



## Devotions for the Season

### Third Week of Advent: An Altogether Love

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 three candles, 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:

**The holy God of love, loves you unconditionally.**

#### **Sunday, Dec. 15th, Day 15**

*Am I happy in God?*

Philippians 4:4

"This Christmas, ask yourself, 'Where am I looking for happiness?' Is your happiness dependent on the perfect Christmas dinner or family members all getting along? Is it rooted in a certain feeling that you hope to give or a certain gift you hope to receive? Is it based on details working out just the way you want? If it is, then Christmas is bound to disappoint."

Rev. Matt Miofsky

#### **Monday, Dec. 16th, Day 16**

*Is God my glory, my delight, and my source of joy?*

Romans 12:12

"Watch for joy along the way to Christmas and along the journey from being "almost" to "altogether" Christian. It may come when you least expect it. It's the joy that rejoices in the hope of what is yet to come." Rev. James A. Harnish

### Wednesday, Dec. 18th, Day 18

*Do I love my neighbor as myself?*

Leviticus 19:18

This Advent, we have an opportunity to experience an altogether hope. I believe such a hope occurs when we hold out hope not only for ourselves, but for our neighbors as well.

Wesley's question reminds us that loving our neighbor is at the foundation of the Christian life. May we commit ourselves to loving others and experiencing hope that is grounded in that love.

Rev. Ingrid McInty

### Thursday, Dec. 19th, Day 19

*Do I love everyone, even my enemies, even the enemies of God, as my own soul?*

John 13:34-35

"Recently, I spoke with one of the mature saints in our church who was raised in a very proper church where everyone was just like him. Our diverse congregation and ministries have stretched him. He told me with tears in his eyes, 'If you had told me that I'd know and love drug addicts, prostitutes, and people with all kinds of tattoos, I'd have told you that you were crazy. But I do.' My friend is learning Jesus' way of loving everyone." Rev. Jorge Acevedo

### Friday, Dec. 20th, Day 20

*Do I Love others as Christ loved me?*

Matthew 19:19

May you spend hushed moments with the One who made you today, receiving the love God longs to give you. Then may you love one person extravagantly well today!

Rev. Jenny Smith

### Saturday, Dec. 21st, Day 21

HYMN REFLECTION

"And God Himself is born!" (From the Wesley Hymn "Glory Be to God on High")

"Through the inspired writing of Charles Wesley, we find ourselves transported into the very pages and events of the Scriptures. Wesley's Nativity Hymn, 'Glory Be to God on High,' ushers us into one of Scripture's most sacred events on a quiet, dark night in Bethlehem ... a tiny miracle has joined the human race; God himself is born!" Jennifer Wilder Morgan

See you in worship tomorrow, read over Psalm 30:1-5, 11-12. Pastor Rich will be preaching at BUMC at 9am and North UMC at 10:30am. Pastor Henry will be preaching at our encounter and 11:30am service. Their message: "An Altogether Joy." Don't forget your change for our Change4Change Offering to support Good Samaritan Fund.

#### Grab Gather Grow

Read over Luke 1:26-45 then discuss the following:

1. How are you being asked to fall in love with God again and again in this season of your life?
2. How do you present an "almost self" to the world? What would change if you presented an "altogether self" to the world? to our church community? to God?
3. In an Advent worship experience, what would help you feel fully embraced by God's altogether love?
4. What barriers in your faith journey have you encountered that seem to keep you at arm's length from fully embracing God's love?