

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

December 13, 2020
Third Sunday of Advent, Year B

The readings this week:

- Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 ◦ Psalm 126
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 ◦ John 1:6-8, 19-28

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Advent is a tradition in the church of taking time in the weeks before Christmas to set our hearts on Jesus and anticipate His coming. May this short devotional will guide us as we reconnect with joy and take a few moments of respite from weariness. Let us pause and rest in hope.

And the Soul Felt It's Worth

Have you ever really listened to the words of the famous Christmas Song, "O Holy Night?" Not just listened while doing other things, but really listened and prayed about the words? This advent, the song keeps popping up all over for me and I've been forced to really think about it, and have been transformed by the words, especially the verse I posted above.

One of my favorite authors and spiritual guides is Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ, founder and CEO of Homebody Industries – an organization which gives jobs and other services to those who have been incarcerated and/or in gangs. Fr. Greg's entire ministry has been dedicated to living and working with those who our society deems dangerous and unworthy. His life's work has been dedicated to helping souls "feel their worth."

But what does it mean for a soul to feel its worth? And how can we participate in this process?

"We are all meant to be
mothers of God, for God is
always needing to be born."

One of my favorite quotes is attributed to Mister Eckhart, a 16th century German theologian and mystic. In typical mystical fashion, he is credited with saying, "We are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born." I think helping other souls to feel their worth is the very way we all birth God into the world each and every day. It is through our actions, through helping other people feel worthy, embraced, and loved, that we can each make the divine present.

And so, what if this advent season, we focused more on listening to and praying with the words of "O Holy Night," than buying presents or going to parties? How

would our world be transformed if the gift we gave our loved ones, and even our not-so-loved ones, was the gift of love and worthiness? What if we all focused on helping others to see themselves the way God sees them, as beloved treasures?

In graduate school, a professor of mine once said that when people were in the presence of Jesus, they felt transformed. They felt saved. They felt redeemed. They felt loved. And that is why lyrics of "O Holy Night" should ring so true; because when Jesus came, people finally knew what it felt like to be loved. Into of a world filled with sin and error, Jesus brought love, and through that love, souls finally felt their worth.



My hope for each of you this advent season and beyond is not only that you feel the worth of your own soul, but that you help others do the same. You are so worthy; you are so loved; you are so beautiful. May you always feel worthy, blessed, and loved and may your presence help others to feel the same. Amen and Merry Christmas.

~ Sarah Fontaine-Lipke. [Stonehill Blogs](#)

May you always feel worthy,
blessed, and loved and may
your presence help others to
feel the same.

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11](#)

How has some form of breaking led to more effectiveness in your life? What is an example of someone bringing the good news to life for you? What was Jesus communicating when He claimed that Isaiah 61 “is fulfilled in your hearing?” In what ways does Christ’s life and ministry explain and expand on this passage? Why is it important that we both speak about the good news and bring it to life? Are we called to live the same kind of life and do the same kinds of things Jesus did? Why or why not? How can Jesus practically help the poor? The brokenhearted? The captives? The mourners? How will God’s people respond in the end? What is one way you can bring the good news of Jesus to life this week?

[Riverside Covenant](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 126](#)

This Psalm demonstrates an assurance of hope for Israel in present difficulties in past experiences of restoration and rejoicing. How can this pattern inform our own faith and experiences? What are our sources of joy, even in the midst of trying circumstances? This reading is assigned for the 3rd Sunday of Advent – that Sunday typically focused around joy (thus sometimes referred to as “Gaudete Sunday”). How does the joy spoken of in the Psalm resonate with your own experience of or longing for joy during this Advent season? Psalm 126 makes no effort to deny or cover up the weeping of its people and the trying times they have experienced of are experiencing. Such honesty is often rare during the Christmas season, when what has sometimes been described as “an oppressive happiness” is the dominant cultural mood of the season. How is the joy of which the Psalmist speaks similar to or different from this “Christmas mood?” Does the Psalm deliver any “good news, of great joy” even to those of us who struggle especially during this season? [Bridgewater Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

O Christ, you lived as an ordinary man not in style but simply, yet still you caused uproar, and questions everywhere; you drew the expectations of hungry crowds, and brought buried conflicts to the light.

May we, who are sometimes swayed by the crowd’s approval, and who often avoid conflict for fear of its cost to us, hold fast to the gospel of peace and justice and follow faithfully in your way of compassion and solidarity with those who are poor and excluded, wherever it may lead us. Amen.

~ [Monthly Prayers/Weekly Worship](#)

Conversion: turning from sin, turning toward Light. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (John 1:6-9) In iconography John is portrayed sometimes with wings, for he is a messenger, however disheveled and disrespectful-looking. He testifies to the Light, the One who is coming, the One Christians prepare for in continual conversion. In Advent the church emphasizes these ways of continual change: Repentance. Conversion of life. Self-examination. Awakening. Deepening.

John was pure, living on "locusts and wild honey" that is, only on what God provided him in the desert. But the people who carry the tradition of proclaiming this Advent message, may not be so perfect. Even so, the message itself is pure, holy, and a guideline for preparing for the Light by deepening the core of faith at the heart of my heart. And, however imperfect I may be, I am called to testify authentically to the Light I find in that deep core of my being.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

3rd Reading: [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24](#)

What is one area in your life today where you are trying to figure out God’s will? This week, how have the circumstances of your life prevented you from rejoicing/praying/giving thanks? Are joy and sorrow incompatible? Who do you know that has taught you how to rejoice in difficult circumstances? What does it mean to “pray without ceasing?” How can you make prayer a bigger part of your life without stopping life? Why is thanksgiving commanded, “in all circumstances?” [Dare to Venture](#)

4th Reading: [John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

When you hear the word darkness what does it conjure up in your mind? What images do you remember? What feelings does it awake in you? Compare John 1: 1-18 to Genesis 1: 1-23. What themes appear in both accounts? Why do you think the author of John may have wanted to make this comparison? The first part of John tries to identify who John isn’t and who Jesus will be. Who is Jesus to you? Do think Jesus may mean different things to you as you grow up? Why do you think it was so important for John to tell people who he wasn’t? What are you feeling when the light completely surrounds you? Where is the light in your life? How do you find that light during the dark times in your life? [Disciples Home Missions](#)