

## WEEK #1 – JOURNEY OF PREPARATION AND PEACE

November 22<sup>nd</sup> – Monday

**Centering Breath Prayer: Child of peace...prepare me for your love.**

### **Opening Prayer:**

*Dearest and most precious God, I have come to you this day to begin a journey of love by your side. You have honored me by offering a love so vast that I am humbled by its magnitude. As we begin this season which is so commercialized by the world, I enter into your peaceful presence to bring my heart to you and blot out the distractions that would hinder our journey together. Please walk beside me through the coming weeks and bring me a deeper understanding of your love and fill me with your peace as we travel through this busy and often overwhelming time. In the loving name of the Christ Child, I pray. Amen.*

### **Scripture: Philippians 4:4-9**

**Key Verses: Philippians 4:6-8: (6) “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (NRSV).**

As we gird ourselves up to face the onslaught of the frantic, rushing holiday season, let us pause to look at the reason behind it all. We are about to take a journey with our Lord, winding through the pitfalls and the anxieties, the joys and the pleasures, the stresses and the frustrations. It is a season of extremes. But in the midst of it all is the sustaining love of God. We may have made a circus of this holiday season, but God has sent us a Savior in the form of a little child who will lead us all in the greatest journey of all, the journey of love.

I am reminded of John 3:16-17: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (NRSV). Not a scripture passage that we normally associate with the Christmas holidays, but worth repeating anyway. It is that ultimate love which began our journey in the first place. It is also that ultimate love which can guide us through this chaotic and often painful as well as sublimely joyful season. In the United States, Thursday of this week is Thanksgiving Day, a day set aside to give thanks for the many blessings we have received throughout the past year. Other countries celebrate such a day at other times, but as I live in the US and most of my readers do as well, I will treat this day as the holiday we celebrate here. However, even if it is not a national day of thanksgiving, it is still a worthy way to prepare for the coming onslaught of the commercialized holiday season we all face.

Most Advent devotionals will wait until this coming Sunday, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent to begin, but I like to use this week to get us into the right mind set to prepare for Christ’s coming natal celebration and the beginning of another year in our faith journey. This year, we begin this preparation with a look at Philippians 4:4-9. It is an exhortation

to rejoice in the Lord always, to leave our worries and anxieties behind, to make our requests of God with thanksgiving in prayer so that God's peace may fill our souls. Our journey of love begins in rejoicing and thanksgiving and continues in peace when we walk alongside the God of love. This time of reflection and travel alongside our Lord can take us through all kinds of struggles, stresses and difficulties that this season may present to us. It can heighten our joy and fill us with God's unsurpassed peace when we travel with the God of love as our constant companion each day. The journey of love we take will help us to concentrate on whatever is true, honorable, just, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise instead of those things which would pull us off the path and separate us from our sustaining God of love. God first loved us and chose to walk with us. Without that love from God, we would be lost indeed. Let us take a journey with our God, a journey of love, winding through this holiday season. May it nourish us and sustain us and fill us with peace. Amen.

### **Additional Scripture: John 3:16-17**

#### **Questions for reflection and/or journaling:**

1. What are some of the worries and anxieties that I can give to God in prayer with thanksgiving?
2. Where might this journey of love take me this holiday season?
3. What are some true, honorable, just, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise things that I can think about along this journey of love that will sustain me along the way?

#### **Suggestions for action:**

Each day I will try to give you some suggestions for action that you might take to make this journey more real and personal. Today I would like to suggest that for the next few weeks you set up a small tree. It may be a traditional small Christmas type tree or it may be a few branches of a dry tree in a pot, or even a paper tree cut out and put on a wall. Each day I will give you a word or a phrase which you can add to your tree. You might write them on ribbon or paper cut outs, such as leaves, butterflies, hearts, footsteps or whatever suits you. It is hoped that you will discover other words or short phrases within the message or thoughts spawned by the message that you will add to your tree each day. As you see this tree throughout our journey of love together, it is hoped these words will spark memories, ideas and feelings that take your journey in new directions and beyond the words which I write. This is your journey of love with God and I am just along as a shadow of the love that God's light may bring your way. Today's beginning phrase is: **JOURNEY OF LOVE**

#### **Closing Prayer:**

*God of love, as I begin this journey of love with you, help me to find what is true, honorable, just, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. May I focus on these things as we walk along together. I long for your love and for the peace only you can give as we travel through this hectic season. May I never forget the reason we celebrate this season: your constant and sustaining love given through your Son, the Christ Child whose birth we are about to celebrate. Help me to find joy, peace and love for all along this wondrous journey of love. In the name of the Christ Child, I pray. Amen.*