

November 26th – Friday

Centering Breath Prayer: Child of peace...bring me into your kingdom.

Opening Prayer:

Precious Lord, you are so dear to me. I long to be a part of your kingdom and so come today to travel with you once more so that I might become a part of your kingdom on earth. It seems like it is taking forever for your kingdom to come on earth and it is so easy to give in to the temptation that it isn't real and you really aren't coming again at all. As we await the celebration of your first coming, work with me to long for your return in power and glory to usher in your kingdom forever. May I be a part of that day. In your glorious name, I pray. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 24:36-44

Key Verse: Matthew 24:2-44: (42) “So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming. (43) Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. (44) You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected” (NLT).

The official holiday of Thanksgiving is over. Vast amounts of food have been consumed, family ties have been renewed, the parades are over and Santa has arrived at stores and in the news. The Christmas season has officially arrived in the commercial world and today is usually the largest shopping day of the year. The cycle of life continues along its merry way and we are swept along with it. Our schedules are beginning to fill up as the holiday festivities commence.

Our scripture passage today seems a strange one to be a part of the opening week of Advent. We don't usually associate the second coming of Christ with the Christmas story of Christ's birth. Yet we must remember that during the waiting season of Advent we are not waiting for the incarnation of God in the birth of the Christ Child. That event took place some 2000 or more years ago. We will revisit that event many times over the next few weeks and discuss its significance for us in many ways. But the real event we are awaiting is the incarnation of Christ in us, the arrival of the Kingdom of God, or Heaven as it is sometimes called, on earth. This is sometimes also called the second coming of Christ. Verses 37-41 of our passage talk of the cycle of life which will continue right up until the moment of Christ's coming even as it did in the time of Noah and the great flood. In our own day we might think of the events of 9/11/2001. The cycle of life continues. We give birth and die and marry and hold feasts such as many of us did yesterday, and do the ordinary things of life here on earth. Sometimes this cycle is suddenly interrupted by cataclysmic events and life is no longer ordinary. Such was the case on 9/11 and in the days which followed, life was altered in a significant way. Christ's birth was an even more significant event, though it took place in a very obscure place to very simple people and was witnessed by few. But life was changed radically because of that birth and the life of Christ on earth. The incarnation of Immanuel meant that we now have access to the Kingdom of God. We have been

adopted as sons and daughters of God. But life on earth has not altered as radically as we would like to see happen. There is still death and suffering and hunger and abuse and many other ills that don't belong in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God has not yet "*come, [God's will is not] done on earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). Christ has not yet come in power and glory to usher in his kingdom.

As we leave the holiday of Thanksgiving, though not our gratitude, and enter into this Christmas season we are reminded that we are waiting for something other than Christ's birth, though we celebrate it with great fanfare. What we are really awaiting is the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. So this preparation time, this waiting time of Advent, is one of watchfulness, of making ready for Christ's kingdom. Christ's birth was not the end of the story, but the beginning. Christ's life, his teachings, even his death and resurrection were not the end of the story, but the preparation for the kingdom to come on earth. Those were a part of the journey of love which Christ undertook for you and for me. The destination of the journey of love both by Christ and by ourselves is the Kingdom of God. Becoming prepared to enter and watching for the arrival of the Kingdom of God are a part of the journey of love we have entered this holiday season. Our waiting is active, not passive. As we continue the journey we will have many opportunities to glimpse the Kingdom of God as we travel and learn about our part in ushering it into our lives every day. Let us continue the journey and pray daily, "*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10 NIV). In this way we can keep watch and be ready for Christ's second coming even as we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, Immanuel, God with us.

Additional Scripture: Matthew 6:7-15

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. If Christ were to come back today, would I be ready?
2. Would I recognize the Kingdom of God if I suddenly found myself in it?
3. What part might I play in bringing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven?

Suggestions for action:

1. Phrase for your tree: **KINGDOM OF GOD**
2. Begin a list of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God as you understand it. Be prepared to add to that list as we continue to travel along the journey of love. Jesus taught many things about it in his parables.
3. Live today as if you were already a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Closing Prayer:

O God, I want to live in your kingdom. I want to be ready to receive you when you come again. Make my heart ready for your presence and teach me about your kingdom so that I will recognize its attributes when they appear on earth. Help me keep watch for you around me as I live my life. Guide my words and my actions today as I live my life so that I may be more like you and closer to your kingdom. In your awesome name, I pray. Amen.

November 27th – Saturday

Centering Breath Prayer: Child of peace...bring us peace.

Opening Prayer:

Precious Child of peace, I come before you today to continue our journey of love and to learn more of you and your kingdom. Open my eyes to the peace you have available to your people and teach me from your word that I might become a peacemaker within this hostile world. In your awesome name, I pray. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 122

Key Verses: Psalm 122:6-9: (6) “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May those who love you be secure. (7) May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. (8) For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, ‘Peace be within you.’ (9) For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity” (NIV).

Peace. Though most of us long for it, few of us ever achieve it in great measure. We live in a violent world where peace is rarely valued and certainly not advocated as a way of life. Things were no different in the time of Christ. His country was a conquered land and the violent overthrow of the Roman government was highly desired by many. As the Messiah, Jesus was expected to free his people by leading them as a warrior king such as King David, his ancestor, had been. Prince of Peace was not the most important title they wished to acknowledge until after the Romans had been kicked out of their country.

Our scripture passage today is a Psalm attributed to King David, warrior king and ancestor of our Lord Jesus, the Christ. His reign knew little peace, yet here he urges the people to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, King David’s home city and capital of his kingdom. But even more importantly, it is the city where the temple of the Lord was located. *“For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.”* There is no longer only one place to find the house of the Lord, our God. All places are home to the Lord, so for the sake of the house of the Lord our God, we pray for peace in all places. The peace of the city comes down to the peace of those who live within its walls and homes. Our prayers for the city are prayers for brothers (and sisters) and friends. As we stand on the eve of the official beginning of the season of Advent, let us bring our prayers for peace to mingle with those of others so that the Prince of Peace, Immanuel, the Christ Child whose birth we celebrate once more, may use us to work peace into this violent world and hasten the Kingdom of God on earth. We begin this process by coming into the house of the Lord, wherever that may be and earnestly praying for peace. There is no peace in the world without it first beginning within ourselves. If we are not at peace in our own souls, how can we expect there to be peace in the world.

One of the things which most characterizes the Kingdom of God, in my opinion, is peace. As we approached the Thanksgiving holiday I told some online friends that what I most hoped for on Thanksgiving was a calm day. I live with my Mother and she

has dementia. It is an insidious disease, stealing her memories and turning her into a willful child at times, often causing painful arguments which destroy our peace within the household. More than anything, I desired a calm day without the strife which such arguments caused. No matter how much I know intellectually that she is no longer able to reason things out and to understand explanations of things, I still get frustrated and lose my patience and my temper with her when she asks why she must do things and I give her a reason which she completely ignores. I lose my peace. I suddenly understand how people can become abusers of the elderly when I want to shake some understanding into her or when she glares at me with daggers in her eyes because she insists she has already taken her medication which I am insisting she needs to take. Peace is something I long for, but don't always know how to achieve. Thankfully, we had that calm day. My prayer was answered. It was a good day. I know that only with the help of Immanuel, God with me, can I find peace within myself and work for peace within my own household. If there is this much work to find peace in each household, is it any wonder that there is no peace in our world? As we continue on the journey of love together, let us look for avenues of peace and strive to become peacemakers with those around us. For the sake of the house of the Lord, for the sake of our brothers and sisters and friends, for the sake of the security of our homes, our communities and our world, let us pray for peace. And the Kingdom of God will be one step closer to fulfillment on earth as it is in heaven.

Additional Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. How earnestly do I long for peace? Do I pray for peace within myself first?
2. What steps might I take to achieve peace within my household?
3. How often do I pray for peace and do I really believe that peace is attainable?

Suggestions for action:

1. Word for your tree: **PEACE**
2. Write a short prayer for peace. Put it on a card and carry it with you. Include it in your prayer time everyday for the next week. Include a prayer for peace within yourself and be specific.
3. Write the word **PEACE** on index cards and place them in several spots in your home or office where you will see it often, by the mirror in the bathroom, next to your computer screen, on the dash of your car, etc. When you see the word, say a little prayer for peace on earth.

Closing Prayer:

Child of peace, how much we need peace in our world. Even within our own households we often find more contention than we do peace. I long for peace, within myself, within my family, within my community and within my world. I come today filled with prayers for peace. Start within me, O Lord. Instill in my heart a desire for peace and a willingness to work toward it in all that I do and say. In your peaceful name, I pray. Amen.