

Companions on the Way



Worship Resources

Advent



Daily Reflections: Week 1

Awaken

For personal devotions, I suggest that you spend time each morning before the other concerns of your day overtake you. If you are of the discipline of formal Morning Prayer then you may wish to incorporate these readings and reflections into worship instead of other readings. Keep it as simple as you can for you are inviting your heart as well as your mind to quieten and open. Less is often more.

Day One: Read Matthew 24: 36 - 44

Acknowledge whatever jolting or jarring of the spirit, feel any reluctance or excitement or dread, allow whatever reaction/s you have to happen in response to this reading. This is Scripture that intends to awaken the reader.

Many of us are tired before Advent even starts knowing that it heralds our busiest time of the year. Maybe all we want is a little more sleep or at least rest before we start the work of Advent. But we hear Jesus speaking to his own near the end of his earthly life and he is urging his followers to awaken and stay awake as things are about to happen. Jesus asks his followers to look back to just before the flood and the ending of the then known world and forward to the ending of their known world.

Great things are nearing. The new order, the reign of God, requires that the old order get shaken about - disordered, disturbed, disrupted.

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Reflect on what in your inner world, in your shared life with others, and in the outside world needs disordering (or at least significant reordering), needs a little disturbing, needs to be disrupted? How ready and desirous of being disrupted by the coming reign of God are you? What do you long for to be different? And what are you not quite ready to hand over or have overhauled? Identify the longing and the resistance. No judgement just self knowledge.

Be encouraged that Maria Boulding says in her wonderful work "The Coming of God" that we need only desire to have desire and that is enough for the spirit to begin its work.

And if you can find any desire for disturbance and being stirred up consider checking out the band [Disturbed sing Sounds of Silence \(several versions are available on YouTube\)](#) to allow yourself to be disturbed by the unorthodox treatment of a classic song and- for me at least - to get a thrilling sense of why our world needs to be disturbed and reordered. Whenever I watch this video I feel a deep desire for things to be disturbed and changed in our world, I get a sense of the urgency of the coming of God into this world. See how you react.

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Day Two: Read Isaiah 2: 1 - 5

What beautiful words. Think of the barren and broken parts of your life and relationships as you hear the promise of justice and a new order being established. Think of all the things on the evening news as you visualise the nations coming for just judgement and reordering.

Can you visualise spears being beaten into ploughshares? What examples of spears being beaten into ploughshares can you identify in your life, in the world that you know?

If you need some help visualising this google images of this, listen and watch [TEDtalk by Jolyon Mitchell "Swords into Ploughshares: Aims into Art"](#). I have a pair of earrings my adult children bought me last Mother's Day that are made from bullets by women in Ethiopia who have been treated for obstetric fistula. Many charities have similar products. It can help our stuck imaginations break free and begin to recognise the need and the opportunities to see a new way of being the nations, communities, and families of earth.

And consider listening to the gospel favourite "Down by the Riverside" sometimes also known as Study War No More. YouTube has great renditions by gospel singers Sweet Honey in the Rock and a more bluesy one by Ben and Micah Hester. Sing along; nurture the desire for a different world. Go about your day with this song in your heart, with images of how weapons can be turned into art. Let Isaiah be the lens through which you experience the everyday.

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Day Three: Read Psalm 122

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; 'May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.' For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, 'Peace be within you.'"

To a great extent - our peace, our prosperity, our very survival depends on each other. We can think of this in political and environmental terms. I cannot pray for my family and friend's wellbeing without invoking justice, mercy and abundance for all. Not in this interconnected world.

How does the image of an interconnected world sit with you? Does it fill you with love and concern for others or feel overwhelming? Do you want to determine who you are connected with and who is left out of your world?

[You might like to look up the YouTube video called Cosmic Eye.](#)

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Day Four: Read Romans 13:9 - 14

Does this reading sound menacing to you? Does it make you feel like you and others are running out of time? Certainly, as Paul wrote this from within a prison cell he may have felt a sense of time running down for himself and for those waiting for the return of Jesus in their time. But this can also be read as an invitation - albeit it in urgent language - to ever deepening levels of awakening and awareness. Conversion, coming to belief and baptism, is just the beginning. There is yet more, always more. Maybe rather than anxious we might feel excited, hopeful, affirmed by this reading.

The path we are on is important, is so important that it is always inviting us deeper and further. The urgency of the passage need not be understood as threatening rather than as encouraging. The moral urgency is not only about what not to do but all the good that is called from us for our sake and for the sake of the world.

I can't help but think of that old Advent hymn "There's a Light Upon the Mountain." 'He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way, he is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day: but his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above; for the drumbeats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.'

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Day Five: Read all four readings set for the First Sunday in Advent. I share with you where my reflections have taken me. Where are you being led?

"... it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep." (Romans 13:11)

Most spiritual traditions have the theme of awakening as one their primary messages. But what are we awakening to? Many of us in the church and in the general community are getting ready to remember and welcome a baby, the baby Jesus. We are getting ready for Christmas and all the wonderful things that means for many of us. So why are our Advent readings so disturbing? Year after year we get taken by surprise and unsettled. Advent, especially in the light of Matthew's gospel, prepares us for making room for the baby Jesus and the new world that he heralded by having our known world shaken up.

Isaiah can be read as quite triumphant. Matthew can be read as quite historically about end-times. And Romans makes it clear that believing, or conversion to the Christian faith, is not necessarily awake enough! It may seem that after all these years (and some of us have been celebrating and earnestly "doing" Advent for decades) we are waiting still to be awake enough!

One way of understanding the perennial call to awaken is that we all live historically and spiritually in between the time of the historical incarnation of the divine in human flesh (the time of Jesus walking upon the earth) and the second coming, or fulfilment of the human-divine relationship. Our awakening then is in this context of always coming to experience more fully the implications of the incarnation and the still to be fulfilled potential of our part in the cosmos. In a sense then we are always awakening, growing in awareness and enlightenment (or being filled with the light). So, year after year it is right that we should be reminded of the need to awaken. And season after season we grow in grace because we grow not from our starting place at the beginning but from where we are now.

And I believe that as the community of believers we are called to be awakened in the space between the triumphal image of Israel (or our religious side) being the wise centre of the known world that all come to for wisdom and righteous judgement and the frightening images from Matthew of end time destruction and uncertainty. Both images can be projected onto the world

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as we experience it personally and through our newsfeeds. And yes, who among us does not wish that a spiritually righteous wise nation might enact God's laws in our seemingly lawless world? And who among us does not see and hear things that make us fear that surely we are getting near the end of where our human error and greed can take us?

I believe that we are called to hear and see both images and to awaken to both the reality of how things are-wonderful and dreadful- and to be awakened to how things might be if we lived as expressions of the reign of God now where we are, individually (Gust us) and collectively (all of us). We are to awaken to what is and what can be.

Personally: in our souls, in our most intimate relationships, in our workplaces and in our communities. And that means first and foremost in our imaginations and hearts and minds. We are called upon to develop a longing, an appetite for justice and mercy and grace and peace and joy. We need to desire the reign of God so much that we not only want it later when our lives are finished but now while we live. And to dedicate our lives into living into and out from the certain knowledge that God loves matter, human flesh, creaturely existence not only in his son whose historic birth we are getting ready to celebrate but in every expression including us and our enemies and our fragile precious planet!!!

Questions for the faithful people:

1. What are you afraid of?
2. What hopeful signs of the kingdom do you see?
3. What are you prepared to do with your life to make the kingdom real?

Can you hear the drumbeats of your heart over whatever other noises clamour outside your door? And if you're not entirely excited then remember even the desire to desire the coming of God is enough.

More information:

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