



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Advent Devotions

2020

NOVEMBER 29 - DECEMBER 5



Unidentified mural artist. Virgin of Guadalupe, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. Original source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/msdonnalee/16764672346> - Donna Cleveland.

November 29, 2020

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus....God is faithful: by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:4, 9 NRSV).

Paul writes these words to a congregation in Corinth that he loves but from which he is presently at a physical distance. He expresses overflowing thanks for the Corinthian congregation and for God's faithful grace that has created their fellowship of believers. Paul's words cause me to take note of two "thanks-giving" Sundays: the day of my writing and the day of your reading. I am writing this meditation on All Saints Day Sunday, and you will be receiving it on the Sunday that concludes Thanksgiving weekend on the U.S. calendar. I give thanks to God for the congregation of Nassau, as we continue physically distant from one another, and for the communion of the saints who have gone on to glory before us. Conversations in my Psalms small group have cycled between lamentation over our physical distance and deep thanksgiving for God's steadfast love and faithfulness and for the abiding joy of the fellowship we experience in God's son, Jesus Christ.

Consider taking a few moments of quiet now to name in your heart and give thanks for those on earth and in heaven whose fellowship with you in Jesus Christ supports and strengthens your walk with God.

Ever-loving and nurturing God, thank you for the particular body of believers that is Nassau Church. May we continue to be a place of welcome, comfort, challenge, and strength. Give us courage and compassion, and keep each of us always in relationship with you and with one another. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who binds us together and shows us the way, Amen.

Katharine Sakenfeld

Kathie retired from Princeton Seminary in 2013 after teaching Old Testament there for 43 years. An ordained PCUSA clergywoman, she has participated in the life of Nassau Church since 1970. In this time of physical distancing she is grateful for Nassau's many Zoom opportunities to spend time virtually in the fellowship of Christ's followers.

November 30, 2020

Micah 4:1-5

***In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised up above the hills (Micah 4:1 NRSV).***

What does it mean for the house of God to be the highest in the land? Does it mean dominance and might? Does it mean inspiration and invitation?

As Christians in the United States, a nation of power and might, it is easy for us to become seduced into thinking that God intends for us to be at the top of the heap—to be at the center of power and influence in our nation, and to dictate our will on other nations.

Micah, an eighth-century Judean prophet, offers a prophecy of a different kind of power and might, one that brings about a world where

“nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

A world where people

“shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:3b–4).

Is Micah speaking metaphorically? Is it a naïve fantasy to believe that there will come a day when we can resolve our disputes as a nation and between nations without violence and domination? Is it naïve or futile to work toward a world where people do not live in fear? A country where our racial strife and political discord can be healed?

I believe, as Christians, that this is exactly the kind of world God invites us to become a part of. A world, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, in which we “fear not” and “hate not” as we devote our lives to embodying God’s beloved community in the world.

God of power and might, who entered our world as a helpless infant born into a peasant family, instill in us the strength, courage, and enduring hope to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. Amen.

Jonathan C. Shenk

Jonathan, a Presbyterian minister, is the owner of Greenleaf Painters, a local painting company. In addition to his business involvement, he is a spiritual director and an advocate for transforming the criminal justice system. He lives in Princeton Junction with his wife, Cynthia Yoder, an author. They are avid fans of their son, Gabriel’s indie rock band, Sonoa.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 1, 2020

PSALMS 7-9

***The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
And those who know your name put their trust in you,
for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you (Psalm
9:9–10 NRSV).***

Psalm 9 provided me comfort. On display is man's mean-spirited, loud and abrasive clanging, doing harm to the earth and to others. Choosing racism and hatred over unity and choosing the economy over the life and death of others, America disappoints me. We have voted and do not yet know who will lead our nation out of this challenging time. Yet, Psalm 9 assures me that I trust in a God who is powerful and just, a God who does not forget the oppressed, nor the oppressor. I just need to study his Word, to know him, to pray not for my wishes, but that his will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. There is great comfort in that knowledge and small assignment. To know God's character is *powerful* and *just*, to spend time with his Word, that restores my soul. I enjoy Saturday mornings with my Witherspoon and Nassau family studying the Bible. We read scripture, share our thoughts, and listen to hear bits of how we are coping with the pandemic, with the election, with our parents, our children. We always find something to laugh about and we end by praising God. So, I lift up Psalm 9. I hope you will find comfort in knowing we worship a loving God who is *powerful* and *just* and who will be with us *forever*. I leave you with Jason Nelson's "Forever" – listen on YouTube: https://youtu.be/FnVFe_J2zfl

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for having your hand in our hand forever and ever. We don't have to worry about the evil around us or the nations that disappoint. Judgement—that is your job. Our job is to love the Lord and to be his child in faith forever. Amen.

Denyse Leslie

Denyse has been a Witherspoon Church member since 2007. She has served as clerk and is currently a member of Session, secretary of Witherspoon Presbyterian Women, and a founding member of the Witherspoon/Nassau Joint Mission Committee. This collaboration is expanding the reach of Presbyterian ministry and building, and deepening relationships Denyse has enjoyed with Nassau sisters and brothers in Christ. Joint service enlarges the heart of a beloved community.

December 2, 2020

Psalms 10–12

Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1 NIV).

After I read this verse, I knew immediately this was perfect for the times we are going through right now. I mean, we are stuck in the middle of a pandemic, social injustice is all around us, and don't forget about climate change. Those were just three examples. Sometimes I wonder, "Doesn't God love us? If God really loved us, why would there be so much pain, hurt and suffering in the world?" I can relate to David (the psalmist) right now. I feel so disappointed and upset when I have to see my teachers and friends through a screen. I feel like God has left.

David comes to learn that God is always there, and we can learn this too. As children of God, we need to believe this truth. God is always there. When we believe, we receive. Our strong, powerful, life-changing, planet-moving God wants us to call, ask and believe that he is our protection; he is our solution; he makes a way when there is no way.

When you are feeling upset, disappointed or sad about your life, believe that God is always there for you. God is not hiding in your life. God is all around us. God is answering your prayers.

Dear God, thank you for always being there even when we don't believe. God, keep us praying and believing in you. Show us that you are present in our lives. In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.

Rachel Berliner

Rachel is a 7th grader at Grover Middle School. She enjoys many activities with the church. Some of her favorites include fellowship, the Christmas pageant, Loaves and Fishes, and chancel drama. She feels right at home at NPC!

December 3, 2020

Psalms 11–13

***How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation (Psalm 13:1, 2, 5 NIV).***

How long, O God? How long? During the past ten months millions of people asked this question, more times than we should ask in a lifetime. How long, O God? Let me ask very softly how many times we prayed: “Let it be your will, O God. I trust in you; I know you love me and you keep your promises.”

When I am sad, impatient or discouraged I keep saying over and over:

“I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.
I believe in love even when I cannot feel it.
I believe in God even when he is silent.”

Christmas is coming and the Angel is talking: “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news!” God sent Jesus, the Savior, to rescue us, to recover us, to reconnect us. Jesus encouraged people two thousand years ago and he is still encouraging now. Jesus is offering peace, joy and salvation. How long? Forever! It’s a reason to celebrate!

Hopefully this year getting ready for Christmas will be less stressful, more peaceful and focused on trust, grace, peace and wisdom.

Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for teaching us to slow down to see more. Please help us to understand that our timing is not the same as yours, but your timing is perfect. Bless us with a renewed faith and refreshed spirit in this Advent. In Jesus name, Amen.

Agnes Olah

Agnes, a retired bank executive, lives in Somerset and has been part of the Nassau Church community since 2012. Agnes enjoys assisting with children’s activities at Nassau and at Trenton. She is also leading the greeting cards and handcrafts projects that help fund Nassau’s mission partners.

December 4, 2020

Jeremiah 1:4–10

Now the word of the LORD came to {Jeremiah} saying.., “I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Ah, LORD GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy” (Jeremiah 1:4–6 NRSV).

I am only a boy...or a girl...or I don't have a seminary education...or I can't speak in public...or I don't have the time...only...only...only.

I've been thinking a lot these past few months about the concept of *call*. Many years ago, I experienced a *call* to ministry, and spent thirty-eight very fulfilling years as the pastor of several congregations. So when I read these words telling of Jeremiah's call, it really hit home.

But my understanding of *call* has expanded greatly over the years. God's call is not just to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. God is calling all of us to say “yes” to God; to discern what God is calling each one of us, with our particular set of skills and interests, to be and to do in this dark winter of 2020, with a pandemic, racism and division abroad in the land.

We can respond with “I am only...” (you can fill in the blanks) or we can say “Here am I. Send me.”

We will soon be celebrating the birth of “the light of the world.” The best gift we can give is to make sure that our light shines a little brighter in the midst of darkness.

Gracious God, who comes to us afresh each day through our Savior Jesus Christ. Help us to discern, today and every day, who you are calling us to be and what you are calling us to do. And then give us the strength to respond. In Jesus name, Amen.

David Mulford

David Mulford is a Presbyterian minister, retired. For the past fourteen years, he and his wife Nancy have been nurtured and challenged by Nassau Church. During this pandemic year, they are especially grateful for the care they have received as residents of Stonebridge at Montgomery.

December 5, 2020

Mark 11:27–33

***So they answered and said to Jesus, “We do not know.”
And Jesus answered and said to them, “Neither will I tell you by
what authority I do these things” (Matthew 11:33 NKJV).***

On Wednesday, 5 December, 1792, by a unanimous Electoral College vote, George Washington was elected to his second term as President of the United States. In 2020 I think about George Washington, our *first* President, who charted the path for our country and its ideals. He carefully cultivated his image, which, at its heart, was almost god-like. He was not God on Earth, but Washington recognized his national appeal. He had charisma, integrity, honor, and the undisputed respect of the people. After meticulous deliberation, once Washington made a decision, he abided by that decision. Not all of Washington’s cabinet members aligned with his opinions on issues, but, despite this divergence, they, nevertheless, had faith in Washington’s leadership. He was not a dictator or oligarch; his authority was sacrosanct because he was *that* respected and revered...as a leader, general, President of our country, as a man of faith, and *as a person*.

Within these particular verses from Mark, Jesus indicated he should not be challenged, but it was more than this. Those with whom Jesus was speaking were intimidated and too distrusting in their *answer* to have faith in Jesus’s question about John’s baptism. While faith is important in a leader, it is even more important in Jesus and in God. Faith is intangible, ingrained, and, indeed, not insisting we remind with a host of Post-it® Notes. Faith in leaders is paramount to bring us together as a country. Faith in God is paramount to bring us together as a church.

Dear God, please help us remember that we must have faith. We must have faith in our family, friends, and leaders. But, overarchingly, we must have faith in the teachings of Jesus and in you who makes all things possible. With grace and faith, Amen.

Cynthia Lynn Miller

Cynthia grew up in Northbrook, Illinois (her parents live in Lake Bluff, Illinois, and her sister and her family live in Carmel, Indiana.). She currently resides in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and works in international market research. Cynthia’s great loves are history, reading, the study of foreign languages, travel, and writing. She enjoys exploring the fascinating details of history to tell stories of the past and enlighten readers about people and places of interesting times.