

The Act of Waiting. . .

The season of Advent is a time of waiting for the birth of our Lord Jesus. Although we already know the certainty of His birth in time and space, this is also a season in which we are to wait for His birth within us. It is not a “one time event”, but a continual birthing as the old passes away and the new life emerges.

Waiting is not, in fact, a sedentary process: it is quite active. While that may conjure up images of hustle and bustle, we need to seek other images. This is not about hurriedness or busyness but about attentiveness— attentiveness to the Father.

As with any birth, there is preparation necessary. Preparation often requires seeing what is so, being willing to relinquish that which needs to be relinquished in order to make room for what the Father has for us, being willing to receive what He gives us, and being willing to tend to that which we have received.

Together this Advent we will look at the One we are waiting for, what our part is as we wait, the joy of waiting together, and having a Savior who is close enough to touch.

Advent Devotions
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Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Sunday, November 27

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” Luke 1:46b-47

And so begins the Magnificat – the outpouring of Mary’s heart in song – when she arrived at her relative Elizabeth’s house.

Walk with me, if you will, through what has just happened to Mary. She has been visited by an angel and told news that would shock even the most unaffected among us. Most minds would be absolutely swimming in the world of “what now?”. Some might never again wander outside of the house (not that the house had been a safe place!)

But this young girl, pregnant with the Son of God, speaks not of anguish or concern over what others would think. She doesn’t wring her hands in worry over what Joseph’s reaction will be. She instead gives voice to the glory of the God whom she carries. She is so taken; she is so certain. There is new life in her body, but there is also new life in her spirit.

The One we are waiting for is *so* large that looking at Him can pull us away from all that pulls at us. Looking at Him can lift our spirits in praise– that we might rejoice, overflow, and be lost (but truly found) in Him. It is not that all that pulls at us disappears, but when we look to Him we can feel the quickening that lets us know there is something gloriously more.

Lord Jesus, you alone know in what things I truly rejoice, what things I glorify—not with my lips but with my life. Gather me up in your arms; let me be held in a way that causes me to look first to you. It is you I am waiting for; it is you I want to praise. I watch and wait for your life to grow within me; I watch and wait for you.

Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Monday, November 28

“For He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.” Luke 1:48

The One we are waiting for is attentive to us. Often when one is in authority, there is concern for those under him only in relationship to their ability to perform the tasks at hand. But our Father is different.

He is attentive; He is heedful. He knows our condition much better than we do, but rather than wielding His power in pursuit of the task at hand, He is mindful of us. He knows that there is nothing we can do without Him, and so He draws near. He knows that we carry only a small piece of the picture, and so He comes along side and teaches us how to lean into Him—not scorning us when we panic and hold tightly to our own understanding, but lifting us back up again and drawing even nearer.

It’s a strange thing that happens when we see who God is and who we are. It doesn’t, as many would suggest, leave us paralyzed but rather with access to great potential. It doesn’t leave us impotent but rather empowered to do the work of the Father.

From the perspective of the world, it makes no sense. But it is not about making sense. We have a God who spoke the entire universe into existence, who can create and destroy and recreate. He doesn’t “need” us for any of that. But we have a God who choose to humble Himself and come and live among us. We have a God who sent His Son to die for us. Is there any more mindful a gesture for His humble servants? Is there anything to make us hold more gently the finite and the Infinite?

- *Where have you known the Lord’s mindfulness?*
- *Where have you felt His presence almost painfully close?*
- *Spend some time looking at what you know of Him and craft a prayer of thanksgiving for His mindfulness of you.*

Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Tuesday, November 29

“For the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name.” Luke 1:49

Too often when some “great thing” has been done for us, we get lost in the thing. I think of a child at Christmas—great things, lots and lots of great things! Look at all of the great things!

But in this verse we see Mary in humble recognition of what the Lord has done for her, and if you notice, she doesn’t stay with the thing, she *immediately* moves to “*holy is His name.*” There are some gifts that mirror the giver, take us beyond the gift to the giver. The gifts of God, when we recognize them, are like that.

I say “when we recognize them”, because that is where worship begins. When we can even see the Lord at work it is a gift—to be able to see. When our hearts become inclined towards the hearts of others, when we can respond to someone’s hardness with the tenderness of the Holy Spirit, we know the difference. We become aware of the way that the Lord has taken our heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh.

The God we are waiting for is continually doing great things for us, and they are often things in such stark contrast to our human nature, that we find our breath being taken away and the holiness of God being palpably before us.

In the presence and recognition of His holiness, our eyes move from ourselves to Him. And as they rest on the Father, we will see more and more of the great things He has done for us. May our eyes and hearts be opened.

- *Spend some time reflecting on the great things the Lord has done for you*
- *Spend some time reflecting on His holiness*
- *Finally, spend some time reflecting on the magnitude that One so holy would be so deeply concerned for and attentive to you.*

Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Wednesday, November 30

“His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.” Luke 1:50

Fear of the Lord is an awe, a true “seeing” of Him. Again, it is getting beyond ourselves, recognizing our limits and our needs, laying down our need to feel important. And by doing so our sight is cleared, and we can see God in a way that shows both our incredible need and His unending provision.

When we can see, when we can no longer stand because of the depth of the overwhelm of who He is, we see that we are recipients of His mercy. It may seem small or large, but that it is even there, is large. That God would extend mercy to us. . .unfathomable!

But this is who He is, and this is the consistency of His nature. . . “*from generation to generation.*” This is another piece of the ability to see—to see His mercy in *all* situations. We tend to think of mercy as something that rescues us from difficult situations. Mercy may instead be the ability to *remain* in that situation. And He remains with us.

When we look long at the One we are waiting for, when we look at our lives through Him rather than at Him through our lives, we see His brush strokes of mercy all over the canvas of our lives. And there is a signature on those canvases, from the blood of Calvary. May we be and remain those who fear Him. Lord, hear our prayer.

- **Where have you seen the Lord’s mercy in your life?**
- **When have you most deeply felt that reverential awe?**
- **Where have you felt left without mercy? Can you remember the posture of your heart in that time?**
- **Ask the Lord to let you see Him in a deeper way today, that you might fall to your knees.**

Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Thursday, December 1

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.” Luke 1:52

The One we are waiting for is not One who fits neatly into the world’s ordering of things. He does not yield to the human patterns of “how life should be done.” He is not safe in the way that we know and believe that we long for “safe”. And yet ultimately it is His consistency in which we can lay down all and *know* as the writer of Hebrews tells us: “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*”

But in the meantime, we must know that the bastions we have erected in our own lives are not where our safety lies. We must know that a lifetime of work on our own to establish position and security can be undone in a breath. It is not that God takes delight in seeing our accomplishments and undoing them. It is that God takes delight in being with us as we are about our lives. And what may seem to be so very important to us may, in fact, be an obstacle to the accomplishment of His purposes in our lives.

He takes delight in our seeking of Him, in our looking to Him for the prompting of our hearts. In Isaiah 30:21 we read: “*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’*” “When we are attuned to Him, as He is attuned to us, then it is not about what is accomplished or what is left undone, it is about relationship—an intimate connection with God.

When we yield our accomplishments to Him, then we may be lifted up. It is a lifting up to His heart—where we might see life from His perspective, not from the pulse of the world. And when we are lifted up, and t’s very much a God-thing, we know we are “safe” as the word is truly meant.

Lord Jesus, there are places in my life where I feel like a ruler on a throne—not because you have placed me there, but because I have worked long and hard for those accomplishments. There are also places where I am humbled. Father, enable me to feel the difference, to think of the things I must do to maintain my “royal position” and to think of the feeling of humility. My true “royal position” is with you—that I am your child. Let me linger this day in reflection on that truth, that I may be willing to lay down any work that is not called forth by your still, small voice.

Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Friday, December 2

“He has filled the hungry with good things”. –Luke 1:53

The One we are waiting for created us to hunger. He created us to be in relationship with Him, to hunger for His companionship and His intimacy–His direction. And so we live our lives with that hunger gnawing at our souls.

We have learned along the way how to feed that hunger– just as we have learned how to feed physical hunger. We make choices, and too often we make choices according to the prompting of convenience and ease. When we have physical hunger, it can be much easier to grab some fast food than to take the time to prepare and eat a meal that will offer us true nourishment. And we may be full for a time but not satisfied or nourished at the depth that we could be. When our souls hunger, we can distract them with media or activity, conversations, or we can have a quick experience of worship that leaves us “feeling good.” But in such a manner we cannot be satisfied.

It is not about feeling good, it is about an intimacy of relationship. A relationship where, when we hunger, we turn to Him to satisfy our hunger. That we trust Him to be the ultimate and accurate “spiritual dietician”–who knows just what we need. It’s not about a formula, it’s about recognizing and acknowledging our hunger, it’s about coming to Him–not in a hurry but in humility, it’s about trusting the silences in His presence, it’s about Him.

And His promise is to *fill* the hungry with Himself. But if we do not come to Him to eat, if we do not seek His heart in order to find our lives, our hungering will merely produce a dissonant echo rather than a satisfied certainty.

- *Lord God, reveal to me my hunger*
- *Show me the things I fill myself with other than you*
- *Show me the results of that “filling”*
- *Show me a way in which I can begin to turn to you in that aching, to drink and eat of your goodness.*

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.” Psalm 62:1-2

Week one – The one we are Waiting for

Saturday, December 3

“He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful.” –Luke 1:54

Psalm 124 begins with a terrifying imagining: “*If the Lord had not been on our side. . .*” If you allow your thoughts to take those words and imagine such a thing in your own life, it can certainly be paralyzing. There is so much that we assume we are designing on our own, when in fact we are living in the mercy of the Father alone.

The One we are waiting for *is* on our side. The One for whom we are waiting is in covenant with us—He remembers to be merciful; that is the commitment He has made. And so no matter how deep the darkness of the time in which we walk or the circumstances in which we find ourselves, the Lord “remembers” to be merciful.

As we’ve seen before, mercy is not always lived out in a way that we might orchestrate. I remember when I first came to faith and shortly thereafter I was pleading with the Lord to help two friends be able to qualify to buy a house. They were in their early 50's; he was a truck driver and she a school librarian, so their income was not large. And they kept not being able to procure a loan. I did not hold back at all in letting God know how *I* thought He needed to dispense His mercy. After all, these were wonderful people—why not let them get a house? Within two weeks, the husband dropped dead of a heart attack. Had they already purchased a house, his wife would have been strapped with debt under which she would not have been able to ever rise; she would have been devastated. It was God’s mercy that they not find a home.

And so we are to trust our Lord’s goodness and mercy. Our lives are testimony to His faithfulness from beginning to end. As we wait for our Lord, we need to be prayerfully seeking the eyes to see that mercy. That rather than gathering our own list of what His mercy might look like in our lives/in the world, we would be able to see His Spirit moving, in even the smallest of ways, and know that the fact that He is in our midst is a display of mercy of the greatest sort.

Lord Jesus, there is much in my life that I give to you with blueprints of how you are to accomplish those things. Forgive me, Father. Give me the grace to open my hands and leave them open. Allow me to become so enamored with your heart that I long only for the way that you would unfold this life of mine.

Week Two – What is our Part in Waiting?

Sunday, December 4

“Trust in the Lord and do good.” –Psalm 37:3a

We are not just waiting for God to move; we have a part in the waiting, too. He is always working within us and we are a part of the working out of that. It is a working out that is more than words; it is a life lived.

It is amazingly easy for me to say that I trust God. I trust Him that the sun will rise; I don't look for a rope to help hoist it into the sky each morning. I trust Him to give me breath; I don't spend time figuring out how to position myself to receive the maximum amount of oxygen. So I trust Him. Right?

Sometimes. But there are times when I am looking for that rope—perhaps to pull my children from a difficult situation that I am not sure God can rescue them from. There are times when I am positioning myself outside of the momentum of life, just in case God might forget that I sometimes get overwhelmed.

Here the psalmist simply writes: “trust in the Lord”. We need to ask the Lord to show us where we do that and where we don't. Sometimes it's evident and sometimes it isn't. But the second part of this verse, I believe, helps us to see when we are trusting. You see, if we are “doing good”, then most often we are not concerned about our own well-being but about the well-being of others. And if we're not concerned about ourselves, then we're trusting. Yes, we can “do good” in order to receive from others, but we know the difference. There is a richness in losing ourselves as we serve those the Lord has put on our hearts. There is a richness in having Him as our heart, a richness that allows us to get lost in Him. Where else would we long to be found?

- *Ask the Father to show you the places where you trust Him well.*
- *Ask Him to reveal to you the places where you lean into your own abilities rather than into His adequacy*
- *Ask for His grace to realign your heart, to seek Him and come to know full well His ability to be fully trusted.*

Week Two – What is our Part in Waiting?

Monday, December 5

“Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.” –Psalm 37:3b

When my sons were very young and first exploring their world, they would do something that always intrigued me. They would walk the perimeters of that world with such apparent confidence, but they would *always* know where my husband or I was. They would march from place to place with a look of fierce independence, but they would always keep us in view. As long as they could see us, they knew that they were safe, and it was a safety that gave them the confidence to continue to explore.

Often I wonder why it is that when we grow up we feel we must abandon all of our youthful ways. There was great wisdom in the attentiveness of those young boys. They were not kept from exploration, they were just certain of their safety. And so we read “dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture”. That, however, seems to chafe against our propensity towards independence. So we live our Christian lives in a way that is similar to a puppy intrigued with the newness of life. We come in for a few morsels of food, then run off to see in what adventure we may engage. Back in for a few more morsels—back out again.

We are called to dwell, to remain, to fasten our attention on the land the Lord has given us. Just as we don't wait well, we don't dwell well. But often we don't dwell well because we're looking all around rather than looking at the One who is our provision. When we train our hearts to be fixed on Jesus, it is so much easier to relinquish our momentum and “be” with Him. He becomes our vision.

He may walk us into dark places, but He will walk us rather than having us walk alone. He is our safe pasture; He is our spaciousness. The One we are waiting for in this poignant season is the keeper of our souls. May we seek Him for training and grace to dwell.

Lord God I flee from you daily. My lips say that I want to be in your presence, but then I design my own agenda and off I go. Lord God, when I know my need of you and look long into your eyes, I know such peace and safety; I am dwelling. Thank you that you have prepared safe pasture for me; let that be enough for my wandering heart.

Tuesday, December 6

“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

When I was in my early 20's I was with several teens for a day of tubing on the South Platte River. The water was low, so we spend lots of time just exploring. At one point I saw some little something emerging from the water, and I watched it. For close to an hour I watched it. It was a dragonfly, coming slowly out of the water onto the rock, coming out from its casing, uncurling its abdomen and letting the sun dry its wings, then pulling those wings from its side and in the first fast movement of the time, quickly flying away.

I felt as though I had been in the presence of God. I had been able to delight in a design of His and it was so incredibly rich. His signature is all over our world: from dragonflies to delivery rooms, from sunsets to symphonies, from passion to prayer. God has created so much in which we delight; God has revealed so much of Himself in which we are to delight.

Somewhere along the way a mustiness entered the storerooms of faith. Somewhere along the way we felt our “*work for God*” much too large and important to dilute with delight. Somewhere along the way we were terribly mistaken.

When we look at the Father, we see an expansiveness of delight that is broader than our imaginings. And what is fascinating is that when we delight in Him, He becomes the desire of our heart. We hunger for Him; we know the richness of who He is and what He gives us of Himself. Even the most somber of occasions can become one that is outlined with delight, because Jesus is there in the midst.

- ***Father in what do I delight? What grabs my attention other than you?***
- ***Where are places where it is easy for me to delight. Please bring to mind times when I have seen you and delighted.***
- ***Bring to mind what I know to be true of you, and let me spend some time just delighting in you. Lord God, that you become the true desire of my heart.***

Week Two – What is our Part in Waiting?

Wednesday, December 7

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him.” Psalm 37:5

In a world that flees from commitment, this is a haunting verse. And yet there is an incredible irony that lies within. *When we flee from commitment, we are committing to not being committed!* We tend to create in another form the very thing that we rebel against. It’s not unlike when people come to visit a liturgical church. Some are so distracted by the liturgy, defined as “a prescribed form for public worship”, that they are unable to enter in. If, however, you think about it, even the most loosely formed church has a liturgy—to sing, pray, hear a message and leave may be their prescribed form.

But let’s leave the feeling of confinement and look at what is true. It was God who created us, who calls us by name, who knows our every thought and the content of our every day. It is He who holds all power and knowledge—He who holds the world together. What incredible wisdom to commit our way to Him!

Sometimes we feel as though we should be able to “handle things”. But we don’t need to. As we read in scripture, if my child is starving, I will do everything within my power to procure food for him. How much more would the God of the Universe find resource for our every need?

We commit ourselves to so much in this life, often to things we are not even aware of. But we need to be continually asking whether the things that we are committing to are pools of living waters or stagnant, standing water. The Lord God is worthy of our commitment, is worthy of our trust. Not just because of His power, but also because of His love.

Father, there is much I boldly commit to, and yet often I shy from committing to you. I am afraid at times. I am afraid of what will be asked of me. I am afraid of the cost. And yet the cost is the death of death. Lord God, help me to look around and see others who have committed to you, and let me be gathered up in that great cloud of witnesses: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus!” Heb. 12:-1-2a

Week Two – What is our Part in Waiting?

Thursday, December 8

“Be still before the Lord.” –Psalm 37:7a

“Be still.” Those words bring to mind a request for a young child to not only be quiet but also refrain from any and every bodily twitch that might take him captive. If you are old enough to remember the song, you might hear in your mind a chorus of “To dream the impossible dream. . .”

When are we still? When are we able to just be? When do our eyes and our thoughts stop darting and wondering and planning and calculating? I believe it happens when we are filled.

I think back to the days of nursing my sons. Hunger would bring them to me in what seemed like insatiable desire. There was no detouring them from the mission at hand, and they drank until they were full. But when they were full, they would fall to sleep and lie heavily and limply in my arms. There was no movement; there was no need. They had been filled.

If we come to the Lord for some of our nourishment, the places we have filled elsewhere will still be places of longing. And we will not be able to be still. If we come to the well of provision that God has for us, if we drink deeply, then we will be stilled by His provision as it has become our own.

It is not a matter of coming and being still; need screams most loudly when we try to contain it. It is a matter of coming, of feeding, and then giving way to the rest that we can find in Him alone.

Lord Jesus, I come. I come asking your forgiveness for the other wells I have stopped at along the way. Even though I drank, my spirit knew the waters were bitter. I come to you, you who are fresh and living water, I come with incredible thirst. Let me drink; let me not turn away when I am so inclined; let me drink. That then I may be still and see you for the glorious fullness of who you are.

Week Two – What is our Part in Waiting?

Friday, December 9

“Wait patiently for him.” –Psalm 37:7b

Sometimes I decide that I’ll be virtuous. So I enter the waiting room at the doctor’s office prepared to just sit and wait patiently. I don’t even wear a watch, so I won’t be conscious of the time. If there are people in there, I will engage them in conversation or at least pray for them. If I am alone, I’ll spend the time in prayer. Five minutes into my virtuosity I open my cell phone which has a clock on it “*just to see*”. And thus begins the depletion of patience. Even the rare good magazine that might be found in the waiting room serves as only a temporary distraction.

There is a deep discipline to patience. Throughout the Old Testament God tells the Israelites to “remember” who He is and what He has done. That remembering is the active part that takes us to a place of patience. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, when we recount how He has been so present in our own lives and in the lives of others, then we begin to lose some of the frantic feel. We may lose ourselves in the remembering in a way that lessens the urgency of now and increases our ability to “be” with Him in the midst of the momentum. Time and space loses its importance.

When we know the One we are waiting for, when we know His promises of never leaving us or forsaking us, when we remember His faithfulness in all situations, then we can open the hands we hold so tightly—then we can be held rather than holding. When we know it is Him, we can rest. We can be about the work of our lives and heart, knowing that He will come, knowing that He will act, in just the perfect time.

- *What situations are the most difficult for you in terms of waiting.*
- *Ask the Lord to give you insight as to why that is so.*
- *Ask for the grace to relinquish the parts that are yours to relinquish*
- *Spend some time just rehearsing what you know to be true about your faithful God.*

Week Two – What is our Part in Waiting?

Saturday, December 10

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath” –Psalm 37:8a

These instructions are included in this psalm because these are things that can keep us from the Father. In order to take Him in fully, there are also things that we need to be willing to relinquish acting upon.

Please don't read this as a condemnation of anger. There is much in this world to be angry about, and the stirring up of those emotions can often result in some very productive changes in the life situations of ourselves and others. But much is also destroyed when anger becomes wrath and is lavishly unleashed.

Anger is an emotion that often comes when we are waiting or attempting to be patient. When we are looking at the situations of our lives and feeling slighted, when we are seeing people we love not getting a fair shake from others, when we are feeling inadequate, or when we have spent too much money or too little time, these and a multitude of other circumstances can leave us very angry. And that anger often ends up being unleashed in inappropriate ways.

Again, we are wooed to look in the face of Jesus. The longer we look at the things that make us angry or remain in the circumstances in which we are wading in our own sin, the more likely we are to be unable to refrain or turn. But when we look to Him, we get a sense of insight that transcends time and space. We are no longer bound by clocks or calendars. We are looking at the One who loves us enough to have taken our sins to the cross and die for them. There is such an incredible inequity in that, which really catches us off guard and enables us to be moved from the place of anger into the place of hope.

- *What are the things that anger me that come out of my own sin or inadequacies?*
- *Ask the Father's forgiveness of those places.*
- *What are the things that anger me that I also know anger the Father?*
- *Ask Him if there is something you are called to do in any of those situations.*

Week Three – Waiting Together

Sunday, December 11

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46-47

We are all waiting with the porch lights on . But because we are often waiting within our own homes, there is a deep sense that we are waiting alone. That just isn't so. Still the enemy loves to paint our mind canvases with thoughts like: “He'll never do that for you,” “Everyone else has it all together”, “You call yourself a Christian and have thoughts like that?!” You know the litany; you know the anguish.

It is time to come out of our homes– the places where we have isolated ourselves. It is time for us to see that God created us to make this journey together as the Body of Christ. Granted, some very destructive things have been done in the name of the Body. But God doesn't say “If they let you down, go back to your own “home” and hunker down and hope for the best.” No, when we are let down we are looking at people, we need to refocus and press in.

Scripture gives us some rich and wonderful pictures of how we are to wait together. Here we see the early believers living in the overflow of their love of the Lord. They are together not just at the temple, but in their homes. They are not generating the joy in their hearts; we cannot generate joy. But they are living in the overflow, which gives them an expansiveness of spirit. May our hearts grow to do the same.

- ***Where do I stay in my own “home”, unwilling to be vulnerable with others?***
- ***Where do I count the cost of being an active part of the Body?***
- ***Whose Body is it?***
- ***Father show me how I can let go of myself and grab hold of you, relinquishing concern for self and bathing in the expansiveness of you.***

Week Three – Waiting Together

Monday, December 12

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” Acts 2:1

In Acts 1 Jesus had instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit. They prodded Him for dates and times, but He redirected their minds to the power they would receive—the power that would enable them to be His witnesses.

As was true with much that Jesus taught, there were not many specifics given; we are all inclined to feel more confident if we know specifics. But then there is little expansiveness to our faith.

When they were together, they could “remember” together what it was that He had taught them. When one might become weak of faith, another might retell a story and kindle the faith of the weaker brother. That’s how the Body works when it’s working well.

There is also something profound that happens when people share a common experience, here the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Having gone through this experience together, they each represent a place of accountability for one another. So if one tries to pull back from the call of God, the others—sometimes not even by words but by presence— are living reminders of the experience.

Jesus instructed the apostles, and they obeyed. His presence was still so fresh in their hearts and minds. We, too, are called to keep His presence fresh for one another in the Body of Christ as we wait together for the coming of our Lord.

Lord God you instruct us to be together, to “remember” you together. Make our mouths instruments of praise—let our words be salt as we encourage one another on this journey. And then, in your tender economy, we will be encouraged,too.

Week Three – Waiting Together

Tuesday, December 13

**“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’”
Exodus 32:1**

Of course, we are also human beings. And when human beings get together, while there can be great godly encouragement, there can also be a mob mentality which corporately comes to a place of saying “Enough!” and then demands its own way.

We looked last week at our part in waiting, and as we read this story in Exodus we can see how the Israelites were perhaps patient for a time but then their hearts began to wonder, “what about us?” From that point on chapters are prolifically written for the book It’s All About Me. But we all know that, don’t we. We can be so right on target, so connected with the Lord, and then the slightest wind comes and we’re fearful, or we’re distracted, or we’re compassionate towards evil. It’s not that odd.

Even leaders fall this way. Listen to Aaron when Moses confronts him about the sacred calf. First he says: “You know how prone these people are to evil.” And then, “They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

If we are to be the Body as God has designed us to be, we must be focused on Him—not what He can do for us or how loving Him will make our lives better—just on Him. For when we are immersed in His presence, then the temptation that besets us all will have so much quieter a voice, perhaps even inaudible. It is for our Lord that we wait, let us help one another to silence the competing voices.

Lord God, I know my condition. I know that I, too, am inclined to throw in the gold and seek other gods. Forgive me that sin. Let me be bold enough to know that I need my brothers and sisters in Christ to steer me to your heart and your heart alone, and let me do the same for them.

Week Three – Waiting Together

Wednesday, December 14

Day Four—“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’” –Mark 9:2-5

When we experience the presence and the power of God corporately, it is *more* than profound. That we get to be together at such a time is second only to being able to be there at all. And there is a deep longing to stay in that time, to remain on the mountaintop.

When I read this scripture, I am Peter! “Let me stay, Lord! This is good!” Perhaps it comes from the fact that no place this side of heaven is ever home, but when we are unquestionably in the presence of the Lord, we do not want to leave. It is as though we have caught a glimpse of what our true home is—the home we long for.

Then we assume that, if we stay, we would never lose that fullness— that we would be able to live as God has created us to live. And that would be good. Interesting that in Mark we don’t read a response to Peter from Jesus. Sometimes the unfolding of circumstances reveals what we already know, and we don’t need a response.

And so they came back down the mountain. But together they had tasted of the fullness of the Lord and had experienced a corporate sense of Him. They had Him in common. They had one another as reminders when life’s circumstances became so confusing and unclear. Surely this is how the Lord has created us to be together in Him.

- *Remember experiences that you have had of God’s presence with others.*
- *Have you revisited those places with those people?*
- *Think of a person with whom you are close in faith. Ask the Lord to show you a means of experiencing Him with that person—that you might use it as a means of growing in faith.*

Week Three – Waiting Together

Thursday, December 15

**“He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”
1Thessalonians 5:10-11**

There is to be no distance. Whether we are awake or asleep, whether we are alone or with others, whether circumstances are bright or darkness is falling, we are to live together with Him. But we need one another in order to do that.

In this verse in Thessalonians, Paul calls us to encourage one another and build each other up. What does that look like? We have developed a cultural posture that sees encouraging and building up as saying good things about a person. It’s wonderful if you can see good things about a person, and it certainly is nice to receive. But Paul doesn’t say “encourage those who are worthy of encouragement and build up those who are doing good things.” It is encouraging all and building up all.

Encouragement of personal virtue falls flat in no time. Building up a person in anything other than the Lord is actually substanceless. The way to encourage one another is to hold up Jesus to one another. It is to encourage one another towards godliness, to hold up His standard of holiness, and to cheer one another on in that direction. It is to walk along side, to lift one another up when (not if) we fall, it is to pray for one another through our darkness and rejoice with one another when the light returns again.

It is a beautiful gift that we are given, to be able to encourage one another. It is an awesome responsibility, to be a light on the road that another travels. But He is the One who gives us that light; we are called to take our eyes off of ourselves and tend that light for one another. We must wait together for Him, that we might receive the gifts He has for us in one another.

- *Where do you find yourself offering godly encouragement to others?*
- *Where is it a struggle for you?*
- *Ask the Father to help you to take your eyes off of yourself and be able to offer that encouragement*
- *Give thanks for those who have “held the Christ light for you.”*

Week Three – Waiting Together

Friday, December 16

“Then the angel left her. At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!.’ “ Luke 1:39-42

News like the news that Mary had received could have been enough to cause her to withdraw into her home, barring visitors and pining away in fear and self-pity. The difference is that Mary *knew* that God had come to her. She recognized Him, she yielded to Him. When one has been in the presence of God, it is not easy to keep still.

So Mary “hurried” to the hill country of Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. The angel had told her that Elizabeth was with child—even there, God gave her a place to go, a person to be with who had also been a recipient of God’s favor. That is such a picture of His heart towards us.

There is an amazing economy to God’s love. He uses us for one another in myriad ways. Mary went to Elizabeth—the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaped in response to Mary and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Big time blessing for Elizabeth! Then Elizabeth exclaimed to Mary “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.” What encouragement for Mary!

God meets us as only He can and then allows us one another in which to find confirmation of His love. When we let Him work in us, when we allow His Holy Spirit to fill and guide us, we can see the weavings of His love in ways we never could have crafted or imagined.

Lord Jesus, I long for your encouragement. I know you are breathing it into my life every day, but I confess that I cannot always hear it or know it for certain. Thank you for the people you have and will put in my life to turn me to you, that I might hear more clearly and be steadied and strengthened to do your work. Thank you for the people whose life you will put me in, that I may do the same for them.

Week Three – Waiting Together

Saturday, December 17

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” John 20:19-20

We can only imagine the disciples’ world. Out of certainty had come apparent failure. Not only did they lose their Lord and teacher, their own lives were at risk. They who had followed the Lord so closely now felt as though there was no foundation on which to stand.

When they were together—Jesus came. Jesus comes when we are together; Jesus brings His peace (for we all have varying responses in His presence); He shows us that He is real.

And from the description of doors being locked in fear, we know that His coming was such a gift. He didn’t give a great cosmic shout: “Hey, don’t worry—I’m here”. No, He knew that they needed to see Him, to see where His wounds were. They needed the encouragement of His presence.

We need the encouragement of His presence, and we are called to be that for one another. We can’t know how that will be played out—sometimes with great sacrifice, sometimes with great joy and ease. But in our willingness to be that for one another comes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to enable that. And how amazing is it, that we might bring Him to one another. There is no more holy ground.

- *Where do you need to see the Lord right now?*
- *Ask Him to come in a way that you will know without question.*
- *Where do you have opportunity to bring the Lord to someone right now?*
- *Ask Him to orchestrate those encounters in His amazing way.*

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Sunday, December 18

“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.’”

Luke 1:30

Our God is not God from a distance. Our God became flesh and lived on this earth among us. Our God did not wind up the universe and go off for coffee. He stands along side each one of us on every step of the journey. We have a God who is close enough to touch.

Sometimes that is terrifying; we believe we want distance, but that isn't what the deepest part of our hearts long for. We long for His touch.

The angel came to Mary, and like so many other times in Scripture when God makes his presence known, the first words are “do not be afraid” or “peace”. It has to be a gloriously terrifying thing to have such an encounter. And then come the words “You have found favor with God.”

What we must realize is that those are words for all of us. Proof that we have found favor with God was embodied in Jesus as He hung on the cross. Listen to the words He speaks to us in Isaiah 43: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”*

We have found tangible, palpable favor with God. The God we are waiting for is waiting for us.

Lord Jesus, it's just so amazing that I am precious and honored in your sight and that you love me. While that is often hard for me to believe, it is the truth of your heart as recorded in your Word. Let me linger this day in the knowledge that I am waiting for One who is waiting for me.

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Monday, December 19

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’” Luke 2:8-10

Once again a visitation, heaven breaking through to earth. Ordinary men about their work, ordinary men keeping watch. There is a posture of attentiveness there that beckons our notice. Can one see the Lord if not looking for Him? . . .

I love that the angel came to ordinary people. The religious were looking for the coming Messiah, but they had their own picture of how and where the King would come. And they missed the glory of the Lord shining around them. But the shepherds saw it, and as might be expected, they were terrified.

Again the words of comfort “Do not be afraid.” Not only that, but again follows encouragement: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” What greater confirmation than such a word spoken to ordinary men?

There is such deception in the teaching that we must get our act together to see the Lord, to receive the Lord, to be in the presence of the Lord. We end up spending our lives trying to accomplish something that will never be accomplished. We must instead look up; we must bring others along side and encourage them to look up.

God has come; God is coming. And as we watch together, even the most ordinary of lives will be illumined by the glory of the Lord. What an amazing Father!

Amazing Father, you chose me. I can do nothing in return but love you. Teach me to love you. Teach me to see the glory shining in my ordinary life. Teach me to help others to lift their eyes to you. You have come; you are coming. Lord bless us all as we wait—that we may gather ordinary others to be in the family of extraordinary you!

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Tuesday, December 20

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . .the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” John 1:1, 14

What would make you come? What would make you pierce the distance between heaven and earth? Love would make you come.

This is the stuff that can take our imaginations and cause them to fly. What was it like in the beginning? What was it like to come from there to here? What was it like to be God and man? What was it like on the cross? What was it like to return to your Father?

A God who is close enough to touch beckons questions. We question when we are interested; we imagine when our hearts have been taken captive. We linger when we know that we are safe.

We are safe with you; we are safe in you. Although all of the world is uncertain and unsafe—you are our certainty. In you we rest and receive. From you we go out, that others may be gathered into your fold, that others might come close enough to hear the heartbeat of the God of all creation.

God our Father, I stand in awe. You came and resided in our midst; you continue to reside there. You came and took upon yourself all the sin of the world, my sin, and still you want to be with me. Lord, while I cannot understand you, I know I am known by you. And in being known I am given a freedom in which I can simply “be”. Loving Father, let me “be” nowhere else but in you.

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Wednesday, December 21

“A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ “ John 20:26-27

Jesus had come to the disciples the week before, but Thomas wasn't there. Jesus could have easily relied on the disciples telling Thomas that they had seen Him. Jesus could have easily decided that Thomas should believe what he heard, that he didn't need to see.

But Jesus knows us. He knew Thomas and knew that Thomas needed to see— to touch. He didn't condemn Thomas for that; He came to him. And when the skeptic could touch the wounds, his reply was *“My Lord and my God!”*. That was all that he needed.

We tend to think that there should be certain prescribed ways in which to come to Jesus. Denominations and individuals throughout the ages have tried to put together formulas, which have succeeded mainly in generating guilt and rebellion. The words to the old hymn come to mind: *“Just as I am. . .”* Jesus takes that “just” and meets us there, and it is in that meeting that we can come fully to life in Him.

We have a God who is close enough to touch. When we bring ourselves close enough for Him to touch us, all heaven breaks loose. And there is such incredible freedom in being just who we are and hearing His “Yes”.

***Lord Jesus, forgive me the places where I have tried to bring other than myself to you.
Forgive me the places where I have been ashamed of who I am and tried to be someone else.
You died for me; give me the grace to live for You.***

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Thursday, December 22

“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch His cloak, I will be healed.’” Matthew 9:20-21

There is something about “*knowing*”, something deep and profound. I remember the morning after my first son was born. My husband and I were taking a (slow) walk down the hall of the hospital when I heard a cry from the nursery. There were perhaps 15 babies in the nursery at that time, and it could have been any one of them. But when I heard the cry, I knew – that was my son. And it was.

I imagine the crying out that this woman had been doing for years—crying that wasn’t often heard, as she would have been ostracized for her “uncleanness”. And yet she somehow “*knew*” that if she could only get close enough to Jesus she would be healed.

And Jesus, in the account that Luke records of this story “*knew*” He had been touched even in the midst of a huge crowd. He said “*Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.*”

Our God is close enough to touch, He is enough to heal us. We have the choice of whether we stay outside and away or whether we press in and reach out. We will be noticed, and that may be uncomfortable; we will be healed, and that will be freeing.

Lord God, there are many things that have bled from me for years. There are relationships that have lost life, there are dreams that have faded, there are places where I need only reach out for you, but I hold back. I hold back in fear, I hold back in unbelief, I hold back for reasons I don’t even know. I ask for the strength—in the driest of places—to reach out, to touch you. And I ask for the grace to believe that not only will new life come to me, but you will turn and see me, and I will be known. Lord, hear my prayer. . .

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Friday, December 23

Day Six— “Moved by the Spirit, he (Simeon) went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.’ “ Luke 2:27-29

This story begins: *“There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”*

Simeon longed to see the Savior. He lived his life in that longing, filled with the Holy Spirit of God. And God granted him his heart’s desire, after which Simeon was content to die, knowing all would be well—would be as it should be.

We have a God who is close enough to touch. We are given the Holy Spirit to encourage us, to comfort us, to prompt us into places and situations we wouldn’t choose, but they are the very places where God resides. What will we do?

What do we long for? Do we long for God *but also* more money, a house with a view, land in the mountains, a more attentive spouse? Or do we merely long for God? Simeon had been single-focused; God revealed Himself to Simeon. And that was enough.

God is enough. As the Good News Bible says in Psalm 23:1— *“The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.”* What will we reach for? Where will our gaze be fixed?

Lord God, I want to be so taken by you that it is you alone that I long for. I want to be so accessible to the Holy Spirit, that it is you alone that I am moved by. I want to be so aware of my total and complete need for you that it is you alone that I come to. Lord, hear my prayer.

Week Four – Close Enough to Touch

Saturday, December 24

“So they (the shepherds) hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.” Luke 2:16-18

The shepherds left their sheep. These are guys who stayed with their sheep day and night to protect them. They hurried off in response to the angel of the Lord; they hurried off to find a baby in a manger. They knew.

And so our Lord has arrived. Will we go? What must we leave behind? Will we leave our livelihood and everything else that has come to matter to us? We really can't take those things with us. So will we go?

Oh, I pray so. For myself as well as for all of us. Because when we are willing to respond to the overwhelm of the presence of God, when we are willing to take no thought of the cost or what is left behind, we will find life like we have *never* known it before.

We have looked at the One we are waiting for. We have seen our part in waiting. We have come to understand the strength of waiting together, and now He is here to touch. Will we come to Him?

Coming will not be a place of rest, but instead another part of the journey. The shepherds saw Him but then it says *“When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”* When we see Him, we are moved to spread the word, to let others know.

And then here is the beautiful picture *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”* It's just as we have been told, all the promises of God in that manger. It's just as we've been told; may we return together glorifying and praising God. May what has begun on this day change our hearts forever, together, in Him. O Come let us adore Him!