he commands us to do is to drop the guilty conscience and remember the hope we have. Hold tight to that hope because God is faithful. You can count on Him. Live every day knowing that you are well taken care of.

***And, love like it!***

t h i s   w e e k ' s   p r a y e r   &   a p p l i c a t i o n

1. **Lord's Prayer:** Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. Amen.
2. **Encouraging Words:** Words are powerful! They have the ability to inspire greatness. Look for ways to use your words today to encourage someone.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2012

## LAMB POWER

today's scripture reference

Revelation 5, Psalm 126; Advent Candle—the Lamb

Revelation Chapter 5 promises us Jesus as the Lion of Judah, come conquering. But instead we get a Sacrificed Lamb. Quite a powerful reversal of images. Instead of Jesus the fearsome, conquering warrior, we get Jesus the sacrificed, the killed.

We see this same tension in the holiday season. We love to have time with our families. We love the chance to slow down and enjoy time off work, time with those we love. But at the same time, we have a busier schedule, the stress of strained and broken relationships, the endless quests for perfect gifts. We love the peacefulness of the Christmas Lamb, but how often do we feel more like a Lion has invaded our lives?

The First Christmas Story teaches us those same tensions. For all the beauty of the Holy Family's first Christmas together, the reality is that Jesus was born into poverty under a government that wanted to see him dead. Maybe that's why we've never been able to escape the hustle and bustle of this season.

We must always remember that Jesus came into this world not as a Lion but as a Lamb. Not as a conquering king, but as a helpless baby. If we are to celebrate the true Spirit of Christmas, we must find the Lamb in the midst of the storm of the holidays. Rather than letting ourselves be tossed to and fro by the winds of all that clamors for our attention in this time of year, we must take control of our holidays.

questions for discussion

1. What if we took control of our schedules, drew healthy boundaries for ourselves and our families so that by the time December 25 arrives, we're excited to celebrate instead of worn to the bone?
2. What if instead of maxing out credit cards to buy one more gift, we celebrated within our means and gave gifts of time and love instead of designers and wires?
3. What if instead of participating in the ugliness of the holidays, we sought out ways to be instruments of peace?
4. What could a Lamb Christmas look like for you? It's still 2 weeks away. Not too late to make some tough decisions. May the peace of Christ rule in your heart this Christmas!

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2012

written by Tricia Lacey

today's scripture reference

Psalm 2

I hate politics. Well, not entirely. I hate conflict. That's the biggest reason that I dislike politics. Part of it is a fear I won't be convincing because I don't know enough. Political conversations are often debates. And that isn't fun to me. Some of my political opinions I have come to because of what I believe God to say and personal experience. Other issues I fail to have an opinion on because I am uneducated. I want to be open. My background makes me hesitant to call myself "open-minded". I fear that worldly views to creep in if I don't guard my mind. Yet, we can be closed-minded and not allow Christ to change our opinions, either. I need to be reminded that I got my ideas from many sources-some reputable, some not; some legalistic, some with ulterior motives. Have I recently asked what God's opinion is on the matter? He may just answer.

Psalms 2 portrays God looking down on the nations trying to run themselves. He does warn against those who are striving to "push for position" and who are defying and denying Him. He actually laughs at them! Perhaps it's valuable to see what God does NOT say in light of the kings of the earth and rulers. He never says that we had better vote in the right President. The kingdom calendar will not be changed or thwarted by which party we affiliate with. He maintains control all the time. He knows we will attempt to control our society with our man-made governments. His anger grows out of those who presume they can free themselves of Him. So, if we take direction from that, we have instruction as to how we can pray. I will have to be committed to praying for the President the same way, regardless of my emotions.

I'm writing this devotional before the November election results are announced. By the time you're reading this, we'll already know who will be President for the next four years. But no matter who is going to inhabit the White House this January, we pray the same thing. We ask that our President will be wise and serve the Lord with fear. That he will honor and seek God's leadership and rule; that he will subject himself to Him.

Whether I agree or not with his decisions, tax cuts/increases or calls on foreign policy, what he will do with Healthcare, and even his stance on abortion. I will pray that He will be moved by a God who is truly in control. A God who desires for us to not run a society without Him.

this week's prayer & application

1. **Prayer Walk:** Pick a route to walk. Aim for at least 10 minutes. As you walk, ask God to reveal Himself to you. Prayerfully respond to the following questions: Where do I see God as I walk? What is God saying to me as I walk? In light of God's revelation to me, how am I going to respond?
2. **Silence:** Life is filled with noise. Take a few moments today to silence the noise and hear the still small voice that is speaking to you. To begin, sit or stand still, take a few deep breaths, and sit in silence inviting God to speak to you.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2012

written by Becky Horton

today's scripture reference

Matthew 4:1—11

People tend to think their circumstances determine the quality of their lives. We often pour our daily energy into attempts to control those circumstances. We feel happy when things are going well and there are no bumps in the road, and then feel sad and depressed when things do not go as planned. If our joy is connected to circumstances instead of promises, that joy will fluctuate or may cease to exist altogether. This could be said for any long-term relationship, including our relationship with God.

In the first eleven verses of Matthew 4, Jesus faces some intense temptations. Satan does his best to make Jesus lose focus as he hits on different areas of human weakness. At this time of Jesus' life, he is tempted through basic human needs, trusting God, and ego. In our everyday lives, we face temptations that are an attempt to shift our point of view off God and onto ourselves or others surrounding us. We are constantly faced with thoughts that are negative, isolating, judgmental, or degrading. One's self worth is often dismissed based on what life could look like *if (I) did this... could be this... looked like... or didn't do...*

When we let our focus fix on anything but God, we are choosing idolatry. Even good things in life could become idols if they become the entire focus of our energy and thoughts. God wants a relationship with us that is not tainted by idolatry, manipulation, or works.

Jesus died for us while we were still in sin; He gave of himself simply to make relationship possible. Satan is not entirely interested in tempting us to do bad things... he wants to take our focus off of relationship with God; to make us lose sight of the fact that we are of value to God. Our worth is in what God thinks, but it is easy to concentrate our time and our thoughts on the temptations the surround us.

Matthew 4:10 simply commands to worship the Lord and only Him; serve Him with absolute single-heartedness. When we allow idolatry to creep into our lives, even good things can take precedence over relationship with God. Anytime our self-worth is affected by something other than God, idolatry has entered into the picture.

"Don't let your happiness depend on something you may lose." -C.S. Lewis

this week's prayer & application

1. **Examine:** At what moment today was I most like Christ? At what moment today was I least like Christ? At what moment today was I most alive? At what moment today did I feel most drained? Where was God most active/least active in my day? God, grant that I may know You more fully and allow you to live through me today.
2. **Slowing:** Life is lived at such a fast pace. Take a few moments to reject the notion that your value in life is dependent on how much you produce. Intentionally seek ways today to slow life down. Drive the speed limit, wait in the longer lines, etc. As you slow yourself, allow God to speak to you as a being, not a doing.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2012

written by Katie Horseman

today's scripture reference

Philippians 2:1—11

In this passage, Philippians 2:1-11, Paul writes about humility and living humbly as Christ did. Today we define humility as “the quality of being humble or not proud or arrogant, subservient.” There are plenty stories throughout the Bible that talk of humility and its importance in our lives as Christians. Proverbs 16: 18 and 19 say “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly.” This line speaks directly of Christ and his way of life on earth, specifically, his unconditional love for all people and his conscious decision to take on the life of a servant, body, mind, and spirit. Proverbs 22:4 says “Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor in life.”

Let's explore Proverbs 22:4 a little more, what exactly is the “fear of the Lord”? In this case, fear does not mean fright or that we must live in fear of consequence, moreover biblical fear refers to reverence and awe. We recognize God as the one true God, an entity we will never fully comprehend and thus we respect, honor, and revere him and show this in our commitment to live in the likeness of Jesus, putting our brothers and sisters above ourselves in love. How do we live with humility as Christ did? In Philippians 2 Paul states we must “ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” We are challenged by Christ to put all others above ourselves and live as a servant to all. Despite Jesus' ultimate position and power he never took his equality with God as an advantage, but he surrendered his position and took on the form of a servant, obedient, powerless in society, and remained obedient even in death.

How do I act as Jesus day in and day out? This is a tall order. First, consider what it means to be a servant. In servitude we relinquish our desire to have power over things and people and ultimately our need for control. In a life of servitude, as Jesus lived, we only have control over our own actions. Christ lived a life of servitude and changed the world forever. We must challenge ourselves to resemble Jesus, relinquishing control and living life humbly and in “fear” of the Lord. We have the power, just as Christ did, to bring heaven here now with every conversation and action, day in and day out. Jesus did not change the world by commanding an army or demanding the servitude of others. He changed the world and saved humanity by becoming a slave. I challenge you to act as our Lord, to awaken those around you by serving all before yourself. Be it the end of the world or not, I challenge you to become a slave in the name of Jesus Christ.

this week's prayer & application

1. **Jesus Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.... (repeat as many times as desired)
2. **Drawing:** God is often expressed to the world through art. Take a few moments to be creative. As you read your daily scripture and reflection, think about how you can artistically express what God reveals to you. Write a poem or draw a picture to describe what God is speaking to you.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2012

written by Grace Brown

today's scripture reference

John 1:1—8

The popular saying, "I've seen the light," represents a significant moment of change. It's a moment when we have learned something so profound, so life altering, it's as if blinders have been removed. "I've seen the light, I've been filing my documents all wrong." "I've seen the light, I never knew so many were affected by poverty in this area." No matter what it is, when something so profound has been revealed to us there is no way that thing can be undone. We are forever changed.

In this world we face a lot of darkness. We live in the midst of death, deception, and destruction, and it can cloud our minds. We think we have to keep our heads down and press on, living with depression and devastation. Work is just for the money. Time controls everything. Hope is for the weak. Faith is for the naïve and the only person you can count on is yourself. In this mindset we struggle to find our purpose.

We struggle to see how anything we do matters. So we continue to dredge through this life alone and in the dark, thinking this is just the way life is supposed to be. However, this is not the way we were designed to live. We weren't created to remain in the dark, to struggle alone. We were created to have the blinders removed. To be so intrinsically changed that there is no possible way we can go back to living in the dark. To be so radically transformed that our attitude and our actions reflect the undeniable light on the inside.

Even before humanity was plunged into darkness, God knew we would need a rescue plan. He knew that we would need to see the light. The light of all mankind, the light He sent to us, shines in the darkness. Jesus Christ was sent to be the light of the world, the life of the world. He came to restore our brokenness, to remove the darkness from our eyes and put the beauty of truth and resurrection in our hearts. God's truth, the light given to us through the birth of Jesus Christ, cannot be overcome or undone by the darkness in the world. It is too powerful, too bright. We have been overcome by darkness in this life. Without the life of Christ, we have nothing to hope for except death. But through His hope, love, and forgiveness we can take the blinders off. We can be radically changed. If we can accept His light then we triumph over the darkness.

this week's prayer & application

1. **St. Francis Prayer:** Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. God grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
2. **Serving Others:** The needs of others around us often go unnoticed because we are too preoccupied to see them. Intentionally look for a way to serve someone today.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2012

written Keven Wentworth

today's scripture reference

Luke 22:54—69

Do you realize that although there are winners at the Olympic games every four years, 90% of the best athletes in the world did not win a medal. Like them, many of us try, but never win. Work has not become what we had hoped. Things do not turn out as we were led to believe. Marriages begun in hope have ended in tears. Our children are a constant concern despite our hopes for them. Politicians disappoint us. Friendships are betrayed. Prayers do not seem to be answered. Even those things that we do manage to achieve often disappoint us. The sense of failure is never far from the surface. The Bible records many failures because it records life as it is. The Bible is about real people. Some of the biblical failures are today only remembered for their successes, but before there was success, there was failure. One such story is before us today in the story of Peter's fall.

Jesus has been betrayed by Judas and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. In verse 54 we read, "Having arrested Him, they led Him and brought Him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance." Jesus has been arrested and then hauled off to the home of the high Priest. Peter follows at a distance and ends up in the courtyard of the high Priest where he warms himself around a fire with some strangers.

To many of us Peter could be looked at as a failure if you were to leave Peter in this portion of scripture. Many people never get beyond their failure and live a constant life with a defeated spirit. God can use our failure to our benefit and for His glory as long as we learn from them over the course of our lives.

1. **Failure Is Not Fatal IF . . .** we recognize that everyone fails. (v. 60)
2. **Failure Is Not Fatal IF . . .** we remember that God's love and forgiveness is not dependent on success. (v. 61)
3. **Failure Is Not Fatal IF . . .** we learn and grow from our failures. (v. 62)
4. **Failure Is Not Fatal IF . . .** we put our failures behind us. (John 21:15-18)

Theodore Roosevelt, U.S. president: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they lie in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

this week's prayer & application

1. **Lord's Prayer:** Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. Amen.
2. **Encouraging Words:** Words are powerful! They have the ability to inspire greatness. Look for ways to use your words today to encourage someone.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2012

## IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER

today's scripture reference

Revelation 10, Psalm 82:1-8, Advent Candle—The Prophecy

In this weird little chapter, it's easy to get confused and caught up in the curious details so that we miss the main point. An angel comes down out of heaven with the Scroll that the Lamb had opened. And then the angel makes John eat the scroll. That's a weird image, but familiar to readers of the Old Testament. God makes Ezekiel eat a scroll of prophecy; the point is for Ezekiel to internalize the message, to make it a part of him.

In Revelation, we are John. As the Readers, we are called to eat the scroll, to hear the message of God's coming, the reality that the kingdoms of this world are becoming the Kingdom of our God. That is to become a part of us. And we have an obligation, a calling to live out the message of the Revelation, to bear witness to God as King with our lives and our words.

John says that God's scroll is sweet in his mouth, but bitter in his stomach. Isn't that what following God is like? When we're gathered to worship, or alone with God, time is sweet. We are encouraged and inspired. We can see so clearly what it means to follow God, how we need to make changes or stay a difficult course.

But then we return to the world. We dive back into the challenge of every day life. And that's when following God gets bitter. We have to make choices that alienate us from friends and family. The word sacrifice begins to be actually painful. In order to follow God, it costs us time, money, position, something. It's much harder to see the Gospel in the midst of all the business of every day life, to say nothing of the Christmas season.

questions for discussion

1. This year, how can you be a prophetic witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the midst of the holidays?
2. What might it look like for you to eat the scroll of God's Word, to live with God as your king?

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2012

w r i t t e n   b y   J R .   F o r a s t e r o s

t o d a y ' s   s c r i p t u r e   r e f e r e n c e

Mark 13::1—13

This passage is a bit from Mark's version of the Apocalypse. Jesus goes on to describe the same sorts of frightening imagery we find in the Revelation - the sun blacking out, false messiahs, the unmaking of creation. These are the bits of the Bible that scare everyone, and simultaneously send us scurrying for our charts and timelines. Why are we so fascinated by trying to figure out when the End is coming? Maybe it's a bit like riding a roller coaster or watching a horror movie.

We're clearly not the first generation to puzzle over this. Every generation since Jesus left has been convinced it was living in the End Times. Even Jesus' disciples asked him when it all was going to go down. But instead of giving them a date, Jesus told them to watch for signs. Signs like wars and false messiahs and persecutions. No wonder everyone's convinced they're at the End - that stuff has always been happening.

Instead of focusing on the When, we should focus on the Why. As in, Why did Jesus tell us to watch out? Why did he tell us to watch for signs? The last part of today's passage is helpful: our job is to bear witness to God's truth in the midst of all these "signs". In the midst of war, of pretenders to God's throne, of persecution, we are to continue to proclaim that God is our king.

Just as we saw yesterday in Revelation 10, our obligation in all of this isn't to figure out a date or enact the Signs of the Times. We are to be signs of the times ourselves, pointing people to the rescue that only comes from God. Whatever storms come in our lives, when we face persecution, at the times it feels like the sun isn't shining, we live as God's people. In the midst of a world at war, we seek to be peacemakers.

How can you be a signpost today, pointing people to the rescue they can find in God?

t h i s   w e e k ' s   p r a y e r   &   a p p l i c a t i o n

1. **Prayer Walk:** Pick a route to walk. Aim for at least 10 minutes. As you walk, ask God to reveal Himself to you. Prayerfully respond to the following questions: Where do I see God as I walk? What is God saying to me as I walk? In light of God's revelation to me, how am I going to respond?
2. **Silence:** Life is filled with noise. Take a few moments today to silence the noise and hear the still small voice that is speaking to you. To begin, sit or stand still, take a few deep breaths, and sit in silence inviting God to speak to you.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2012

w r i t t e n   b y   K e v e n   W e n t w o r t h

t o d a y ' s   s c r i p t u r e   r e f e r e n c e

John 5:30—47

Jesus has just claimed to be equal with God, to give eternal life (18), to be the source of life (26), and to be the judge of life (27). Jesus was claiming to be divine. Are there any other witnesses to support this almost unbelievable claim? There most certainly are. This section stresses testimony supportive of Jesus' claim. Jesus' authority was brought into question by His critics so He refers to collaborating witnesses. Jesus identifies six authenticating witnesses who buttress His claims.

**John the Baptist**—In verse 33-35 Jesus did not need to rely on human testimony for His own confirmation, but John's work and witness helped people because he pointed them in their darkness to the light of Christ.

**His Works**—In verse 36 refers to the witness of the works of Jesus. One of the ways the Father appointed for the world to recognize the Messiah or the Christ was His works. The "signs" were specific works which God had assigned for the Son to do.

**His Father**—From the works of the Father Jesus turns to the Father Himself in verse 37. This witness is vital not only to us, but to Jesus. Because He has the witness of God the Father He is not worried about the disbelief and opposition of man.

**The Scriptures**—In verse 38 we learn that the Father's witness comes from His word. Jesus does not deny that the Jews have the word of God, or even heard the word, they just do not have His word in their hearts. They had no continuous commitment to the totality of the message of God.

**Moses**—In verse 46-47 we see reference to their ideas and thoughts about Moses. He indicated that Moses, the very one they so respect as their earthly father, had spoken about Him. If they believed Moses they should have no problem believing the Son.

**You**—This is a great season to be a witness to someone about what works His Spirit has been doing in you. You are just as much a part of this chapter as the other five witnesses that have been mentioned.

Will you be a witness of His work in you? Will you be a witness of the Father working in you? Will you allow the scriptures to be lived out through your witness of them working in you? Christmas is a great time of proclamation of His life being lived out in you.

t h i s   w e e k ' s   p r a y e r   &   a p p l i c a t i o n

1. **Examine:** At what moment today was I most like Christ? At what moment today was I least like Christ? At what moment today was I most alive? At what moment today did I feel most drained? Where was God most active/least active in my day? God, grant that I may know You more fully and allow you to live through me today.
2. **Slowing:** Life is lived at such a fast pace. Take a few moments to reject the notion that your value in life is dependent on how much you produce. Intentionally seek ways today to slow life down. Drive the speed limit, wait in the longer lines, etc. As you slow yourself, allow God to speak to you as a being, not a doing.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2012

w r i t t e n   b y   W e n d e l l   S i m p s o n

t o d a y ' s   s c r i p t u r e   r e f e r e n c e

Isaiah 10:5—19

Open the paper and check out the news—no matter the day you can find high drama in world events. Much of it is heartbreaking. Whether it be the Middle East, Asia, Africa or the Americas, it is not hard to find stories that sadden us, that anger us, that make us cry out to God. We see nations rise and fall, we see rulers wield incredible power in the exercise their will, and we see innocent people caught up in these machinations both suffering and prospering unjustly. We cry out to God to take notice and do something. "This isn't right!!! Why are these things happening?!? Where is God in this mess of a world?!?"

At the heart of the Good News is the Lamb who is King and who will be King. What started at the resurrection—our first revelation of King Jesus—is moving forward to His second coming. All of history—everything we see—is moving toward the new creation and the full inauguration of Jesus the King. God is intimately involved in the movement of nations. God rules over all events and timing of all things as He brings forth His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

God's ways and purposes today are not always clear to us, just as they weren't in the time of Isaiah ben Amoz. Some 700 years before the time of Christ, God used the evil empire of Assyria to punish Israel. The people of Israel saw it as a great injustice as God's people suffered at the hands of a pagan nation. The people of Assyria saw it as their own power and might to impose their will and take whatever they wanted. Both were wrong. God was moving nations in order to call His Chosen to repentance and to prepare Jerusalem for the arrival of the King. Both Jerusalem and Assyria were guilty of idolatry, and both would be put right by the love and mercy of a long suffering God. It didn't work out like the people on both sides thought it would or should, but it worked out exactly as God intended so that the times would be fulfilled and the world would be ready for the servant King to break into His creation.

In Revelation 10, John eats the scroll symbolizing his internalizing of the Gospel and his mission to bring the Good News to the nations. We are to do the same. Nations move and we tremble, but take heart child of God! Jesus is most assuredly coming again to put all things right. Show others how a servant of the one true King lives. Eat the scroll and shine the light of the Good News for all to see.

t h i s   w e e k ' s   p r a y e r   &   a p p l i c a t i o n

1. **Jesus Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.... (repeat as many times as desired)
2. **Drawing:** God is often expressed to the world through art. Take a few moments to be creative. As you read your daily scripture and reflection, think about how you can artistically express what God reveals to you. Write a poem or draw a picture to describe what God is speaking to you.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2012

written by Virgil Vaduva

today's scripture reference

Ezekiel 34:1—10

There is a story in the Jewish community about Rabbi Gamaliel, Rabbi Eleazar, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiva once traveling, when they heard the great tumult of the city of Rome. The first three wept, but Rabbi Akiva laughed. When they asked, "Why do you laugh," he asked, "Why do you weep?" They said, "These heathen, who worship and burn incense to idols, live here in peace and security, while our Temple, the footstool at the Throne of God, is destroyed by fire. How should we not weep?" Rabbi Akiva replied, "That is why I laugh. If this is the lot of those who transgress His will, how much more glorious shall be the lot of those who perform His will?"

When Jesus was born, the Scriptures likened his birth with the coming of the presence of God with humanity. While in other religions the gods were living it up in another place or dimension, the God of the Bible became a living reality, flesh living with his creation. God with us is what Isaiah and Matthew called Jesus, Immanuel. The birth of Jesus revealed God as a deity in pursuit of his creation; a god in search of sinful man. Presented as the true shepherd of Israel, as a humble lamb but also as a King that brings about the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus resolved the tension and the disconnect between the earthly leaders of nations and kingdoms and the will of God for humanity. The shepherds, kings and leaders who have misused resources entrusted to them, the leaders who have misrepresented God and have themselves become god and the idols of many generations are contrasted with the humble King Jesus, a king of peace, not war, a king that does not demand wealth or power and does not use a coercive message to expand his Kingdom.

So often Christians ask how things would be in the Kingdom of Heaven. As we continue to anticipate and try to understand the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, we can think about how often Jesus started a parable with the words "The Kingdom of Heaven is like...."

Perhaps today Jesus would start one of his parables with "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a powerful nation, or an empire changing its ways... The Kingdom of Heaven is like Rome pledging its allegiance to peace, justice, compassion and love." Or perhaps "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a nation destroying its weapons, and rejecting consumerism." Advent gives us a real opportunity to become introspective about God dwelling within us—an opportunity to accept the present and living Kingdom of God. Let us no longer wonder how the world could be with Jesus at the helm. We do not have to wait for some sort of "end of the world" in order to experience a better reality. As Jesus dwells in us, as we become more like him every day, we can end the world we live in now and help resurrect it into a new reality, the reality of the Kingdom of God, where we become the shepherds God desires us to be.

this week's prayer & application

1. **St. Francis Prayer:** Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. God grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
2. **Serving Others:** The needs of others around us often go unnoticed because we are too preoccupied to see them. Intentionally look for a way to serve someone today.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2012

written by Aaron Horton

today's scripture reference

Zephaniah 3:14—20

Here we are just four days from the day that we celebrate when God responded out of love for His creation. The anticipation and longing is at it's highest fervor yet and growing. It's in the midst of this time that it is a good for us to stop, slow down, take a break, and reflect. We need to remember. Whether it's being reminded of what life was like in seasons past when we longed for hope. When we longed for change and something different. Maybe it's in the midst of pain we're experiencing now that we need to be reminded that there is hope coming. We all need to remember that the whole idea behind why God came to us like he did and lives among us is so that creation would have a restored relationship with Him.

At the top of the section in my Bible for today's scripture it says, "A Song of Joy." There were two main thoughts I have as I reflect on this text. The first is the picture that we can see of God singing over His people this song of joy. He's letting them know that He has forgiven them and that He is faithful and will raise them up again. That, "the Lord has taken away the judgments against you." That we can lift up our heads. The long night of despair and stumbling in the darkness is coming to an end. That no longer will we be taunted by the shame of sin. Not only will God free us, but He will restore our relationship with Him.

The second reflection has to do with the second half of the scripture. There's a reminder here of how much God cares about those who oppressed and who are marginalized. When our lives become filled with God's presence we become the avenues of God's healing into this world. When we read these words we can't just think they are only for us and our life situations. God wants those who have experienced restoration to be agents of His restoration in this world.

On this day just four days out from Christmas have you experienced restoration in your life? If you have, do you see the world around your life that needs to be restore?

this week's prayer & application

1. **Lord's Prayer:** Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. Amen.
2. **Encouraging Words:** Words are powerful! They have the ability to inspire greatness. Look for ways to use your words today to encourage someone.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2012

## JUDGE, JURY, AND . . . PRISONER?

today's scripture reference

Revelation 19, Psalm 115:1—13, Advent Candle—The Nations

Revelation 14 presents us with a surprising, powerful image: Jesus is the harvester, visiting judgment on the world. That part's not so surprising, but what comes next sure is: Jesus is also the harvested. Jesus is the one who was crushed, whose blood spilled out to cover the whole world.

God is both the harvester and the harvested. Jesus is the judge and the one who bore judgment.

Today's Psalm speaks of the power of God. God is a mighty king who towers above all the idols we've built for ourselves. The psalmist reminds us that everyone who puts their trust in idols, in false gods, will be as empty and dead as the idols.

That sounds like a harsh judgment. It is, in fact, a harsh judgment. But let us remember that God is not only our judge. God also became one of us - that's what we're celebrating in just a couple of days. God took on human form, came as a baby into our world. He grew up among a bunch of idolaters - people who thought they were serving God but who were just as easily distracted as we are.

Jesus knew that if we're left to ourselves, we end up dead and empty. So he came into our darkness to show us the light of life, the light of God. He took on himself the consequences of our idolatry so that we could be reunited with God.

Revelation pictures this truth beautifully with the wheat and grape harvest. Wheat and grapes - bread and wine. The Communion meal Jesus gave us reminds us of our rescue. Of how fundamentally we need Jesus' rescue - the same way we need to eat and drink.

The early Christians observed Communion every time they ate together. We don't do that so much anymore, but the Christmas season is full of feasting. Over the next week, you'll probably share a meal or two. In these moments, take an opportunity to pause as you eat a roll or munch on a Christmas cookie. Remember that Jesus' body was broken for you. As you enjoy some punch or eggnog, remember that Jesus' blood covers you.

As we celebrate the coming of the Christ child over the next few days, let's remember that he came to show us the way back to God!

questions for discussion

1. What opportunities have you had to feast this Advent season? What feasts are coming in the next week?
2. How can you use those feasts to remember and celebrate Jesus' sacrifice?

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, & 25 2012

## THE CHRIST CHILD HAS COME

today's scripture reference

Matthew 1:18—2:23, Psalm 111—The Christ Candle

Today, we celebrate that Jesus has come into the world. This year, we've been talking about Jesus' coming as "the End of the World as We Know It". December 21 came and went, and everyone realized that maybe we should've paid a little bit less attention to all the hype around an ancient calendar that didn't actually even predict the end of the world.

But then again, it's Christmas. And the all-powerful creator of the universe becoming a helpless baby born to an impoverished family living in the backwaters of an ancient empire is still noteworthy. God became human. The Lion of Judah became a lamb to be sacrificed. The king of the universe became a baby.

That changed everything. It signaled the End of a world where the strong rule and the weak suffer. The End of the poor going hungry and the rich consuming more than they need. The End of the abused suffering alone and the abusers going free. God has become a baby. All bets are off. Everything is different now.

Of course, it's not the End quite yet. We're still waiting for Jesus to return that last time, to finish what his Death and Resurrection accomplished the first time. Today, on this Christmas, we're between the First Coming in the Manger and the Second Coming in victory.

So today, we remember that Jesus came. And we anxiously await his coming. Some of us are celebrating with family. Some of us are alone. Some of us bear the pain of a loved one no longer with us. We live in the tension between those two times.

As we celebrate, let's look for all the places here on Earth that don't look like Heaven yet. Let's look for all those places here in our own souls that don't look like Jesus yet. And let's commit together to continuing to work for change. Let's continue to press towards Heaven, to join with Jesus in dragging the Future into our Present.

Because the truth is Jesus' coming changed everything. That birth in Bethlehem signaled the End of the World as We Know It. Everything's different now. And that's the best news anyone could ask for on a day like this.

questions for discussion

1. How has following Jesus changed your world? What has Jesus' coming signaled the End of for you?
2. How has your decision to follow Jesus been a new beginning?
3. What tensions are you experiencing in your life right now, as a result of choosing to follow Jesus?
4. How can you make yourself more available to the Holy Spirit this week?

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD *as we know it*  
ADVENT 2012

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