

Advent Devotional

MEMORIAL PARK CHURCH
2024

BE
STILL



Introduction

Each day of Advent you will find a brief reflection, a short prayer. Many from Memorial Park Church contributed to this devotional out of care for you, our church family. May it bless you in the love and name of Jesus Christ.

“Advent is the time to be still and wait for the light to come.” ~ Henri Nouwen

As we enter into the Advent Season, where we are called to be still, we come face to face with what might be one of the busiest times of the year. It is also a season filled with expectations that we create or that are put on us that usually always go unfulfilled. We create these images of “the perfect Christmas” with loved ones: all the perfect presents picked out and beautifully wrapped under a tree that everyone decorated with handstrung garland, delicious homemade meals on perfectly set tables in perfectly clean houses, our whole family going to church together, invitations to all the wonderful Christmas parties and look elegant or handsome in the perfect Christmas wear, everyone wakes up Christmas morning cheery and healthy singing Christmas Carols around the piano, decorating perfect cookies, lots of laughter and moments filled with kindness and happiness. Everything is “merry and bright.”

And then there is the reality.

It is not as if during advent we see “Peace on Earth.” There is war and natural disasters. There is family discord or family missing from around the dinner table. There isn’t a job that can pay for “all the things” or we end up in debt. People are sick and are suffering. Food might be scarce or tasteless. There is yet another felt obligation or commitment in time already stretched thin. There is no invitation, we are not a part of any “celebration.” We could go on and on. The reality is we have a season where we are expecting perfection but it never arrives.

Yet it does. It has. And it will. In our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all the business of this season unmet expectations, the hope for this devotional is that you will hear the call to Be Still, even if for just the time you read and ponder and pray each of the 24 days of Advent. It is an invitation to know that God loves you so very much that he sent his son Jesus Christ to take on flesh, to die in atonement for your sins, to be raised again and is seated now at the righthand of God, the Father. He WILL come again.

He sees you. And his promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ who didn’t come for the perfect, he came for the broken. In the next 24 days, as you seek him in the stillness, the silence, the rest, may your peace be renewed and restored and the joy of the Lord be your strength.

“Advent is a time of waiting and longing, of preparing our hearts to receive the gift of Christ.” ~ C.S. Lewis

Be Still

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Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Because You Know
Written by: Pastor Esmé

“Be still, and know that I am God.” – Psalm 46:10a

This is probably one of the most well-known scriptures. We see it on bookmarks, up on walls, on bracelets and so much more. But, like many other verses, we tend to pluck it out of its context. Before this verse came many more and it is followed by more.

Why does this matter? It is actually central to this verse because before God calls us to “be still” he first reminds us of who he is SO THAT we might find stillness in that truth. We can trust him, creator of heavens and of earth; he who is powerful and mighty, undefeatable and unsurmountable, relentless and dauntless, present and eternal.

We are really none of these things on our own, right? And yet we try and we try as we depend on ourselves, or maybe worse, things that are of this world rather than things of God. No wonder we feel overwhelmed at times (if not more often than not) or afraid of what might lie ahead! If it depended on us, we have good reason to feel that way. The same is true in grief and loss. If we depend solely on ourselves to get through, the pit of despair is all that would rise up to greet us. But in our dependence upon God, we find refuge and strength.

Another way to read this particular verse is, to take all the above from the verses that precede it with the subtle, but not so subtle reminder that we must reflect on when we consider the flipside of what this means. Be still and know that I am God (and you are not). Praise the Lord! When we reorient ourselves to who God is, and who we are not, with the understanding that it is HE who is our refuge, our strength, our help... that it is HE who has sought us first, loved us first, called us his before we even knew who he was and that he will not leave or forsake us? Ahhh.... that is the only place we might find stillness. Even if we aren't still... that truth remains and it is what he calls us back to time and again when he calls us to be still. It is like he is saying “Be Still..... Know who I am. I am your God and you are my people, no matter what happens this side of heaven. I got you.” What better hands could we be in?

The verses that follow it tell us of that certainty. There is no “might be exalted.” For God to be exalted among the nations and on earth means that he is faithful to his promises, true to who he is, and that he is our fortress no matter what, no matter where, no matter when. That is where we can be still, now and forevermore.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the reminder to “be still” throughout scripture. We can take comfort in knowing that you know we need to hear this more than once and in more than one way. But thank you even more for being who you are and that because of your son Jesus Christ, we can be still in knowing you are faithful and because we are your people there is nothing that can overcome us or separate us from you. May your Holy Spirit draw us into times of stillness this advent season to be reminded of who you are. For the kingdom, and the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

“A Time to Keep Silence, and a Time to Speak”

Written by: Jessica Molnar

“...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.”~Ecclesiastes 3:7b

All of Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, but I think that introverts and extroverts are naturally drawn to opposite clauses of Ecclesiastes 3:7b which says, “...a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” How can we think about this verse during Advent?

My doctor was running 25 minutes behind for my appointment, and she apologized profusely when she arrived. I assured her that it was fine. At her continued apologies, I joked, “I was in this tiny room with my book for 25 minutes. In silence. I’m an introvert, so I promise you, it’s all good.” She laughed.

If it’s comfortable for you to keep quiet, how do you judge when it’s time to speak up? Do you see the sadness of a friend who needs hope, the withdrawn spirit of a spouse who needs comfort, or an injustice that needs to be corrected? We can pray for God to give us not just the courage to speak up, but also the words to speak to that friend or spouse. God delights to use us to minister to others, and we should never feel that we are doing so alone, because the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit gives us His strength (Matt 10:19-20).

From the opposite perspective, if it’s common for you to have lots to say in most circumstances, how do you judge when it’s time to be quiet? Do you slow down and notice that your neighbor has been nodding along to all your topics, that the family discussion has escalated, or that there’s a lonely child off to the side? We can pray for God to give us the self-awareness to know when to restrain ourselves, or the patience to be the peacemaker in a conflict. The Holy Spirit can give us tenderness instead of preoccupation, and the prompting to simply say, “but how are you?”

When you wisely judge a time to keep silent, or a time to speak, take heart. It’s the Lord who ordains these times. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” These are God’s seasons, and God’s times. Not mine. Not yours. His. Just as God chose the exact time and place in history to send us Jesus our Savior (Gal 4:4-5), so God chooses to fill our Advent time with opportunities. Let us recognize those opportunities and use them well. Let us use our silence or our speech to give Him all the glory.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please give me the courage to speak when you’d have me speak, and the awareness to hold my tongue when you’d have me be silent. Thank you for all of the opportunities that you give me to honor and glorify You this Advent. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” ~Romans 12:12

Fear and panic jarred me when a police officer pulled in my driveway told us our son had been in a head on collision. He said, “He is breathing, he spoke a few words, but we know nothing else about his condition. You need to make your way down to Mercy Hospital.”

In a cold sweat, almost unable to breathe my husband and I drove through rush hour traffic to the trauma unit. Our minds were swirling and filled with anguish. How could this happen? Will he live? I found that I couldn't pray. I couldn't cry out to God. My faith had dissolved instantly and was eclipsed by fear and unbelief. We spent the next week with our son as he recovered in the trauma unit, and another week with him in a rehabilitation facility despairing at the severity of his injuries and then being utterly astonished at how quickly the Lord knit him back together.

Of course, this was a terrible event and most people would be overwhelmed and terrified. But my son's accident exposed a much deeper issue at play in my heart: Why did I respond with such fear and an inability to pray? Did I really trust God? What am I really hoping in? You see, I had spent my life in a posture of bracing for impact. I had such fear of the future for my kids and for myself. I would play out worst case scenarios in my mind and what I would do if that happened. I had very little peace and certainly no joy because I trusted fully in what I could see and control instead of the power of God.

Since the accident I have learned that joy and hope must be anchored in the future expectation of heaven and God's promises, not victories or an easy life here on earth. Rejoicing in hope means that I have assurance that God will do what he promises. Being patient in tribulation is, in essence to be still, to know and accept that in this life things are hard. Trouble and calamity are the norm. But instead of falling to pieces I can lean in and fully surrender to God and seek strength from him.

Trusting in God is not passive but an active choice especially when faced with uncertainty and difficult circumstances. Being faithful in prayer means staying in constant communication with God and prayer is that avenue. If all you can do in your weakness is cry “help!” That's a prayer. Pete Grieg, in his book *How to Pray, A Simple Guide for Normal People* says this about prayer: “The best way to start praying is to stop praying. To pause. To be still. To put down your personal prayer list and surrender your own agenda. To stop talking at God long enough to focus on the wonder of who he actually is. To ‘be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.”

Dear friend, whatever you fear or worry about this day know that because Jesus made a way, you can approach God with confidence. He loves you and already knows what you need.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Romans 12:12 is a simple verse and but a powerful message. May your words help us to know the hope that we have because of Jesus, how we can trust you and fully surrender to you in all situations. Teach us how to live Lord. Amen

Patience in Stillness
Written by: Dana Kapp

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ~ James 5: 7-8

The earth is tilled, the seeds sown. All are in their rows, neat and orderly. The farmhands are ready. You are ready, hands eager to harvest and gather.

But the earth lies passive, unyielding. The seeds don't grow. The early rains came but then they stopped and the sun burned hotter, baking the earth to stone.

This isn't how it's supposed to be. Surely it isn't bad to want good things? Crops to share with your neighbors, with those in need, giving you a chance to point others towards the Lord by providing an example of his goodness. These are all good things. And if God is a good Father who wants to give his children good things, why won't he give you this? It eats at you more and more every time you stare at those silent fields, and tendrils begin wrapping around your heart. Doubt. Fear. Resentment. Anger.

Breathe in. Breathe out.
Don't let the gifts distract you from the Giver.

Is there an unmet expectation you grieve over? It could be a job, a relationship, health, or a general feeling that life isn't as it should be. If so, how does it feel to be told to "be patient" in the midst of this waiting? How does your attitude around this topic impact your current relationship with God? Consider also this name Hagar gave to Yahweh in Genesis 16: El Roi, "The God who sees me."

Prayer: Father, give us patience as we sit and wait. Amen

Silent Before Him

Written by: Dee Cuffman

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. ~ Habakkuk 2:20

The book of Habakkuk opens by describing a conversation Habakkuk has with God. The prophet is perplexed and angry. The world around him is in a state of turmoil, and Habakkuk struggled with the reality that God used the evil nation of Babylon to judge His people. What? The unrighteous judging the righteous? It's unfair!

His heart was deeply unsettled. Such seeming unfairness angered Habakkuk as it would anger us. And it prompted him to ask, "How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Why are you permitting this?" (*Hab. 1:2*) He wanted God to notice the chaos and oppression and do something. But God had noticed. And He was doing something... just not what Habakkuk wanted Him to do. Like Habakkuk, we expect God's judgment of nonbelievers, but sometimes we want to dictate the terms to align with what seems "fair" to us.

But God reminds Habakkuk (and us) that He reigns. The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. All the earth. That means the oppressors along with the oppressed. And sometimes the appropriate response to God's seeming silence is... silence! Why? Because we easily overlook our own spiritual poverty. Silence allows us to recognize our sinfulness in the presence of a holy God. It causes us to see that we are not in control; He is.

God was still present "in His holy temple," sovereignly ruling over all the earth. God had a plan by which His will would be achieved. And the call for Habakkuk was a call to silence... to be humble before God. Yes, he had questions and complaints, and yes, God permitted him to express them, but most of all he needed to be silent and let God act.

We see a similar call to silence in the Psalms - Be still and know that I am God (46:10). The psalmist says, nations may be in an uproar and the world falling apart, but God will be exalted. In 62:5 we read, My soul, wait in silence for God alone. In silence—in quiet submission to God's will. The prophet Amos says, the prudent man keeps quiet... for the times are evil. These biblical writers are not telling us to be in compliance with evil but they are telling us to stop wasting energy fretting over the outcome because God never takes His eye off the ball. He is always aware and is always acting to fulfill His plan. He will make things right.

When the world is harsh and it seems like evil is winning, we can choose to be in despair or denial; we may frantically try to "fix" it the way we think it should be done. But rarely is our response simply silence. In a world of constant noise that competes for our attention and our [need] to act, can we just keep silent before Him?

When days of difficulty are upon us, Habakkuk reminds us, Let all the earth keep silent before Him. We do not have all the answers. It is not wrong to ask questions or to pursue solutions, but it is wrong if we do this without being still and hearing God's word and God's voice. We must draw nearer to God, in stillness, in the silence, even as we seek to trust in his sovereignty over the disorder even when we don't comprehend His actions.

Are the nations raging and the earth giving way? Does it seem like the "Babylonians" of our day are in control? Be still. God is still God. He is in His holy temple.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we praise you that whatever is going on around us, you are in your holy temple, directing human history from your throne for the ultimate good of your people. Help us to trust in what you are doing even when you do not still the chaos in the way we hope or expect you to. Would you turn our hearts toward the "who" (You!) when we don't understand the "why" and may we draw nearer to you as we humbly surrender even when we don't get our questions answered. We pray these things in your powerful name. Amen

Singlemindedness: The Antidote for Anxiety.

Written by: Laura Roy

“She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.” ~ Luke 10:39

We know this story all too well. Martha is distracted with all of the preparations that had to be made. After all, it wasn’t just anyone sitting in her living room. . . it was the LORD. It had to be absolutely perfect. . . no room for failure and as a result Martha’s anxiety was through the roof.

Mary, on the other hand, doesn’t have a care in the world—she’s oblivious to the whirlwind that is her sister and all of the things that she was feverishly preparing. I love how the Message translation puts it: “. . . Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said.”

What an image! I imagine her leaning in as close as she can so she doesn’t miss a word. She can’t get enough of Jesus and all she wants is more—more of His teaching—more of Him. I think it’s noteworthy that Luke tells us that the preparations were necessary—they had to be made—so it’s not that they were unimportant. The issue was that Martha was distracted by them; they became her focus. Mary, on the other hand, quieted herself before the Lord and delighted herself in Jesus and worshipped Him.

While I long to be like Mary, I often feel like Martha in this season. It is so easy to get distracted by all of the stuff that has to be done that I often lose sight of what is truly necessary—quieting myself before the Lord, listening to what He might have to say, and worshipping Him and letting the rest flow from my time with Him.

How about you? Where’s your focus this Advent? Is it wrapped up in shopping, decorating and baking or are you intentionally carving out space to be still at the Lord’s feet and listen to what He might have for you in this season? Maybe we could take 15 minutes each day to quiet ourselves and imagine sitting at the Lord’s feet and listening to what He might want to say to us. We might just find that the gift of His presence will be the greatest gift we receive. Steven Curtis Chapman wrote the lyrics below. They are a beautiful call to single-mindedness. May they be our prayer today:

“Be still and know that He is God.
Be still and know that He is holy
Be still Oh restless heart of mine
Bow before the Prince of Peace
Let the noise and clamor cease”

Be still and know that He is God
Be still and know that He is faithful
Consider all that He has done
Stand in awe and be amazed
And know that He will never change
Be still

Be still and know that He is God
Be still and know that He is our Father
Come and rest your head upon His breast
Listen to the rhythm of
His unfailing heart of love
Beating for his little ones
Calling each of us to come
Be still. Amen

Be a Light

Written by: Joleen Clouse

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” ~ Romans 12:2

Renewing your mind. It means changing your thought patterns and beliefs to align with the Word of God. That is a hard task, especially when there is so much out there trying to take up space in our minds. When we surrender our lives to Christ and invite him into our lives, we are to become like him. That is quite an awesome thought! We are called to be in the world but not to be of the world.

Since my children have been in elementary school, I try to bless them each morning before they go to school. I say the Aaronic or the Priestly Blessing which is found in Numbers 6:24-26. And I end the blessing with be his light today. My prayer for them is to look, act and think differently than their peers. How easy it is to tell them to be a light but what about me. I am sure there have been times when my actions or thoughts looked no different than everyone else in the world. Would anyone know that I am a Christian. My prayer for myself for this advent season (and all year long) is that when I am out in the world, I am shining his light.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the season of advent and the birth of your son. Help me to love more fully. To forgive more generously. I ask that you help me to remember that I am your light out in the world. Help me to have my thought patterns, actions and beliefs align with your word. Amen

Not Forgotten

Written by: Dee Cuffman

*Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because
He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling. Zechariah 2:13 (NIV)*

Zechariah was a prophet in the days of the return of the Jews to their land from exile. Those who returned faced disillusionment and disappointment. Zechariah ministered to a nation that was feeling forgotten by God. The Messiah had been promised but centuries later the people were still waiting. But God had not forgotten them. Zechariah offers visions that give the people hope. God still has a plan for His people. The Messiah would come.

Earlier in chapter 2, God tells them to “shout and be glad! For you will see Me coming, and I will live among you. . . many other nations will join Me, and their people will become My people.” This news should make them want to celebrate - the Messiah will come and will be available to all.

But then Zechariah calls the people to stillness. Not silence for the sake of silence but to quiet themselves in expectation and submission to His authority and timing. The news of the Messiah should also make “all mankind” pause and contemplate in awed silence.

God has roused Himself from His holy habitation. He is on the move. He will not retreat, but He will accomplish all that He intends – their salvation. His promises are sure. Be still. . . and watch.

In our hectic lives, we often long for a moment of peace and quiet, but how do we respond when we have one? Is the silence uncomfortable or unsettling? Perhaps because we are so out of practice in doing it.

Call to respond: We live in a noisy world. Even as believers, we sometimes miss the voice we really need to hear because there are so many other “voices” calling to us, or we are talking when we should be listening. Let’s intentionally and purposefully find a moment each day to clear our minds and simply be still in His presence.

When life is swirling around us at a frenzied pace and our time and energy are in great demand, we rarely wait before God in silence. But stillness is essential. He created us to enjoy His presence. But can we experience the magnitude of His presence and faithfulness if we live in a constant whirlwind of activity?

Prayer: Gracious God, in our sound-saturated world, bring us to the place of silence. May we seek stillness so that we become more attuned to Your presence and Your glory and Your work within us. Amen

Peace

Written by: Bronwyn McAdams

*“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” ~
Isaiah 26:3*

I am not sure if I have ever witnessed perfect peace. I have certainly experience times of peace in my life or times when I knew it was only through the Holy Spirit that I could feel peace. I can recall the feeling of peace that came over me when I received a call that my father had passed away. Incidentally learning about that same time that the women’s bible study that I was participating in had prayed for my father and myself. Not a coincidence.

I also am not sure that my mind is always steadfast. I know that my mind is filled with things that it should not be filled with. . . and I repent of that reality. I pray that I would be transformed by the renewing of my mind rather than being conformed to the pattern of this world, but it isn’t that easy. Although we’re in the blessed season of Christmas, keeping my heart, mind and soul focused on Jesus is really challenging for me.

I also like to think that I trust the Lord. But do I really? With our world in such chaos and wars all around, do I really trust that the Lord is my only hope? I like to think I can do something about my own family or circumstances. It is tempting to consider that my government will protect me. It is hard not to see so many images of our upside-down world and wonder if God is really in charge. I finally realize that my anxiety won’t change a thing. God wants me to trust him now and forever.

I believe the perfect peace that is promised in this verse is in regard to our future with the Lord. I also believe that we do experience peace in our lives that sometimes is unexplainable. That peace can only come from the Lord. One day, we as believers in Christ will experience God’s perfect peace as we enter His presence. Then our minds will not be filled with all the concerns we have here on earth. We can truly rest and keep our minds steadfast.

As we celebrate Advent and are tempted to feel the crush of the business of our culture, let’s pray for peace; to have a mind that is steadfast on the Lord and trust Him with whatever is happening in our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there is so much going on in our world and in our lives, would you help us to recenter on you and renew our trusting faith. May we claim your peace in every moment that would cause us to lose sight of your powerful love for us and sovereignty over everything and may it lift our faces once again to yours. Amen

Stillness in the Storm

Written by: Lori Wilson

“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.” ~ Psalm 107: 28-29

In whatever condition or circumstance we are in, we are encouraged to “Cry out unto the Lord” for His help.

Like the sailors in these Bible verses, at some point you will have great turbulence in your life. Perhaps you are currently experiencing a storm with no end in sight. Your situation may be so serious that you wonder how you’ll ever get through it. You’ve tried everything possible to resolve the matter but to no avail.

The solution is to do exactly what these sailors did... Cry out to the Lord in your trouble. After all, He is sovereign over storms and uses them for His good purposes. God knows we sometimes need to reach the end of our own resources before we will turn to Him. If we call out to the Lord and submit to His authority over the storm, He will calm the waves in His perfect timing and guide us to safety.

The goal is not simply to escape turmoil but to learn to depend on the Lord instead of ourselves. Trusting Him to handle what we can not will ultimately lead to gladness, thanks, and praise for His loving kindness and intervention on our behalf. Another wonderful result will be that we can tell others how faithful God has been, and they too can put their trust in Him.

Prayer: Thank you Lord that you are victorious over every trouble and obstacle. Because of You, we too are overcomers. We too can have victory and walk strong in your peace. Amen

Hidden Person of the Heart

Written by: Katie Sullivan

“But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” ~ 1 Peter 3:4

“If people knew the ‘real me’- the things I think and do when no one is watching, what would they say? Does it honor God?” Have you ever asked yourself this? The “hidden person of the heart” or, your inner self, isn’t something that you wear or put on before a mirror. It is who you truly are, constantly growing and changing as you seek God. The inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit possessed by godly Christians is incorruptible. This means that it does not fade or get displeasing with age. In fact, incorruptible beauty of inner self only ages more extravagantly.

Jesus displayed a perfect example of a “hidden person of the heart” who seeks the Lord. First, His gentle and quiet spirit obeys God’s plan. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He obeyed the Father, even when it meant a horrific death. A gentle and quiet spirit abides by God’s plan, even when the plan leads to difficult situations. Next, a quiet and gentle spirit has the ability to meditate on God’s Word, to withdraw ourselves from a loud and busy world, and listen for God’s whisper (1 Kings 19:12). Jesus, Himself, often withdrew to pray, even in the midst of His busy ministry. Jesus always made sure to make time for His Heavenly Father. Third, a quiet and gentle spirit demonstrates humility throughout leadership. Jesus exemplifies leadership throughout His ministry, but not without humbling Himself.

As we find ourselves torn by the ways of the world, by the busyness of the season, we need to set boundaries and accept that “no” is an answer to activities that will put strains on our well-being and possibly take time away from the Father. When we continue to seek a stronger relationship with the Lord, we should let the “hidden person of the heart” show up visibly in our lives, displayed in a humble manner. That inner self, characterized by the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, is one that obeys and will not fade with age - a beauty that is of great value to God.

How can you make intentional changes that allow you to be still, focus on God, and allow Him to shape and grow a gentle and quiet spirit in you during this advent?

Prayer: We need You, Lord. We cannot walk according to Your will without Your help and guidance. Anoint us with Your gentle and quiet spirit so that we are able to walk as You walked. We pray that we would let the hidden persons of our hearts produce the beautiful fruit of the Spirit which is so precious in Your sight, and that we would honor You in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' holy and precious name, Amen

God is in Control

Written by: Christine O'Rourke

“In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

~ Psalm 4:8

We all suffer from worry and/or anxiety at some point in our lives...and perhaps even more so during this time of year when we may be over-scheduled, filled with unreasonable expectations, inundated with comparisons we cannot live up to, perhaps experiencing personal grief/loss/pain/illness... you name it! And that is just in our personal realms...for then there is all that is going on in the world that causes plenty of worry and anxiety – war, weather, politics, economics, hunger, terrorism... on and on. It is only natural to feel stressed and overwhelmed to the point of inability to rest, sleep, feel peace.

But we have the firm assurance that **GOD IS IN CONTROL!** No matter what we are experiencing, He is bigger than any problem we are facing – and the same is true whether it be in our personal situations or in the world in general. We can experience His rest (sleep) and His peace (overcoming debilitating worry or anxiety) by staying close to him - in his Word, in communicating with him in Prayer, in joining with other believers in Praise, Worship, Fellowship, and Service. Only God can truly put our lives back together when we feel they are falling apart. Only God can give us true rest. As it says in Psalm 3:5 “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.” (NIV)

What is causing you to feel uneasy, worried, anxious, even sleepless during this season? Pray about how you might give that to God and experience His peace.

Prayer: Lord, I come to you admitting that I so often think it is my responsibility to live up to the expectations and ideals the world establishes during this season, and I often fail to trust in you for my own peace and the peace of the world. Please guide me to draw closer to you, to fully depend on you, and to be ever-mindful that **YOU ARE IN CONTROL** – not me and not the powers of this world. Praise God! Amen

The Reason for the Season

Written by: John O'Master

*He shall see the labor of his soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge,
my Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53:11*

Our lives are often filled with suffering, and we fear the hard times; medical issues, loss of jobs, death of a loved one and so many other instances of hardship too many to list here. These are in our lives because of sin in the world and the legacy of sin we carry.

Dr. Richard Gamble writes in *The Whole Counsel of God*, “We are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners.”

And while suffering is not a place anyone of us would seek for ourselves, it is often the place where, when we seek stillness in the Lord, that he heals the places in our hearts we often didn't recognize as being in need of him. He draws close to us that we might draw close to him. He wastes nothing, not even our suffering.

God then sent His only Son, Jesus, called the Christ into the world, in human form to perform the solution, a perfect sacrifice, that of Himself (John 18:37). Suffer He did; degradation, humiliation, injury, loss of followers and friends, and finally, death in the most inhumane way, on a cross.

But His suffering and death were in our behalf (Isaiah 53:5); that by believing in His atonement for our sins, and accepting Him as Lord and Savior, our sin-guilt (Colossians 1:20–22) is lifted and we stand acquitted before God (Romans 5:8-11). Having said all this, let us remember that Jesus is indeed the reason for the season, and in the coming days and weeks, let us celebrate the birth prophesied by Isaiah. When Jesus said “It is finished,” he signified he had met the requirements, stayed the course and completed the atonement for our sins. In addition, he promised that with his resurrection from the dead, we, who trust Him as Lord will also rise to spend eternity in glory, unimagined and unimaginable.

“Then we shall be where we would be.

Then we will be what we should be.

Things that are not now, nor could be.

Soon will be our own.” ~Thomas Kelly

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we praise you for the grace you pour out upon us, and for the love that drove you to send Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice. And in His name, we pray. Amen

Waiting in the Wanting

Written by: Lynn Sosovicka

“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” – Psalm 27:14

We live in an interesting time where we expect instant gratification. There is Amazon Prime which delivers our orders in one-two days and even fast food restaurants for quick food. Because of this expectation, we want immediate answers even when we pray asking for God’s help. We must wait patiently for the Lord. This waiting can cause worry and anxiety for many. Psalm 27:14 is telling us to wait for the Lord. But not only to wait but to be strong and let our heart take courage. Letting our heart take courage means keeping our eyes focused on the promises of God. Courage is fueled by faith. Be brave and courageous. We must believe God’s promises. Waiting is not passive, we must actively seek God .

God told us that pain and suffering would be a part of our lives; “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33. Our hardships aren’t without purpose. Bring your pain to God. Fill your life with God’s word and God’s people to bring hope and encouragement. Overcome worry and pain by turning it over to God. This redirects our thinking. We know what the ultimate reward is for us as believers. Jesus died on the cross because he knew the end of the story. This can give us powerful hope.

On a personal note, I lost my only child, Laura, 5 years ago when she was 21. My heart was shattered and I couldn’t figure out how to decrease the pain so that I could continue to live without her. I said to my counselor that I wanted to fast-track the grieving process. I prayed and turned my pain over to God and could feel him carrying me through the process as I struggled. I am so much stronger now and have been there for others as they grieve. I still cannot face the busyness of the season since losing Laura. I try to keep my focus on the cross. Instead of spending Christmas exchanging presents and being entertained, I go to Ocean City, New Jersey and spend the holiday with God, the ocean and Laura. It is such a peaceful time.

I challenge you to find your peaceful place so that you release the stress and keep your focus on the cross. Your place might be the church sanctuary looking at our beautiful stained glass cross and feeling the peace. Or a playground at the mall listening to the happy sounds of children. The sound of water flowing might be what you need. Wherever it might be, go and experience God’s wonder.

Prayer: Almighty God, may we put our trust and faith in you during this holiday season as we actively seek you. Help us to wait for your blessings as we struggle to be strong and not let the worry and anxiety take over. May we be brave and courageous in our faith so that our heart can take courage as we focus on the promises that you give us. Amen

Stillness in Sabbath

Written by: Kevin Steele

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” ~ Exodus 20:8-11

I know I'm old, but I remember a time when the stores closed on Sunday, including grocery stores. You better had filled your car on Saturday if you were running low, because gas stations closed on Sunday too. Those days are past, and many people now work on “the Sabbath”- healthcare, retail, restaurants (except Chick-fi-A), and many others. Sabbath no longer falls on just Sundays for Christians, but it needs to fall somewhere in our week.

God designed the Sabbath for rest and for honoring and loving Him. In Genesis 1:14, God created ways to measure time, at least in part to set aside times as holy and sacred. With the Law, He codified the Sabbath specifically; one day out of seven should be devoted to Him and rest.

Sabbath is a time to commune with Him. It's a time to read from His Word- to hear of His goodness. It's an opportunity to thank Him for His provision in good times, and His presence in challenging times. Sabbath is a time to speak with Him and to listen quietly to Him. It's a chance to ponder how truly amazing His grace and mercy are, and to admit how much we need them both. It's a space set aside to reflect on His goodness over the past week, and on His guidance for the upcoming week. It's pretty obvious, we need a Sabbath!

During this Advent season, take time to celebrate the Sabbath, whichever day of the week that is for you. He designed it for our good and His glory. Join with Him.

Prayer: Thank you for establishing the gift of sabbath rest and the time set aside for us to recenter on who you are, all you have done for us and that you continue to do on our behalf. Please help draw us back into this pattern if we have allowed things of this world to divert us and make this time rich as we worship you. You are the way, the truth and the life. Amen

The Surging Sea

Written by: Ryan Pietryga

“You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.” ~ Psalm 89:9

Isn't it interesting how the Psalmist tells us that the Lord rules the sea specifically? But if God created all things and sustains all things, why does the Psalmist focus on the fact that the Lord reigns over the sea?

In Ancient Near Eastern thought, the sea represented the unknown and chaos. The sea was known to be the home of Leviathan, a serpent monster known as God's enemy who was slain (Isaiah 27:1). In the Genesis 1:2, we are told that the “Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” God brought order to what was formless, empty, and chaotic when he created all things. What does Isaiah 27:1, Genesis 1:2, and Psalm 89:9 all have in common? They demonstrate that the Lord is sovereign over the chaos, that he reigns with authority and power over the disorder and disarray in our lives.

The holiday season often tends to bring out the chaos and disorder in our lives: as we run around trying to buy the perfect present, or as we prepare to host family, it seems that chaos abounds. But may we be reminded that the Lord is on His throne, and that He is complete control of the “surging sea” in our lives. Let's take time to be still before Him, as He makes still the waves which mount up in our lives during the holiday season. This Christmas season, we set our sights on the one who was born the Son of the Most High, is also the same one who was given all authority and power, and who ultimately came to bring peace on earth. Jesus reigns over the surging sea in your life; may He calm the waves in your life during this Christmas season.

What are examples of chaos and disarray in your lives during the holiday season? What areas of your life do you need to be reminded of Christ's reign and authority? May we be still before the Lord before we do our Christmas shopping, or before we begin preparing our homes for family and friends. Let's meditate on this single verse and be encouraged that no matter what we might be facing this holiday season, the Lord reigns supreme over it.

Prayer: Gracious God, we are grateful for this Christmas season and all that it signifies. We recognize that this season can be challenging, and we are constantly reminded of the "surging sea" in our lives: the chaos, the busyness, the disarray. Lord, help us to find still moments with You this season. Remind us that you reign and rule over the stress and chaos in our lives. Bring peace to us this season, a peace that transcends our understanding, and a peace that can only come from you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Find Peace

Written By: Barb Kowalski

“You yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brother and sisters, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you.” – 1 Thessalonians 4:9b-11 (ESV)

Lately, as I've had many “spinning plates” in the air, I have become more and more convicted by God to be still, and listen for His voice. It became evident that this verse was the one for me to read, listen to, ponder and use for my devotion writing. And for those who know me well, and know that I taught not one but two sessions on “Boundaries”, it is apparently evident that God doesn't think I'm done learning.

Are you, like me, one who feels the need to always be busy? Either with your own tasks, but also signing up for everything to “help” others? And especially in this season when there seems to be so much to do?

What is Paul trying to teach us in this passage? There are several, I wouldn't call them commands, but urgings in this passage. Let's take a closer look.

He speaks to his brothers in Macedonia and recognizes and praises them that they indeed are loving one another. He is so thankful. We, as Christians, can recognize each other in our church family as believers and lovers of one another and others - that is truly evident here at MPC.

Sure we know we are to love one another, and we follow God's command to do so quite well, but how can we love one another when we are stretched thin, maybe exhausted, without time to even love ourselves or love God?

Isn't that just what Paul's telling the Macedonians? And us? He recognizes in the letter that the Macedonians must have been so busy “loving one another” that they hadn't found time for themselves. I know I do the same thing. And maybe you too? Running from here to there, caring for the people I love, and returning home at the end of the day, exhausted, with no time to be still for myself, let alone, spend time with God.

So what is the answer? We need to find a balance between loving and caring for each other, and loving ourselves enough to have quiet time with the Lord. Paul actually encourages a hobby that we can sit and do quietly on our own. For me, it's my sewing hobby, sitting quietly with the sound of a purring machine, sometimes listening to worship music and allowing me an open mind to hear God's voice as I work with my hands. It indeed brings me the much needed peace that I need at the end of a busy day.

This Advent, try to find a place, or space, where you can be still, and spend time with the Lord. The baking, shopping, and wrapping can wait just a little longer while you reconnect with our Creator, listening for his voice and embracing the real ‘reason for the season.’

Prayer: Holy God, please allow me the peace this season to reflect on your goodness, mercy and love. Thank you for giving me the ability to love others. Would you also point me in the direction of restful time for myself, so that I may fully appreciate others and fully lean into you. Amen

The Most Important Invitation

Written by: Deb Waugaman

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” ~Matthew 11:28-29

Our calendars are filled with holiday parties and preparations. We are busy looking for the perfect gifts, baking holiday cookies, and deciding how to fit all the holiday parties into our already busy calendars. Sound familiar? It is easy to become overwhelmed with all the activities, get caught up in the commercialization of Christmas, and lose our focus on Jesus. We might choose to postpone our morning devotional time to get a jump on our extra-long “to do” list. Before we know it, one missed devotion turns into a week of missed devotions and the race to Christmas begins. Our “to do” lists could be filled with many seemingly good things but when we allow those things to take our focus away from Jesus those good things can become heavy burdens.

Our scripture today from Matthew 11:28-29, is an invitation from Jesus to all who are weary and heavy burdened. Jesus’ invitation is for rest. When we choose to accept His invitation and place Jesus’ yoke on us, we can be still. There will still be a “to do” list but now they will not seem as burdensome because we are yoked with Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we go about our preparations this Christmas, would you open our eyes to see when we are being distracted even with good things. May our “to do” list start with you; choosing to come to you first before everything else, accepting your invitation above all else and finding rest in you. Ultimately receiving the greatest gift ever given -your son and our Savior. We ask this in the precious name of Jesus, Amen

His Peace and Protection

Written by: Jan Walsh

*"When you lie down you will not be afraid; when you lie down your sleep will be sweet.
Have no fear of sudden disaster or of ruin that overtakes the wicked,
for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared." – Proverbs
3:24-26*

How often we toss and turn at night, trying to shut off our brains from the day's events, etc, or thinking about upcoming things we need to do. Christmas adds even more things to our schedules and to do lists, things we feel we have to accomplish before December 25th. This often makes us anxious and can cause us to panic. This verse says God will give us comfort and peace during advent and all through the year.

What about the part about sudden disaster, ruin and uncertainty- The Lord is at your side always. He gives us security through the day and during the dark of night.

We must have faith and trust in God's protection. We must have a relationship with God. We must rely on the Lord's strength and security.

The Lord keeps us from stumbling.
The Lord keeps us from traps of the wicked.
God guides and protects us.

When was the last time when you couldn't sleep and instead of worrying or being anxious, you stopped and prayed or read your Bible? It may help you to get some sweet sleep.

BE

S Soak up

T The

I Incredible

L Loving

L Lord

Prayer: Heavenly Father, would you refocus our minds and may we sleep peacefully knowing our Lord and Savior is with us always, our Immanuel. Amen

Three Steps Ahead

Written by: By Lacey Nye

*“Now then, stand still and see this great thing
the Lord is about to do before your eyes!” - 1 Samuel 12:16*

Throughout my life, I have been called to be still through many seasons. In a day and age that is so fast paced and having access to the world at our finger tips, we are used to feeling rushed through our lives. It is important to remember to slow down and enjoy the wonderful God sightings that the Lord has put on our paths as we encounter each day. I have been a member of Memorial Park Church since I was about one year old. I was baptized here, completed confirmation class, spent weekends away at Laurelville (retreat center), and participated in a mission trip through The Pittsburgh Project. The church has established my strong faith and who I am today as a Christian. I have always been involved with Children’s Ministries by helping with the 3- & 4-year-old room on Sunday’s and being a counselor at Summer Surge. Eventually, I began internships here at the church during my summer months away from college when I attended The University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown.

Amidst all of this, I knew I wanted to volunteer with Student Ministries. It had been on my heart for years, but never quite aligned the way I had hoped. God knew the path He had set me on and it all fell into place in His timing. During my first year of being a teacher, I was able to volunteer with the Student IMPACT students. I had created great memories throughout the course of the year and built a solid foundation with the youth of our church. During that summer, I was asked to be an intern for Student Ministries (God was three steps ahead here – as He always is). As summer was coming to a close, I felt a call to apply for the Middle School Program Assistant position. I remember going home that evening, applying, and simply being still. I waited in His peace knowing that if this was meant to be, it would all work out as He intended it to. No amount of overthinking or wondering would change the good plans the Lord has for me, especially in that moment.

Before the summer came to a close, I was informed that I was officially hired and could begin the onboarding process. Looking back now, I have been abundantly blessed on this past year working with middle school and high school students. Most of whom go to our church, but also who have been invited in from around the community. I have always felt a calling to teach future generations. I have found that by sitting in the Lord’s silence and not taking control of situations, God’s answers come through as clear as the ringing of a bell. I am so thankful for the many ways God has showed up for me which enables me to show up for my students each day. God is so good!

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray stillness over my life when times become busy and overwhelming. Allow me to focus on you while holding you close to my heart. Your presence is a blanket of peace that keeps us safe and feeling loved. Amen

His Presence and Rest

Written by: Michele Holmes

“The LORD replied, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’” Exodus 33:14

I'll ask you to consider some context for the verse above before I go any further. In the chapter just before this verse, while Moses was meeting with the Lord on the top of Mount Sinai, his brother had led God's people to worship a golden calf as their god. Moses, after breaking the tablets that contained the very words of God in his anger and frustration with his people, meets with God again to plead with Him on behalf of the Israelites.

What's at stake here is multi-layered but at the core of this story is that the Israelites were led out of Egypt with the promise of a land that was marked out by God just for them—it flowed with milk & honey, with freedom, with God-infused potential. But because they had chosen to worship the calf of gold instead of the Lord, God had decided that they could enter the Promised Land with an angel to lead them instead of Himself.

Imagine Moses now in the Tent of Meeting, sitting before the Lord. His heart's desire is to lead God's chosen people into the Promised Land. But God, who promised them the land to begin with, has now declared that He's not going with them. What would that mean for the Israelites? What would the Promised Land be like without the Presence of the Lord? Moses understood how flat and barren that existence would be and pleaded with the Lord, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.” (Ex 33:15) He was willing to give up the whole plan, the whole promise, the whole reason they all left Egypt in the first place because he knew that life without God's Presence would be a dim and empty life indeed.

God's response to Moses' plea could have been just the first part of verse 14, “My Presence will go with you.” That would have been enough. That's what Moses was asking for. But God, in his grand generosity, continues with, “and I will give you rest.” The word “rest” in Scripture is rich with depth and hits all the high notes of every one of our favorite Christmas hymns. Jesus comes to earth and the weary world rejoices because Jesus is the promise of rest for us—rest from the sin that so easily entangles, rest from the destruction that we so willingly bring to ourselves, rest from our own depravity.

God's promise of both His Presence and his rest resonates in our hearts today. His Presence is our weapon in a strife-riddled world, and his rest is what we long for most on these deep December nights as we await our celebration of Jesus' birth.

This Advent season, consider the things you find yourself longing for that might be overshadowing your need for God's stillness and rest. Ask the Lord to change your desires so that your core longing centers on His Presence and his rest alone.

Prayer: Lord, we dig deep into prayer today and ask for the truth and power of your Presence and rest to settle into our hearts this Advent season. Let us experience the depth of your peace as a result of your Presence over us and your rest within us. In Jesus' Mighty Name we pray, Amen

Waiting on God

Written by: Peter Pugliese

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.” - Psalm 62:1

As we rapidly approach the ‘Christmas Season’ has the hustle and bustle that accompanies it entered your mind? Think about the impact this season has upon us. Time management is put to the test. How do we balance the sacred with the secular? How do we avoid letting the ways of the world steal our Christmas joy?

Pause and consider the journey and ultimate arrival of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. In the midst of the confusion that swirled around them, there was a peace provided for them. God, in His sovereignty was working. As they completed their journey, the one thing we can learn from this young couple is dependence upon God. Mary and Joseph were dependent upon Him. In their inner being they silently and peacefully waited. Knowing this raises the question, how are we doing?

Contrast the confusion this couple encountered as they entered Bethlehem in search of a place to stay with the experiences we have in our lives. The challenges we contend with are real. Even now, our family is being tested, and the hustle and bustle described above hasn’t yet arrived. For any of us, how are we to weather the storm?

Close your eyes, picture Mary. In Luke 2:19 Luke shares with us one of Mary’s intimate thoughts. Here she takes in the reality of giving birth to the ‘Son of God.’ Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. . . With all of the activity surrounding her, Mary is able to trust in God’s protection while remembering what is taking place in the moment. She silently waited.

Are we able to silently wait for God? How do we condition our hearts? We don’t, He does! In all of life’s encounters we need to rest in His presence. Do not let the hustle and bustle of this world derail you. To wait is not inactivity, its actively allowing the God whom we worship to conform us to His likeness. Silently wait for the One born of a virgin. . . He is our salvation.

Prayer: Father, as we await the coming of our Lord, we will engage the things of this world. Lord, help us to be sensitive to your presence. Create in us an awareness of your peace. As we navigate this season, may your Spirit conform us, while assuring us of your promise fulfilled. Prepare us for the celebration of your birth with the hope and joy of this Christmas season. Amen

Resting in Right Places

Written by: Brandon Davis

*“For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’
But you were unwilling.” ~ Isaiah 30:15*

Rest. That is what we are all hoping for in this season of Advent, right? Rest from work. Rest with family. Rest with friends. Physically, rest.

Although we may long for rest, our December schedules fill up quickly. With good things. Time traveling to family. Parties with friends and co-workers. With holiday things. Making Christmas cookies. Buying gifts. Cutting down Christmas Trees. With hard things. Working long hours during the holidays to meet deadlines and finish projects before the new year. Experiencing grief for lost loved ones who we will not get to celebrate Christmas again. We often get to the end of the Christmas season feeling everything but rested. That is because we are putting our hope for rest in the wrong place and in the wrong things.

In this section of Isaiah, the Israelites too were finding their rest in the wrong places. They were resting in an alliance with Egypt to save them from an incoming Assyrian invasion. Instead of trusting in the Lord for their protection. The prophet Isaiah is speaking against them because they were unwilling to return to, and rest in, the Lord. They were unwilling to be quiet and trust in the Lord for their strength. They were unwilling.

We can take this gracious warning to heart. Our rest does not come from earthly things, but through God's himself. God promises salvation for us when we rest in the work that has already been for us by his Son. God promises forgiveness when we return to him after wandering. God promises to give us strength, through the Holy Spirit, when we make space to be quiet and trust in Him.

Amidst the good, the holiday, and the hard things, may we make space for God to work. Space to be quiet, to return, to trust, and to rest in God.

Prayer: Father God in this season that is full help me to make intentional space for quietness. In the quietness, change my unwilling heart to rest in you and return to your presence. Amen

The Way in Stillness
Written by: Esme Teel

“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” ~ Exodus 14:14

What can be worse than being surrounded on all sides? Or worse than feeling like everything that can go wrong IS going wrong? I would venture to say that either of these things feel even worse when we recognize that it is the Lord who has brought us to that place or allowed those things to happen.

That is what happened to the Israelites right after the Pharaoh finally released them from slavery as we read in Exodus. God had seen to it that the Pharaoh would “let my people go.” That would have been enough to say “Praise God,” right? But he didn’t stop there. He didn’t leave the people to figure out where to go or how to get there. He went before them AND stayed with them even as he provided them a leader in Moses in which he would make his will known.

One would think since God had done all this, he would have made their path the easiest it could be. Instead, he didn’t take the shortest way or the most direct. He led them in a rather roundabout way to eventually come up against the sea where they would come to a stop for a time. It is in that very place the Egyptians then came to surround them from all other sides. The hope they had just days prior was now replaced with doubt as they were trying to come to terms with what was happening. It would appear that God had either been outmatched or outwitted. Was God truly the one true God who could, or would, save them after all? And, if he could have and yet didn’t, did he really even care?

At face value and with eyes focused strictly on the circumstances, who could blame them. They lashed out at God in frustration and yet he still didn’t desert them. He had indeed allowed the enemy to surround them, allowed them to question, allowed them to doubt and then he allowed them to recognize that when there was no way out, they were indeed powerless. But in that place of recognizing our powerlessness, even when the walls feel like they are closing in, comes a truth as clear as the sea being spread in two with a way, the ONLY way, through. On their own, on our own, we are indeed powerless. But even though countless in number, with what seemed like every advantage, the enemy and/or obstacles are too powerless. God however, is not.

God makes a way when there is no way. He not only fights against what seems to be unsurmountable, but he can, and does, and did, defeat it. Yes, God brought them to this place where they could see no way out and even made the path to get there maybe much more complicated, and long, and arduous than they would have taken them on their own. But without it, they would have missed the opportunity to see the simple truth that it is his power, his provision, his might, his love that saves and to know that THIS . . . this is THEIR God, and they were HIS people.

God parted the sea for the Israelites, separating his people from their identity as slaves and giving them the freedom to live into their identity as HIS people. He has given us this same path, through faith in Jesus Christ. As his people, we no longer have to live as those without hope when surrounded on all sides by things that would seek to press us down. Instead, we can live into the freedom that even in those places we can be still, because he will fight for us. And yes, with God fighting for us, who can stand against us? He has already won.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we tend to run from one thing to the next, maybe especially in this season, please constantly remind us of who you are and that you are with us and you are for us. Would you remind us that the easy way is rarely the right way and in fact, trusting in you and who you are is the only way to find stillness and the peace and rest that comes from knowing that through Christ our Lord and Savior, we can no longer be held captive because you are our God and we are your people, now and forevermore. Amen

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Songwriter: Charles Wesley

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Be Still, My Soul

Songwriters: Jason David Ingram, Kari Brooke Jobe

Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain
Leave to thy God to order and provide
In every change He faithful will remain
Be still, my soul, thy best, thy heavenly friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end

Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past
Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake
All now mysterious shall be bright at last
Be still, my soul, the waves, and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below

In you, I rest, in You, I found my hope
In you, I trust, You never let me go
I place my life within Your hands alone
Be still, my soul

Be still, my soul, the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord
When disappointed, grief, and fear are gone
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored
Be still, my soul, when change and tears are past
All safe and blessed, we shall meet at last

In you, I rest, in You, I found my hope
In you, I trust, You never let me go
I place my life within Your hands alone
Be still, my soul

In you, I rest, in You, I found my hope
In you, I trust, You never let me go
I place my life within Your hands alone
Be still, my soul

Be still, my soul
Be still, my soul

It is Well with My Soul

Songwriter: Horatio Spafford

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,

Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.
My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—

My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:

If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;

Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

“Over and over and over again God says, “I will choose Nazareth, not Jerusalem. I will choose the girl nobody wants. I will choose the boy everybody has forgotten.” Why? Is it just that God likes underdogs? No. He is telling us something about salvation itself. Every other religion and moral philosophy tells you to summon up all of your strength and live as you ought. Therefore, they appeal to the strong, to the people who can pull it together, the people who can “summon up the blood.” Only Jesus says, “I have come for the weak. I have come for those who admit they are weak. I will save them not by what they do but through what I do.”

—**Timothy J. Keller**

“My brothers and sisters, believe firmly what you believe—that Christ will return. What does it matter when? Prepare yourself for his coming. Live as though He were coming today, and you will not fear His coming.

—**Saint Augustine**

“Christmas contains many spiritual truths, but it will be hard to grasp the others unless we grasp this one first. That is, that the world is a dark place, and we will never find our way or see reality unless Jesus is our Light.”

—**Timothy J. Keller**



BE STILL

Christmas Eve
CANDLELIGHT SERVICES

3:00 PM - FAMILY *

7:00 PM - CONTEMPORARY

9:00 PM - CLASSIC

*CHILDCARE AVAILABLE

