



## Devotions for the Season

### First Week of Advent: An Altogether Peace

Our Advent journey requires a road map, one that will orient us in the right direction and chart our progress. For this Advent, we turn to one of the most important sermons that John Wesley ever preached. It was on July 25, 1741 that John Wesley preached a sermon to his fellow Oxford University colleagues called "The Almost Christian," in which he described a person who, on the surface, had all the outward appearance of godliness. This person did all the basic things right: practiced decency toward others, went to church, abstained from bad behavior, and sincerely tried to do his or her best. But Wesley would say that as commendable as that person might be (and wouldn't it be great if everyone were at least that good!), such a person would only be *almost* a Christian.

Instead, Wesley called followers of Jesus to live an "altogether" life, one that first of all fully loves God; second to fully love others; and third to have a full trust and confidence in God, so that the faith is not just an exercise in intellectual conviction, but a holistic offering of mind, body, and spirit. An altogether Christian is one who unreservedly and wholeheartedly trusts God and puts that trust into action.

Each day of Advent we will take one of the questions John Wesley asked in his sermon "An Almost Christian" and use it to bring us from an almost faith into an altogether love of God. Each day sit around an advent wreath, this week light the first candle, and then share your highs and lows, read the scripture of the day, talk about the Wesley question, pray together, making sure to include your highs and lows, and at the end of the day say to each person in your home the blessing:

**May the Holy God of Peace open your heart that you may receive the gift of peace and experience an altogether Christmas this year.**

#### **Sunday, Dec. 1st, Day 1**

*Do I so far practice justice, mercy, and truth, as even the world requires?*

Matthew 7:11

"As you begin this Advent journey, pay attention to the ways that God shows up in your life. Today at every possible moment do justice, practice mercy, and reveal truth in the most basic, easy, and human way. It is in the small step that our souls find renewal, that our hearts prepare to receive the Christ Child, and that others can see a star in the east. Maybe this year Christ will be born in a Starbucks instead of a stable." Rev. Juan Huertas

#### **Monday, Dec. 2nd, Day 2**

*Do I even appear on the outside to be a Christian?*

Galatians 5:22-23

One of the hardest tasks of a Christian is leaving worship, or a service trip, or a mountaintop experience, or an Advent service. Whatever it may be, we have to leave these places where we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good with the intention to practice daily positioning ourselves before God. When we create a space to encounter God, we are better able to live out that love as we rise and go out." Rev. Sam McGlothlin

### **Tuesday, Dec. 3rd Day 3**

*Do I practice godly behavior?*

Philippians 2:6-8

"If your spiritual gallon bag were to be filled today, what would you place within it? Would you add items of comfort for those needing to experience God's presence? Would you focus on substance to free those around you so they know your actions match your intentions?" Rev. DJ del Rosario

### **Wednesday, Dec. 4th, Day 4**

*Do I refrain from doing evil things, as is described in the Bible?*

Exodus 21:33 and Isaiah 10:1-2

Wesley made "do no harm" the first of the General Rules of Methodist Societies. In the "Almost Christian," he says this is part of "having the form of godliness." By itself, it's not enough. But it's the place we all begin. During Advent, the beginning of the Christian year, it's appropriate for us to return to this as a foundation of the Christian life." Rev. Dave Barnhart

### **Thursday, Dec. 5th, Day 5**

*Do I do good with all my might?*

Ecclesiastes 9:10

"John Wesley's question, at first, can seem like another duty, another thing of quantity, to add to our Christmas to do list: do I do enough good in the world? That's a scary question. How much will ever really be enough, and enough for whom—for yourself? For the world? For God? But what if, instead about quantity, this question was about quality?" Rev. Monica Beacham

### **Friday, Dec. 6th, Day 6**

*Do I seriously follow God's commandments whenever I can?*

Deut. 28:1 and John 14:15

"It's a self-diagnostic question, and so we will have to be honest with ourselves in order to answer it properly. But we should know the answer because we know the difference between what it looks like to be careful and to be careless. We are familiar with the diligence of drivers when the police officer is near. And so we should be able to discern in ourselves the degree to which we are handling the law of God with the seriousness and care it deserves." Rev. David Kalas

### **Saturday, Dec. 7th, Day 7**

Hymn Reflection: "Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

So what are you waiting for this Advent season?

More importantly, how are you waiting for it?

See you in worship tomorrow and read over I Peter 1:3-5. Pastor Rich will be preaching all three of our services on Sunday with the message "An Altogether Hope."

#### **Grab Gather Grow**

Read over John 14:27, 16:33; 20:19-23. Then reflect on the following:

#1 What kind of peace do you long for?

#2 How might you begin to seek shalom within yourself? with another person? for the world?

#3 Which of Paul's practical instructions (Ephesians 4:3-6, 25-32) for peace-making are hardest for you? What can you do to begin practicing them regularly?