



Devotions for the Season

Second Week of Advent: An Altogether Hope

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 two 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 Hope grant you courage, both to notice and to respond
when hope is needed!**

Sunday, Dec. 8th, Day 8

Do I do everything with a sincere plan and desire to please God in every way?

Galatians 5:22-23

"It is easy to get off track in the days of Advent ... John Wesley's question guides us on a path that makes Advent a sacred time of year and brings us to a centered space where we can uniquely experience the joy of the Lord in the days before Christmas... It's time to make your plan to please God every day during Advent." Rev. Tom Berlin
(today, at 2pm BUMC's Christmas Concert, in the Sanctuary, join us)

Monday, Dec. 9th, Day 9

Am I, at the very least, observing the qualities of an "almost" Christian?

Jeremiah 29:11

"Minimum effort exerted, maximum grace expected. And since we know that our God is a God of abundant grace, some of us Christians have adopted this mind-set as we journey together in faith ... Instead, can we strive for wholehearted faith and love of God, with joy that we get to be a part of God's kingdom-building work!" Rev. Robin C. Wilson

Tuesday, Dec. 10th, Day 10

Am I willing to go a step further and be an "altogether" Christian?

James 2:26 and 5:7-8

"Are you ready for the Christmas rush?... We often think of patience as a passive inaction. James' words patience is not "just let go and let God," but a call to active expectation of God's new thing about to burst forth! ... I will take a patient step toward an altogether, God-filled Christmas. Rev. Todd Salmi

Wednesday, Dec. 11th, Day 11

Is the love of God shed abroad in my heart?

Ephesians 3:20 and John 14:12

"Name one thing that you did today that you didn't think was possible," asked a teacher to her class. Has anybody asked you this question before? How did you answer? The Apostle Paul encouraged the earliest church to accomplish the impossible (Ephesians 3:20) ... Jesus encouraged his disciples to do the same (John 14:12) ... Christ's followers should strive to be people who do things that are considered beyond the realm of possibility (even at Christmas)." Rev. Scott Chrostek

Thursday, Dec. 12th, Day 12

Can I cry out, "My god, and my All"?

Colossians 3:12-15

"Advent gives us an opportunity to ask that question of ourselves and to commit to being a wholehearted follower of Christ. When we begin to do this, our lives change... As we approach Christmas, my hope for you is that you both acknowledge and grow deeply in your need for God and each and every day." Rev. Justin Coleman

Friday, Dec. 13th, Day 13

Do I desire nothing but God?

Ephesians 1:4-5

"John Wesley's question serves as our spiritual mirror, reflecting the hard truths of our spiritual conditions. As I read Wesley's sermon "The Almost Christian," this question convicts me: Is God my daily desire? Hmm...'Do I desire nothing but God?' May this Christmas the answer be "Yes!" Thanks to be to God, yes!" Rev. David Dorn.

Saturday, Dec. 14th, Day 14

HYMN REFLECTION Peace upon earth be restored

"All Glory to God in the Sky"

"During this Advent season, I pray that we lay down our swords, both our external weapons of words and deeds that hurt others and our internal weapons of resentments, anger, hatred, and prejudices. And then I pray that we trust God. Surely this is the path to peace for all the Earth." Susan Fuquary

See you in worship tomorrow, read over Luke 1:26-45. Pastor Rich will be preaching all three services and his message for the day, "An Altogether Love". Don't forget your change for our Change4Change Offering to support Heifer Project International.

Grab Gather Grow

Read over I Peter 1:3-5 then discuss the following:

1. Think about a situation in your life that has seemed hopeless. In what ways did you make your way through?
2. What strange places are you willing to go for hope to be reborn?
3. In what ways can you embody hope for those who have been marginalized within your friends and family? within our church or social groups? within the world?