



NASSAU PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Advent Devotions

2020

DECEMBER 13-DECEMBER 19



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DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 13, 2020

John 1:6–8, 19–28

Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said (John 1:22–23 NRSV).

The investigative committee appointed by the ruling elders had arrived, clipboard in hand. John had been expecting them. The crowds had been getting bigger. More and more people were making the trek out-of-town to hear what he had to say. People were repenting. Baptisms were up.

Question #1: Are you The Messiah? Answer: *No.*

Question #2: Are you Elijah? Answer: *No.*

Question #3: Are you the prophet? Answer: *No.*

Question #4: Well then, *exactly* who are you? Answer: *I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord!’*

Question #5: Why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah nor Elijah nor the prophet? Answer: *I baptize with water. The one who is coming after me, I am not worthy to untie his sandal.*

From the time he had leaped with joy in his mother’s womb, John had sensed the coming of the Messiah. John knew who he was and what role he was to play. John’s job was to be the path-clearer, the warm-up act for the one-greater-than-he. John’s job was to get hearts ready and consciences clean in order to receive the Anointed One. John was not bashful about doing his job. He spoke truth to power when he confronted Herod about his relationship with Herodias. It cost him his head — literally.

John understood. It was his job to get us ready for the one who is bringing us good news, the one who is going to bind up our broken hearts, the one who will comfort us in our mourning, the one who will set us free.

Dear Lord, help me to prepare my heart to receive the Messiah anew. Let me hear clearly what you are asking me to do. Give me the strength and the courage to play the part that you have assigned me: to point to the one greater than I. Amen.

Harriet Black

Harriet has been a member of Nassau Church for 20 years. She has served as a Sunday School teacher, deacon, and member of the Emergency Response Team. For the greater part of her career as a nurse, Harriet worked with persons who have diabetes, helping them to improve their self-management skills. Harriet is married to Clifton, and they are the parents of Caroline, NPC Confirmation Class of 2005.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 14, 2020

Ephesians 6:10–17

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:10–11).

What are the devil's schemes? My worst nightmare would be that, under distress, my **hope** is to be dashed, sucked dry by anxiety, fear and despair. But, how is **hope** possible in the face of dire realities? How could we hold **hope** when there's still so much hunger, violence and injustice in the world?

Dr. Edith Eger, a 92-year-old holocaust survivor, suggests us not to confuse hope with idealism. Idealism is when you expect that everything in life is to be fair or good or easy. To expect that is an illusion, a denial of realities. Hope is not paint we use to cover our suffering. Hope is not a distraction from darkness, but a confrontation *with* darkness.

But, how can I confront darkness with my bare hands? No, I can't. Put on the full armor of God, then I can move on.

Dear Lord, help us to be strong and courageous. When we are engulfed by the darkness, remind us to put on God's full armor, so that we can charge on, with faith, hope and love. Amen.

Benjamin Yeh

Benjamin and his wife Emily have been members of Nassau Church since 2014, when they moved from Taiwan to Princeton. He is currently an elder and serves on the HR Committee. Emily serves on the Children and Family Ministries Committee. They have two children, Jonathan and Symphony.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 15, 2020

Psalms 48–50

***When the kings joined forces,
When they advanced together (Psalm 48:4 NIV).***

After reading this verse, I immediately thought about the election. This is the first election I am really aware of, and a lot is riding on it, especially the solution to COVID-19. It confuses me so much why the parties can't work together. I feel that the verse is telling us exactly what we need to know; if we all work together we can end the pandemic and advance on to other journeys of our lives. If all kings (us) can work together no matter the differences we have, we can move on in our lives.

How long will it be until we don't hear about thousands of new COVID cases and deaths every day? How much longer will it be people won't have to risk their lives helping COVID patients? How long will it be until everyone in the country has a job? These are all things we can accomplish if we just work together. By working together we can advance on to accomplish many things, and then we will look back on the pandemic, and see how we responded in faith together, not fear together. If we can't work together, we might be stuck in pandemic-life forever. That is why what this verse is telling us is so important. If we can all join together, we can advance together.

Dear God, thank you for helping us as we try to work together to figure out the solution to this pandemic. I pray that you guide us in the right direction and lead us to a perfect solution for all. Amen.

Sarah Berliner

Sarah is a sixth grader at Grover Middle School. She lives with her parents Karen and Jeff and her sister Rachel. Sarah actively participates in church events, including chancel drama, the Christmas pageant, and singing in choir.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 16, 2020

Psalms 51–54

***O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering,
you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:15–17 NRSV).***

Often when I hear or read the Psalms, I default to a historical contextualization and as a result they feel distant to me. They're songs of battles against ancient enemies, prayers of supplication to an impersonal God. I don't know who Doeg the Edomite (Psalm 52) is, so what does this have to do with me?

Looking at Psalms 51–54, the psalmist takes us on a wild ride. In just four prayers the author 1) begs for pardon, 2) curses the deceitful, 3) denounces the godless, and 4) prays for victory.

But if I read Psalms 51–54 another way—not as four separate prayers, but as one big continuous one—then the sins of Psalms 52 and 53 could be my own. The dialogue becomes monologue and it's like I'm challenging my own deceitfulness and godlessness. (Ask yourself: “When have I been boastful? Or treacherous? When have I plotted someone else's physical or emotional destruction?”)

Then the cleansing pardon of Psalm 51 can become the victory of Psalm 54...but only **if** I take steps to recognize the lies I tell to myself, to others, to God, and move to correct myself; only if I recognize the harm my actions have done to others, and make good; only if I offer God my broken spirit, with a contrite heart.

God, help us fix our broken spirits, so we might declare your praise through good works. Amen.

Tim Flood

Tim and his wife, Kate Torrey, have been part of the Nassau community since moving to the area in early 2018. They're excitedly preparing their home and hearts for the arrival of a new member, expected next January. Tim is the son of a Catholic and a Lutheran, and Presbyterianism is still a little new to him – he finds the organ music comforting and he's glad to not have to kneel, but he often mixes up debts and trespasses.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 17, 2020

Hebrews 1:1–4

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs (Hebrews 1:1–4 NRSV).

According to my study Bible, the Letter to the Hebrews is not so much a letter, but a sermon. So, let's go back and read those opening verses again aloud.

The editors of my Bible tell me that these verses abound with elaborate rhetorical devices that animate this text, which celebrates the Christian confession that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. To hear the text in all of its artistic glory would no doubt be arresting. The music of the preacher's wording helps our language match the extraordinary truth of his confession. Unfortunately, we lose the exquisite poetic sound effects in translation. Even so, the content of the preacher's confession is no less stunning without its gilding.

We read and proclaim confessions of our faith so often that we likely have the creeds and passages of scripture memorized. They have become second nature, maybe even mundane. It is easy to read these opening lines of Hebrews hastily—we've certainly heard this news before. But this confession is meant to stop us in our tracks, to ignite celebration in our hearts, to astound us with the truth of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ, "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being," joined our human race and offers us direct access to God.

Read these verses aloud again. And in light of Advent, let your mind's eye imagine the sky illuminated by the star, hear angels' song accompanying each verse, and be humbled by the smell of frankincense and myrrh wafting forth from the foot of the manger.

Lord of All Creation, be in our hearts as we hear and read and confess the good news of who you are and how you love us. May words that proclaim your Gospel never become ordinary in our hearts and minds. Stop us in our tracks, O Lord, each time we encounter your Word lived and proclaimed, that we might never miss an opportunity to celebrate your goodness and experience your presence. Amen.

Jade Hage

Jade has attended Nassau Church for four years and a member for two years. Hailing from Monterey, California, Jade moved to Princeton to teach high school English. Jade is also a student at Princeton Seminary where she is in her first year as an MDiv student. When we gather in person, you can find her in the choir loft singing with the soprano section on Sunday mornings.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 18, 2020

2 Samuel 6:12–19

As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart (2 Samuel 6:16 NRSV).

I write this the day before our national election. So many questions arise from these passages given the vitriol of this campaign and the pandemic—I cannot help but wonder, will I respond like Michal if my candidate loses?

In my seventy-one years of life, have I ever had so many questions swirling and colliding in my thoughts, my feelings and emotions, and my wishes and prayers? Is one side right and the other side wrong? Yes, I am right-handed, but doesn't my left hand serve a purpose as well. Are jealousy, spitefulness, and hatred stronger than understanding, compassion, and love? Will women and men ever be seen as equals in our country and throughout the world? Will there come a time when the color of a person's skin becomes meaningless, and will a one-year old child pick the black doll as often as the white doll when given a choice? Someday, will there come again a time when couples like my mother (a Republican) and my father (a Democrat) will be willing to marry? Will there be a time when we accept all human beings regardless of the individual's sex, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or physical appearance?

These passages speak to me of the power of being on the “right” side, and I am fearful that I am becoming like Michal, and unable to see “the other side's” point of view. Did the tears that filled my eyes when I learned my first grandchild had arrived into this world yesterday express sheer joy or trepidation?

Dear Jesus, help me to accept all people as your beloved creations. Encourage me to “reach across the aisle” and seek a more thorough understanding of the needs, feelings, and beliefs of others. Please help me to support, guide and love all of your children, especially little two-day-old Piper, who has embraced my heart. Amen.

Penn Bowditch

Penn grew up in Connecticut, and retired after a 49-year career in education on Friday, November 13th (tells you something about both education and his career). He has three thirty-something aged children, an amazing wife of almost 45 years, and plays a form of golf that few golfers would recognize or try to emulate. He was blessed with his first grandchild on October 30th.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL ❖ ADVENT 2020

December 19, 2020

Psalms 61–63

***For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken (Psalm 62:4–6 NRSV).***

“For God alone my soul waits in silence,” says the psalmist. Frankly, that doesn’t sound very festive! Aren’t we supposed to make a joyful noise to the Lord? Isn’t Christmas supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year? Waiting in silence sounds more like a spiritual “time out” just when the celebration should be gearing up.

And yet... maybe we all need a little silence. Christmas can be noisy and exhausting, replete with decorations, gift wrapping and meal preparation, with long lines at the post office and at Target. All the jangling, secular holiday trappings distract us. And although this year is unusual, planning the children’s pageant, Christmas concert and all the church services can also devolve into “to do” lists.

Silence and stillness may be just what we need as we prepare to renew our sense of wonder and thanksgiving at Christ’s birth. As we count down the final days of Advent, God calls us to pause, to rest, and to listen for God speaking. As the prophet Elijah learned, sometimes God speaks most powerfully not through wind, earthquakes or fire, but through “the sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12). How will you find serenity and silence in these final days as Christmas approaches? How will you make space to hear God’s voice?

God of our salvation, in this busy season, still our hearts. Grant us quiet so that we can truly anticipate and appreciate the meaning of Christ’s birth. Amen.

Michele Minter

Michele is a member of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, a Princeton University staff member, and a passionate ballroom dancer. She has two adult children and lives with her husband Jeff in Plainsboro, NJ.