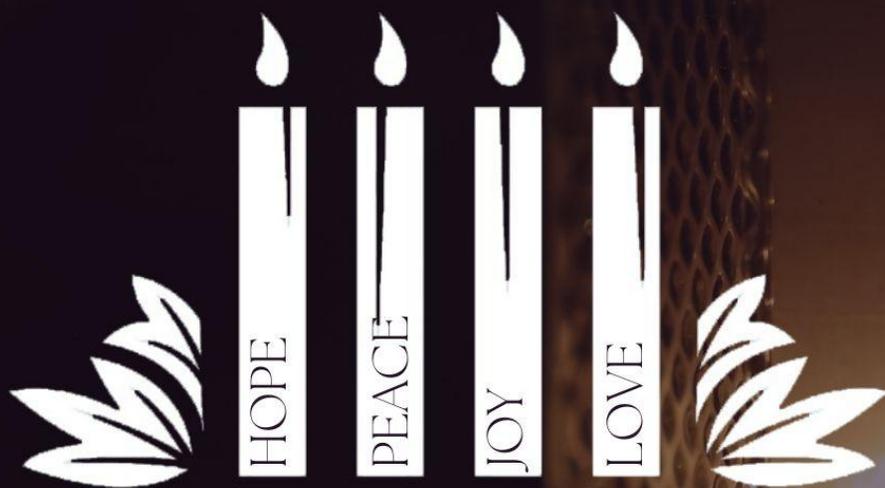


wisdom walks with us



advent 2022





## Advent Guide: Wisdom Walks With Us

The four weeks leading to Christmas are traditionally a season to anticipate Jesus' arrival—to contemplate what it means for the God of the universe to be present with us.

This year's Advent Guide builds on the *Beautiful Life* series by exploring the traditional Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love as *wisdom walking with us*. It meditates on moments when Jesus models the *way of hope*, the *way of peace*, the *way of joy*, and the *way of love* as paths to abundant life.

The gallery wall displays narrative, paintings, sculpture, lyrics, and music by our very own artists. There you can pick up a printed copy of devotionals, contributed by our very own writers. NSCBC is richly blessed by the creative gifts of our people. Thank you to each one for inviting us to walk more in step with Jesus this Christmas. Your contributions are evidence that God's Spirit indeed dwells with people.

Visit [nscbc.org/advent](http://nscbc.org/advent) for more information.

Merry Christmas, dear friends!

Project Coordinators and Editors: Adam Kurihara, Sarah Bartley, Betsy Crowe



## Introductory Meditation | John 1:1-18

### Wisdom Walks With Us

At some point in the last 50 years, Maslow's Hierarchy leapt out of the world of social science and into public consciousness. We invoke that pyramid like a proverb, giving order to our otherwise tangled competition of motivations and needs. We imagine the pyramid—safety at the base and transcendence at the top—and conclude a meaningful life is available to us only when all other needs are satisfied.

We are tempted to believe that success will result in joy; that being excellent is more important than having hope; that certainty is the way to peace; and that comfort is a prerequisite for love. In the words of theologian Miroslav Volf, this is a recipe for a life that is *unbearably light*. Volf often looks to his parents—people who lived brave, intuitively virtuous lives in wartorn Yugoslavia—and finds an alternative proverb: *all people can live a meaningful life*.

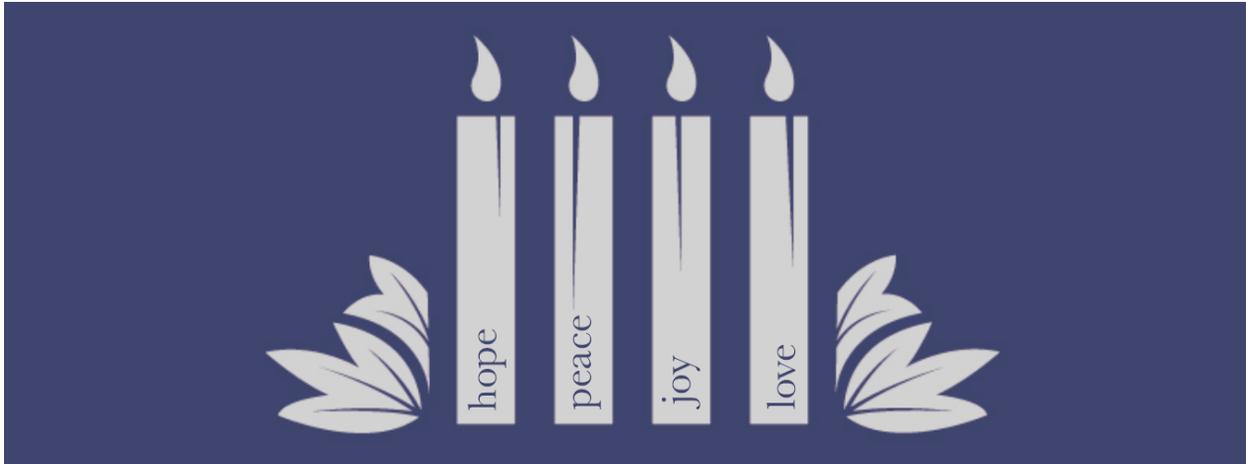
At the very center of our faith is a person who we would consider impoverished: often lacking basic safety, affirmation, food, shelter, and friendship. Even so, Jesus lived a profoundly beautiful life. In the words of John, "*his life is light for all of humanity*." Born in perilous times, to a marginalized family, yet Jesus is God's wisdom in flesh and bone, dwelling among us. And he offers to walk with us, showing us the way to full, abundant life.

As this year comes to a close, we invite you to set aside some time for reflection. Read the gospel passages and meditations. Visit the gallery at church. They explore hope, peace, joy, and love not as nice additions to an already full life, but as beautiful ways to live. Look not only inward, but outward. They urge us to walk with Jesus in the way of hope, in the way of peace, in the way of joy, and in the way of love.

What does the way of love look like? Jesus graciously shows us. *Out of his fullness—his abundant life—he offers us "grace upon grace."* To be wise in love, we cannot stop at simply experiencing love. That would be too sentimental a view of love! We can look at the world around us and notice the urgency of love. We can learn the tactics of love. We can practice them at work and at home, at church and in public.

The same is true of peace, hope and joy. When we practice the way, we find that the Source of infinite love and peace and hope and joy indeed dwells with us already. May the meditations and encouragement of your brothers and sisters in this Advent Guide help you do just that—and may the light of Jesus' life illuminate your way.





## Advent 2022

**Sarah Bartley**, Sculpture using communion cups, spray paint, wreath materials

As church regathered, pre-made communion cups offered a sanitary solution to the communal passing of bread and wine. Sitting in the pew, cup in hand, I imagined giving it another life of some kind—redeeming it—resisting the single-use, transactional way of being that feels more at home in America than at Jesus' Table. After all, these cups participated in a sacred ritual. Each one had been held at the Lord's Table. Could they be made to fit together? Could their hard edges and angles align? (Not easily.) Could they be fashioned into a new form? Might that new form catch the light? At the Lord's Table, Jesus tells his disciples to remember—remember his life until he dwells with them again. Remember his Table. Remember the joy, the peace, the hope, and the love they experienced—that was required of them—to gather at Jesus' Table. They gathered across social dividing lines: marginalized and powerful, rich and poor, outsiders and insiders. At the Lord's Table we find our posture. We are eye to eye, arm to arm. We feast and we remember. We are no longer lone individuals. We are fashioned into a new shape. Love, joy, peace, and hope are available in abundance when we do Table fellowship (Jesus style). These are some of the ideas I was considering as I gave new life to the communion cups we shared during 2022.



## The Way of Hope | Matthew 5:2-12

### Andrew Rennekamp

Ever wish you *didn't* know something? A phone call that ruined a good day. An unwanted exposure to darkness or terror. Or perhaps simply the knowledge that something is not as good as it could be.

This is the hard truth of Ecclesiastes: "*wisdom brings vexation, and with knowledge comes sorrow*" (Eccl. 1:18). Or in our contemporary converse: "*ignorance is bliss.*" To paraphrase much of Ecclesiastes, "*How is a life of wisdom beautiful at all?*"

I've wrestled with this question myself. I'm fortunate enough that I could choose to ignore the troubling reality of the world around me, my head emersed above it all, and imagine to myself everything is beautiful. Or, I can live immersed in (and often dwelling on) the poverty, injustice, foolishness, and evil in the world around me and be a... well, let's just say... less than beautiful person to talk to. Steve's song brilliantly captures this experience—of fumbling through fog and of growing rust.

Ecclesiastes offers a prescription for those who choose the path of wisdom: "*Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of humanity. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil*" (Eccl. 12:13-14). Within this prescription there is a glimmer of HOPE. Ultimately, God will make every deed known and finally bring about justice.

But if you, like me, don't feel all that hopeful reading these words, it's because there's also a strict warning woven in here. If we do not keep God's commands, we too will be judged. *I really HOPE I don't screw up.*

Within the context of this seedling of HOPE enters The Wisdom of God personified—Jesus (1 Cor. 1:24). Remarkably, Jesus upholds the Ecclesiastes prescription, saying "*don't think that I've come to overturn the commandments of God... whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:17-20) and "*on the day of judgment people will give an account*" (Matt. 12:36). But he does more than that. In his Sermon on the Mount in particular, Jesus expands this glimmer of HOPE.

He doesn't ignore the reality of the mess around him or complain about it. Instead, Jesus names eight types of people immersed in the reality of our fallen world and pronounces unexpected blessing on them. Paraphrased, Jesus says, "*Blessed are those aware of their need, for they will be satisfied*" intentionally woven together with "*Blessed are those reflecting God's character, for they will meet God himself*" (Matt 5:2-12).

The wisdom of God revealed to us through Christ is that God is not only the one who will bring every deed into judgment, but he is also the one who saves. God himself, though righteous and pure, is gentle and merciful, a peacemaker who became poor of spirit, hungry, and hated so that we could be filled.

A life of wisdom is beautiful when its HOPE is in God's rescue.

After pronouncing blessings on the poor, hungry, grieving, and hated, Jesus gave four warnings for the complacent (Luke 6:24–26), who believe they have no need for him. In contrast, his message of HOPE was delivered to those most aware of their need for him, including many who were physically ill (Matt. 4). It's these people—who shed tears, yet also HOPE in the knowledge of God's rescue and share it with others—who Jesus would go on to call “salt” and “light” (Matt. 5:13).

Take a few minutes to pray along with me. *LORD, hear our prayer. Search our hearts and help us to reject complacency. Instead teach us to embrace Wisdom, in all her joy and grief. By your Spirit strengthen our desire to keep your commands and remind us of the HOPE we have in you. Thank you for your Son, who leads us into your Kingdom, where you satisfy us with yourself and where all that is wrong is set right and made new. Help us to live out wisdom beautifully, as salt and light, sharing the HOPE we have with those around us. Amen.*

## The Way of Hope | John 11:17-44

Porter Sprigg

*“Take away the stone,” he said.*

*“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”*

Jesus approaches the tomb of Lazarus, knowing what is going to happen. New life is going to spring from a place of mourning and death. But first, the stone must be rolled away. Martha protests. No one wants to smell death, especially if the body is your brother's. Martha doesn't want to face the smell. To do so would be disgusting and heartbreaking.

There are some things in our lives that we just don't want to uncover. We are ashamed of what we've done or how we've treated others. We are crushed by the ways we've been abandoned or mistreated by others, and we hide these things from God because we are afraid to face the decay and pain. We assume that it will disgust God the same way it disgusts us.

When God tells us to roll away the layers of stone in our hearts, to reveal our inner woundedness and sin, we protest. But in the very places where we feel dead and dismayed, God wants to heal. Where we recoil in the face of decay and want to run from our sin and our pain, God moves towards us in compassion.

God wants to show up in the places you feel most lonely, most angry, most hurt. Why? Look earlier in the passage:

*“Where have you laid him?’ He asked. ‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied. Jesus wept. Then some of the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’”* Jesus sees the decay in your life and he responds with tears and compassion because He loves you! He is committed to you with a commitment that transcends understanding and he is willing to do whatever it takes to resurrect your life with that steadfast love.

In his book, Gentle and Lowly, Dane Ortlund writes, “The sins of those who belong to God open the floodgates of his heart of compassion for us. The dam breaks. It is not our loveliness that wins his love. It is our unloveliness.” Our decay, our sin draws Jesus near. That may not make sense. It may seem completely wrong, but we have to let Jesus love us on his terms. Jesus compassionately moves toward the decay.

This reality should fill us with humility and hope. If Jesus loves us in the midst of our decay, if he died for us *“while we were still sinners,”* then there is no room for boasting. But there is also no room for despair. Christ brings freedom to the weary sinner. The smell of death isn't the end of the story. Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the grave and he does! Hallelujah! Jesus resurrected Lazarus and he'll resurrect you.

The Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a leading voice in the racial reconciliation movement in South Africa, encountered horrid racism in his life. Tutu was known for his contagious joy and laughter.

Towards the end of his life when Tutu was battling cancer, a cynical American reporter interviewed him and asked how he could be so joyful. The reporter pointed to the ways that South Africa had taken steps backward in terms of justice and asked directly, "How can you be so joyful when you're about to die and your country is still so fundamentally broken?" Desmond lit up with a grin on his face, tapped his clerical collar to remind the reporter of his faith and said, "Ah you forget. We are resurrection people." What a profound answer. We are resurrection people! Desmond knew that the power of death would not have the final say on his life because of Jesus' resurrection power and he also knew that even the darkest places can be transformed by God's light. May we be people who let God into our own brokenness and then move with compassion towards the decaying corners of our world!

## The Way of Hope | Luke 2:25-38

**Karoline Niles**

In this cultural moment, hope can be perceived as overrated and even unhelpful. After high profile instances of abuse and corruption, this is understandable—it is important to be honest and realistic. And yet, it is impossible to construct a better world without hope. How do we help one another do better unless we have hope that better is possible? How do we build a business or help a student through a crisis without hope? Biblical hope is like that—it has to do with our capacity to imagine a different future because we trust in the character of God to be who He says He is and do what He says He will do. Hope involves training our expectations to see the potential that God sees.

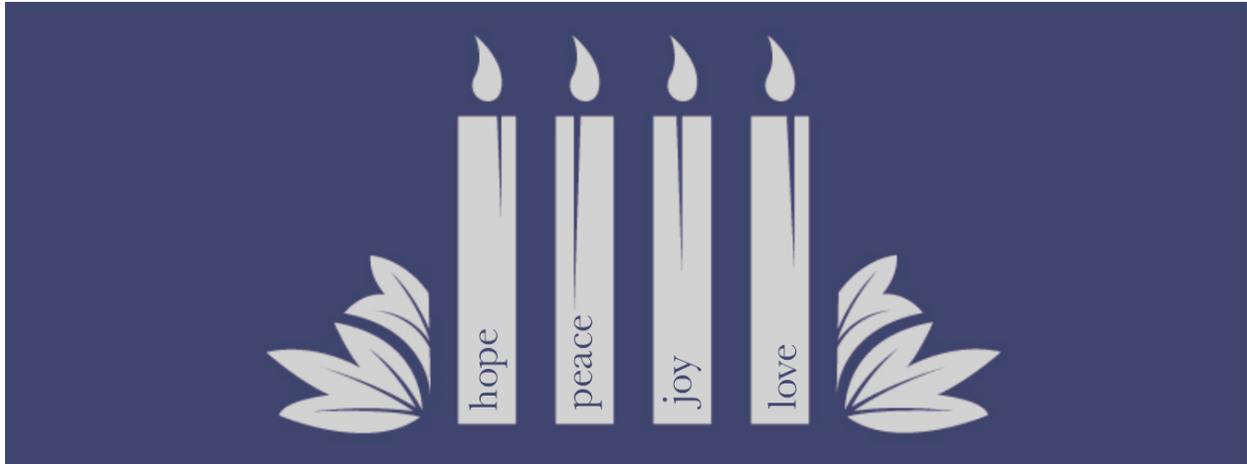
Luke drops in on a remarkable moment at the end of two long, faithful lives. We know that Simeon lived a devout life in prayerful expectancy and Anna worshiped night and day at the temple. At some point in his life, Simeon was given a promise that he would see God's Messiah. He would meet the fulfillment of God's promise. Both lived out days filled with ordinary moments, in relational rhythms with God and with the community of God's people, at the temple engaged with God's Spirit. It must have required discipline to hold on to hope as Simeon aged. It would be understandable if he had moments of doubt.

How do we cultivate hope? The relational rhythms of worship and community prepared Simeon and Anna to recognize Jesus—this specific baby born to these specific parents—as the child of God's promise. I worked landscaping and property maintenance on an estate for about three years. Manual labor outside in the hot, humid weather would have been grueling but for the consistent breaks we took together. Each day our boss sent a text at nine o'clock for coffee time, noon for lunch, and three o'clock for tea time. At any given moment, a break was never more than a few hours away. I could do just about any job for that amount of time knowing there was good coffee and good conversation waiting. These were the relational rhythms that sustained me.

Simeon and Anna did not know how or when God would fulfill his promise. Yet their lives were undoubtedly shaped by actively expecting it. A lifetime meditating on Scripture with the community of God's people prepared them. When Jesus did arrive, they recognized him. They rightly perceived this child as the great climax of hope realized and still yet only just beginning to set the world right. As you reflect on this passage, take some time to consider the rhythms that prepared Simeon and Anna to recognize Jesus. What do you think it was about Jesus and his parents that alerted Simeon and Anna that this was the Messiah they hoped for? Consider the rhythms that are cultivating your capacity for hope. Consider the places and relationships where God may be calling you to exercise hope.

What do we do when we don't know when tea time is coming? How do we continue to work in the meantime? This week, as you meditate on hope, consider reading Isaiah 40 each morning and ask God "What may I hope for?" Simeon and Anna likely asked God this very question. God told them they may hope for a Messiah. Like Simeon and Anna, ask God your questions about hope and live expectantly for Emmanuel: God with us.





## The Way of Hope | On the Woman Bleeding for 12 Years

**Jessi Rennekamp**, Narrative on handmade paper

I have recently become interested in the practice of meditating on Scripture by writing fictionalized accounts of biblical stories that explore the characters' internal thoughts, feelings, and backstories, that dive into the intentional "gaps" in the biblical narrative and fill in possible details, and that elucidate the significance of the text in a way that helps modern readers connect it to their lives in a new way. Jewish rabbis have created stories like this as part of a collection of writings designed to interpret and apply the Torah, known as "midrash." I've been engaged by Christian midrash-like stories, including *The Chosen* TV series, the "creative writing" chapters of *Inspired* by Rachel Held Evans, and certain poems in Madeleine L'Engle's *The Ordering of Love*.

When I began reflecting on the theme of *hope*, the first image that came to my mind was of the times that I've been anxiously awake in the wee hours of the morning, with my thoughts and fears and feelings of hopelessness keeping me tossing and turning in my bed. Sometimes, on those nights, I've turned to Jesus in prayer and found a hope that surpassed my circumstances; a hope that let me drift off to sleep and awake to new light – and his new mercies – the next morning. I started to imagine that the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years may have had nights like that. For her, Jesus was her last hope as she'd spent everything she had on solutions that didn't work. So I chose to write about an imagined night of hopelessness that turned to hope, and those moments of ever-increasing hope as she drew closer to Jesus.

I pray that her story of hope for healing and for restored relationships with God and community may resonate in a new way with each of us this Advent season.



## The Way of Peace | Luke 10:38-42

**Katie Alcott**

Perhaps inspired by Jesus' teaching about the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), Martha is a disciple who expresses her devotion through hospitality. Jesus can see that Martha's intentions are good but her heart is anxious. She is not experiencing peace. How can he tell? She makes the signature move of an anxious person: she reaches for control.

As a doer and a perfectionist, I relate to Martha. Before I had children, I loved spending a December weekend baking cookies to share with friends and family. Our neighborhood is full of generous people, and I reciprocated their care by sharing homemade treats. But each year, as our family grew, baking lost some of its joy. It became another stressful box I needed to check. I found myself dropping a tray of cookies by my neighbors' mailbox between errands. Like Martha, my intentions were good, but I was distracted and my heart was not at peace. Like Martha, I needed Jesus to invite me into a new way of being.

The invitation came the year I was pregnant with my third child. I was exhausted. While it felt like a concession, I decided to forego baking and buy Trader Joe's cookies instead. It seemed like all I had to offer as I carved out a Sunday afternoon to deliver the cookies and wish my neighbors a Merry Christmas. My first stop was a neighbor with whom we are close. As we talked about our holiday plans, they offered to babysit so I could walk the neighborhood kid-free. I gladly obliged. At the next house, my neighbors were hosting a belated Thanksgiving and Hanukkah celebration. They insisted I come in for potato latkes and stories about their daughter's travels. An hour later, with a full belly, I moved on to the next neighbor who immediately invited me to admire their kitchen renovations and hear updates on their grown children. My final stop was a neighbor I knew the least well. She invited me in for tea and put slippers on my feet. Our husbands joined and discussed their love for music, travel, and golf. We traded holiday traditions and stories from our shared careers in nursing. Several hours later, I had delivered only four boxes but experienced several meaningful conversations.

Like Martha, I felt Jesus inviting me into a new way of being at peace with myself and my neighbors. While service is valuable, the cookies were not all that I had to offer. Rather, it was my availability that made it possible for me to experience the life that God had for me—and I experienced it through the hospitality of my neighbors.

When Martha reaches for control, Jesus responds with such sweet words: "Martha, Martha..." He gently defends Mary's right to sit at his feet and invites Martha into a new way of serving—not anxious and troubled, but at peace. I recently heard the author Shannan Martin describe hospitality as "*asking for what we need and offering what we have.*" Reflect on this statement. Can you see how this approach offers a greater peace?

Finally, spend some time prayerfully reviewing your holiday to-do list. You have permission to re-order your list. You are free even to cross-off good things if they leave you anxious and without margin. Add or adapt your activities so that they contribute to the peace and fullness of your neighborhood, extended family, or workplace. May this reorientation help you to truly celebrate Advent—God *with* us. As Jesus reassured Martha, it is possible to choose what is better.



# The Way of Peace | John 14:25-31

**Sam Solberg**

Every advent season I reflect on the words of New England poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. During the American Civil War Longfellow was struck by repeated tragedy. His wife died after her dress caught on fire while she worked on her daughters' hair in 1861. Two years later, against Longfellow's wishes, his teenage son Charley enlisted in the Union army. Weeks before Christmas 1864 Charley was shot through the back. After rushing to Washington DC, Longfellow returned to Boston with his severely wounded son. On Christmas day he poured both joy and grief into his poem "Christmas Bells."

Longfellow reflects:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The Carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
'There is no peace on earth,' I said;  
'For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!'

I'm often struck by Paul's description of the "peace of God" in Philippians as a peace "*which surpasses all understanding*" (Phil. 4:7). The peace of God, perfectly represented in the birth of its Prince on Christmas, cannot be found by simply examining the state of reality. How can there be peace in the midst of the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the state of violent turmoil which has once again seized Afghanistan? How can there be peace in a world cursed by poverty, starvation, pandemic, and human trafficking? How could there be peace as Mary and Joseph fled from the infanticide of Herod's soldiers?

Certainly, as he looked around at his fractured nation and at the bullet wound on his son's back, Longfellow had little reason to feel the peace proclaimed on this holiday. The war, death, and tears that consumed his world seemed to taunt the very idea of celebrating peace. And yet, the bells still rang in 1864 as they had rung year after year, and despite his despair Longfellow declared:

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

'God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!

The Wrong shall fail,

The Right prevail,

With peace on earth, good-will to men!'

Such a confounding peace, which endures the death and injury of loved ones, which rings out even as brother fights against brother, must come from a deeper and truer source than external circumstances. This is the kind of peace Christ offered when his people and disciples expected a conqueror who would drive out the Roman Empire. While speaking of his eventual departure in the Gospel of John, Christ tells his disciples, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*" (John 14:27). Praise the Lord for giving us this peace instead of a temporary, worldly comfort. Christ continues, "*I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me*" (John 14:30-31). Even the evil of Satan himself can only serve to highlight the source of our ultimate peace: the love of Christ and the will of the Father.

Jesus exhibited this very peace as he anticipated his own torture and death. In Gethsemane, even while he fell on his face and pleaded for another way, Jesus saw beyond the immediate bleakness, praying "*not as I will, but as you will*" (Matt. 26:39). Christ knew that beyond the pain and suffering of his body, his people, and his world, there was an ultimate, indestructible hope. Like a bell that rings more deeply than a canon, the inexplicable peace of Christ defies the mockery of sin and death and renders them utterly powerless.

## The Way of Peace | Luke 4:16-28

**Brian Indreleie**

When we hear about peace at Christmas we often think of inner peace—a sense of serenity or absence of anxiety. And yet the peace promised in Isaiah 61 is not an individualistic peace. The Messiah mediates peace among peoples. Fittingly, when Jesus gave the first sermon to his home synagogue in Nazareth, he preached from this passage, promising “*good news to the poor*” and “*liberty to the captives.*” He then closed the scroll, while “*the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.*” They were fixed no doubt because he stopped reading in the middle of Isaiah’s sentence and left out a cherished line regarding, “*the day of the vengeance of our God.*”

Jesus proclaimed the Lord’s favor, but in much of Judea war drums were beating. In the Jewish community, many resented Roman rule and longed for independence. Others profited from Roman rule and resented those that threatened this. Multiple factions vied over Jewish identity. If a messiah were to come, he had best side with the “right” faction and make war on the rest. Given this context, it is not surprising that some rejected Jesus’ identification with peace and the Lord’s favor, declaring him a false prophet and even trying to throw him off a cliff, which was the fate designated to such. To preach peace is the ultimate offense to those who profit from conflict. Yet Jesus, being the true Messiah, attested to his sonship by miraculously walking through the mob like they weren’t even there.

Still today, as we begin Advent, the drums of war beat across television screens, social media feeds, in tense family conversations, and in many corners of public life. The wars are sometimes political, sometimes cultural, and sometimes economic, but always we are called to fight, for only the victor will enjoy the day of vengeance. Some pastors and even seminary presidents have spoken about how the days of gospel winsomeness are over, and that now is the time for Christians to fight to secure their vision for the world. When we are tempted to heed these voices, we would do well to remember that the fighters of Jesus’ day by-and-large were not the ones who became his followers. Jesus offended his hometown hearers the most when he warned them that in Elijah’s day, it was gentiles and widows who experienced God’s favor while much of Israel experienced God’s judgment. Those with no battle to fight were the ones to both experience and bring the Lord’s favor.

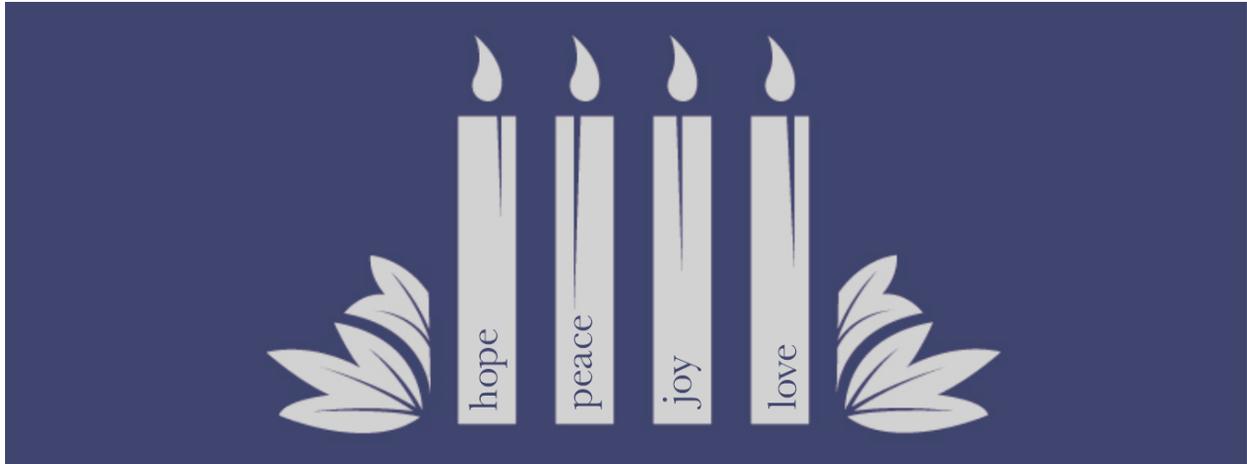
In a way, Jesus anticipated his own ministry in this inaugural sermon. During his ministry the poor would be helped, many lepers and those with other ailments would be cured, demons would be cast out, and women, children, and minorities became his followers. Wherever he went, he brought peace and the Lord’s favor, and many came to know and love God. Sadly, the fighters lacked interest in this as it did not enhance their vision of the world. Rather than be moved by the great works God was doing, they hard-heartedly attributed them to the devil.

Jesus was a peacemaker. He calls his followers not to war but to make peace inasmuch as we can. Not everyone rallied behind Jesus’ message and not everyone will be dissuaded from war by our own peacemaking efforts. Jesus persisted in this mission nonetheless, and so should we.

When conflicts arise (even today), whether in our church, in our families, in our workplaces, or in public life, pay attention to your response and to how we collectively respond.

- Do we rush to take a side or do we turn away wrath with a gentle answer?
- Are we quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry?
- Do our tongues and keyboards burn like a fire or do they speak words that are good for edification, according to the need of the moment, speaking grace to those who hear?
- Are we driven by so-called righteous indignation or controlled by the love of Christ?

This Advent season, consider Jesus' invitation to the way of peace. This is an invitation not to simply feel peace, but to *"live at peace with everyone."* (Rom 12:18) Consider asking this list of questions regularly when you encounter conflict. The list is drawn from Proverbs (15:1) and the letters to the early Church (James 1:19 and 3:6, Eph 4:29, 2 Cor 5:14). Remember they were given not simply to individuals but to guide the peacemaking efforts of the Church. Return to the gospels and meditate all the more on the actions of Christ who brought peace. The day of the Lord's vengeance will come someday and on that day it will be the peacemakers who will be called *"sons of God."* (Matt 5:9)



## The Way of Peace | "Thou Will Keep Him in Perfect Peace"

**Danielle & Jon Rodgers**, Cello arrangement with photography

Watch at [nscbc.org/perfectpeace](https://nscbc.org/perfectpeace)

I used to sing Samuel Wesley's "Thou Will Keep Him in Perfect Peace" with an anglican choir many years ago. It has been a favorite of mine ever since. The lyrics are drawn from Isaiah 26:3, Psalm 139:11, 1 John 1:5, and Psalm 119:175. When reflecting on the theme of "Peace" in relation to our Advent series, this work was top of mind. I decided to arrange it for cello, recording the individual vocal lines on cello and mixing them together. This arrangement is paired with Danielle's photography with the lyrics spread out similarly to how they'd be sung in the choral arrangement. I encourage you to search for the choral piece online and have a listen, it is very enjoyable.

## The Way of Peace | Be Still

**Shauna Kurihara**, Oil on canvas

Peace. The Lord promises us peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Breathe in. Breathe out. Do you feel the peace of the Lord with you today? It is hard to experience the peace that the Lord promises to us and desires for us to have if we don't allow ourselves the time and the space to actually sit and be still with him. How can we recognize his presence with us if we are always doing; always moving from one thing to another? The reality is that we won't. Paul tells us in Philippians that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (4:7). The Lord desires for us to experience his peace, but how are we to receive it if we do not slow down enough to even notice it? This painting is a reminder to slow down and be still, an invitation to breathe, and a promise of God's peace. As you spend time with this painting and contemplate the birth of Christ, our Prince of Peace, I would invite you to breathe deeply, be still, and recognize the peaceful presence of Immanuel, God with us.



## The Way of Joy | Luke 17:11–16

### Talia Messina

What fills you with joy? Is it full-bellied laughter that makes your cheeks burn bright? Is it when the dinner table is packed with good company? For some, it may be curling up with a book and a cup of hot chocolate on a cold winter night. For others it may be singing and dancing with abandon to that song that makes you feel invincible.

Whatever it is, whether contemplative or exuberant joy, there is a thread that connects these experiences. They are *in the now*: They are only enjoyed to their fullest capacity when you are immersed in the present moment. The past and future don't exist. But if that's the case, how can you experience joy when the now feels rushed or heavy? Can joy still be present when the "most wonderful time of year" turns your mind to failed dreams and faraway friends or family? It can feel like the gaping space left by a pulled tooth that your tongue can't help returning to. What do you do when your spirit senses a not-quite-rightness?

Friend, joy is not a feeling. It is a mindset.

Jesus came to heal our hearts and minds. Or as Paul puts it, when we focus on Jesus, we can have *the "mind of Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:16). But what does this mean practically? Luke tells us that during Jesus' ministry Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one returned "*praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.*" When Jesus saw the leper he said, "*Your faith has healed you.*"

Why did one leper respond with exuberant joy and gratitude, while the others didn't? Like them, he was an outcast, separated from his family and friends because of his highly contagious disease. Like them, he knew that Jesus could heal him, and he called out for mercy. But if you read the story closely, Jesus does not tell the lepers that they are healed when he heals their physical wounds. He tells them to show themselves to the priests, an authority that would grant them entrance back into the community. It is only after the joyful leper returns that Jesus tells him, "Your faith has healed you."

This leper lived in a faith-filled mindset grounded in gratitude to Jesus. It allowed him to experience joy because he gave the Savior—the fullness of God among us—due praise. To feel full and whole, begin with cultivating faith in the source of your healing: Jesus.

Where is the leprosy in your life—that thing that's eating you up and closing you off to joy? Look back at your life last year, two, five, or ten years ago. Are you living the answered prayers of a younger you? Has your gratitude moved you to turn to Jesus in praise and thanksgiving, or do you continue to let bitterness and hopelessness fog up the lens through which you view your life?

If you don't feel like you can reach for the fullness of joy that Jesus offers—*tell him*. Ask for help. Ask for guidance. Ask him to clear the cataracts from the lens of your life and instill in you a desire to pursue a joyful mindset. Jesus didn't come to earth for you to do anything on your own strength. In her book [One Thousand Gifts](#), Ann Voskamp describes the relationship between joy and gratitude like this:

“As long as thanks is possible, then joy is possible...The holy grail of joy is not some exotic location or some emotional mountain peak experience. The joy wonder could be here!... The only place we need see before we die is this place of seeing God, here and now.”

Lean on your faith in Jesus. Let him in so that you can see him in the messy, raw, realness of life and be filled with the true joy of the Advent season.

## The Way of Joy | Luke 10:21

### Cameron Casey

A few weeks ago, I planned to meet a few friends for good food and drinks at Bonefish Harry's. Last to arrive, of course, I circled the table hugging and patting everyone on the back. As I sat down and we settled in, the DJ's voice came over the loudspeakers... it was music trivia night. With music blaring and the sound of muffled DJ announcements bellowing through the restaurant, we quickly realized that our time together would be different than we planned. It would be loud.

Of course, we weren't the only ones there. While *we* were a bit annoyed, fighting the loud music to have conversation, *others* took a different path—we might call it the path of obedience. From the tables around us, about ten guests slid from their chairs and began to *dance*. Dances of every kind! Hips moving! Hands pumping! Heads bouncing! Right there, in the middle of the restaurant! Camera phones focused from every angle to capture the moment; to capture the joy! It was as if we had all been guests invited to a party—a very loud party—and only some decided to participate in its joy (Lk. 14:17-18). Still, their joy was contagious; their display of obedience to the call of the music was magnetic. Slowly, my friends and I stopped fighting the call. We began to talk less. Under the table, we let our feet tap to the beat. Timidly, we began to nod our heads to the music. With a shadow of delight, we simply shared the moment together.

Who were these ten partiers? Who were these vessels of joy? The priests of this holy occasion? They were *little children*.

The Bible tells a remarkable story of God—the 'biggest' reality of our world—partnering, exalting, and delighting in small, humble, and powerless people. Abraham and Sarah had little hope for the future but would bless the world (Gen. 12). Moses was called to defeat the Egyptian superpower led by Pharaoh (Ex. 3). David, the youngest; the small shepherd; the artist; would be king of Israel (1 Sam. 16). Pride and arrogance ignore Wisdom's call (Prov. 8). Babies would declare the hidden Lord, who reigns above the heavens, to enemies and foes (Ps. 8). Mary rejoices that God has brought down the mighty and exalted the humble (Lk. 1).

Jesus' delight fits this larger pattern. He delights in the lowly and the humble. In the chapter before, Luke records Jesus' transfiguration—a glimmer of his divine nature and startling entourage—inviting with him just Peter, James, and John (9:28-35). I mean, wow...! What an experience that must have been! It's no wonder that shortly after the disciples started to argue amongst themselves who was the greatest (9:46)—“*You weren't even there! I was!*” shouts James. Only a few verses later, Jesus rebukes Jewish cities, like Chorazin and Bethsaida, who ought to have received his Kingdom and elevates the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon (9:13-15). Then, as if out of nowhere, Jesus gushes with joy. It's our signal as readers to lean in... Jesus has a word for us: *God hides from the wise and the powerful but reveals to children*. There it is again, that remarkable character of God! I think Abby's interpretation of Jesus' joy fits in so well with those dancing children at Bonefish Harry's.

It would be fine to stop there: *the Father* and *Jesus by the Spirit* delight in small things. *God* delights in small things. Alone, this is remarkable! Yet, this is just the half of it. This passage says more. It tells us about *our humanity* and *our joy*. Consider the *human* side of God's partnership, delight, and revelation to small things. The small—our children—actually have something going for them! They participate in and model for the rest of us a fuller picture of humanity and the way of joy. God delights in revealing and giving to the small and the small, the

insignificant, *and* the powerless delight in receiving from God and others. There is a beautiful fit. A mutual divine-human dance of giving and receiving, sending and welcoming, overflowing and embracing, creating a nova of joy. Could it be any other way? Do the 'wise and intelligent'—obviously, a bit tongue and cheek—*want* to receive from, partner with, and delight in Jesus' Kingdom.

Like many, I like doing things. I like to be independent. I like stepping in and helping people. But, if that is all I am—a self-sacrificer—I'm missing a crucial part of my humanity. I'm missing the part of me that, like those little children at Bonefish Harry's, wants to let go and obey the call of the music, the call of God, to receive. Children, we need you. We need to see your delight in receiving from all people. Please, teach us your way.

## The Way of Joy | Luke 7:11-34

**Tom L.**

I smiled at the miraculous inbreaking of joy and wonder. It was prompted by a text message from my friend, Uhaju, an Arabic and Quranic teacher, asking, “When will you send me another worship song [about Jesus]?”

On the islands where I serve, men and women respect the prophets. Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist and Jesus—all are respected as teachers and prophets of God. It is a good and solemn thing to respect the prophets. It is a religious duty. This is not unlike the attitudes of the religious leaders in our passage.

But Jesus is not content with a respectful religious posture. He pushes people to think and to feel, “*What did you go out into the wilderness to see?*” He says of John the Baptist. And then he nudges them further, seeking to provoke them out of their respectful religious attitude, “*A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.*”

“More than a prophet?” They say to themselves, “Who can be more than a prophet?” This attitude is eerily similar to that of our island neighbors. Jesus keeps pressing them into unfamiliar territory, “*The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.*”

“What is he saying? Is he calling us violent? How dare he! We respect our religious duty. We defend our faith.”

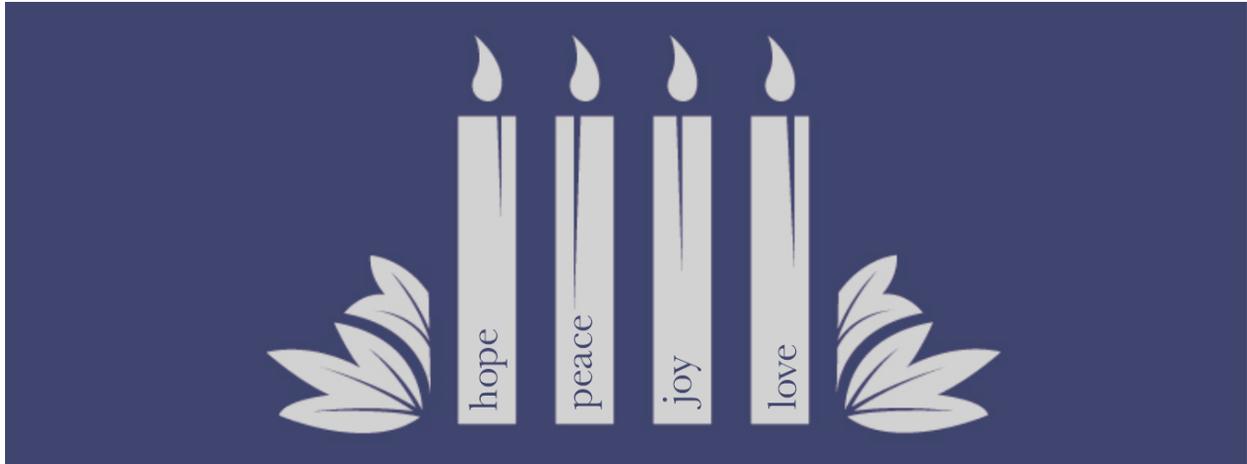
And then Jesus gives one final push. He says this generation is “*like children sitting in the marketplace, calling out, ‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’*” They questioned and rejected John calling for repentance. And they also questioned and rejected the Son of Man for eating and drinking with sinners. Can you hear his provocation? The religious leaders have not allowed themselves to be led in either lament or celebration. Jesus, the Savior Messiah, the Good News, the source of all joy stands before them, breaking into their world, but they cannot see. They can only complain.

I have seen from experience how religious attitude deadens the heart. For every moment of joy, there is someone ready to question its virtue—ready to complain. Every holiday has its nay-sayers. Every cultural event has the ones who say, “They shouldn’t do that. It’s not in line with religion.” Even music, which Islanders love, is considered sinful by the strictest religious leaders. And questions arise in the minds of islanders controlled more by law than by love—is it sinful to listen to music? Could our joyful events guide us to hell? These thoughts taint the joy of music and dance, planting seeds of doubt, guilt and shame. While religious impulses differ in America, the same forces are at work. We hide empty hearts behind proper, respectful, outwardly perfect-looking, ordered lives. We complain that others do not rise to the standard, but inside, we have only compliance, not joy—we fail to recognize the source of joy standing before us—Jesus breaking into our world, offering his hand to lead us into joyful song and dance.

My island brother Uhaju was this way. A religious and Arabic teacher—he did not like music. He questioned it, thought it beneath him. But then the Savior softened his heart, filled it with love, and changed him. Now he wants music, and to worship God through it. He has stayed up all night memorizing the words to a song, allowing the melody and the words to fill him with joy. His joy is real.

Take a moment and reflect on what deadens your experience of joy. Remember that Jesus came eating and drinking to celebrate the inbreaking of his kingdom – where *“the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”* This is cause for joy. The things he was doing then He still does today. He is among us, saving, healing and waking the dead. Look to Jesus, our source of joy—rejoice and sing!

Take a moment to enjoy this song Uhaju loves [<https://youtu.be/EXQGTInPpZU>]. As you listen, reflect on what Jesus means to him and to you.



## The Way of Joy | Joy Of The Father

**Abby Sidmore**, Acrylic on canvas

For my advent piece I created an Acrylic painting on canvas. My painting is mainly inspired by the verse Luke 10:21 where Jesus is expressing joy through God's wisdom and love. So, in my painting I chose to depict a scene where Jesus is showing his joyful praise of God, surrounded by nothing but the light God is shining down. To tie everything together I wrote a portion of the verse on the canvas that I felt best expresses the joy of Jesus in this moment. All in all, I hope that my piece will put a smile on the face of anyone who sees it by spreading the joy that Jesus so often had because of the good work of God.

## The Way of Joy

**Annalee Messina**, Watercolor and micron pen on paper

I painted my sister Tali doing something that brings her joy: reading a good book. She always finds the best ones.



## The Way of Love | John 4:1-42

**Laura Range**

She was—both literally and metaphorically—from a different tribe than Jesus. She drew her water at noon, when the heat of the day was at its worst, driving others away and thus slightly cooling the heat of social exclusion. Her life—down to the very rhythms of her day—was ordered by a lack of belonging. She was the portrait of someone a Jewish rabbi might understandably avoid: a Samaritan, a woman, likely very poor and desperate, living with a man who was not her husband.

And yet, Jesus saw her and loved her. He eschewed many social norms, stepped into her reality, and turned it on its head. He saw her not as someone to be avoided, but someone who could receive living water and go on to demonstrate to the community who had rejected her what it meant to walk in the way of Jesus.

This isn't the only time that Jesus offered unexpected love and belonging. Jesus saw in Matthew not a corrupt, exploitative traitor but a disciple. Jesus saw in Zaccheus not a money-grubber but a generous man. Jesus saw in Mary Magdalene not a demoniac, but a witness to the resurrection. Again and again, Jesus chose the way of love. He found people in the place of their rejection and sin and loved and called them into a new way of being. Around his table they celebrated a new community—people healed and restored to each other: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, political enemies, those considered righteous and those considered sinners. Their new community became the primary witness to Jesus.

Writing about the rise of tribalism in our culture, Amy Chua says, “Humans are tribal. We need to belong to groups. We crave bonds and attachments, which is why we love clubs, teams, fraternities, family...but the tribal instinct is not just an instinct to belong. It is also an instinct to exclude.” This instinct to exclude has been heightened in our culture. Tribes often don't simply disagree with one another, they demonize one another. Tribes often define themselves in part by whom they reject.

So what does it look like for us to follow a savior who loves and engages those we might normally reject? What does it look like for us to walk in the way of love as Jesus did? What can we learn from his transformative encounter with the woman at the well?

- **He closed the proximity gap.** Jesus sat by the well at noon. He initiated a conversation with someone unexpected, her difference and vulnerability fully apparent. We can't love people that we don't know, and often have to be intentional about connecting with people who otherwise experience exclusion and those outside of our tribe.
- **He saw who she could be.** He looked at the Samaritan woman through a lens of love and hope instead of stereotypes, pessimism, and foregone conclusions. Love calls us to see the image of God in one another and recognize what the transformative power of the gospel could mean in their lives.

- **He called her into a new way of being.** Jesus “*told her everything she ever did*” in a way that resulted in her restoration, not judgment and shame. Belonging to one another means loving each other into a new way of being—one that draws on deep relationships to heal wounds and generate new life.
- **He chose her as a witness.** Jesus chose her to become a witness to what a restored community looks like not despite but because of her alienation. The isolated woman at the well was transformed into the first witness to her entire community.

The community Jesus left behind—a community that began with people like the woman at the well, Matthew, Mary, and Zaccheus—was the primary witness to Jesus’ life and ministry. Sarah’s Advent 2022 sculpture captures the beauty of this. Think about the relationships you have to God’s family, especially to your primary church community. What do those relationships communicate to the world that Jesus is about?

# The Way of Love | John 16:7

**Sarah Leong Rumeau**

*Is anyone coming to help?*

When things seem like they aren't how they should be, do you ever wonder if there is someone coming to help?

For many, broken times are filled with deep longings for someone to come help,  
make it better,  
be bigger than the darkness or simply  
remind us we are not alone.

While there is redemptive beauty in the here and now, in Genesis 3, we see the impact of humanity's choice in the garden, facing pain, sadness and loneliness. While advent can be filled with exciting wonder, sometimes this time of year also echoes points of pain like these. In these moments we might notice a particular longing for someone to come be with us, to make it better than we are currently experiencing.

In John 16 we see some of the final words Jesus will speak to his disciples before his death. On the eve of his suffering he levels with them that his time with them is short. It's a conversation likely filled with anxiety, grief, confusion and hopelessness for Jesus' friends; they are facing the opposite of their longing to have someone bigger and stronger present with them.

During this time, we could wonder if the disciples felt love as Jesus peeled himself away. These verses demonstrate how the disciples too were living in this confusing paradigm that wasn't the original design.

But here in true God-like fashion, we see Jesus is not limited to human capacity. In this instance, because he loves us, Jesus goes all out. In his wisdom, he bucks everyone's perception of love, stares at the disciples' distraught, confused and possibly tearful eyes - and does what is actually the most loving.

"But I tell you the truth; It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you: but if I go, I will send him to you." (Jn 16:7).

When we are going through challenges or traumas, our perspective often narrows and we are blinded from creative options to make things better. We are handcuffed by how our experiences have previously played out.

We can wonder if the disciples are experiencing this same limiting. In the moments Jesus was speaking about his leaving, maybe they were in such panic, they too had lost their creative problem solving. In their pain, perhaps all they could see was abandonment instead of a

promise that the Spirit was indeed coming to save them in a lovingly different way that was on the grandest of scales.

This advent season we celebrate God's promise to answer his people's longings by coming to help us. In Jesus' words in 16:7, we see that this promise is bigger, stronger and more capable than the disciples imagined. Here Jesus refuses to leave them in their limited capacity. Instead he lovingly sends his Spirit to dwell within them. The Lord knew, this was how he could answer their deepest longing for someone to be infinitely available to them in order to handle what they could not.

Therefore, when we are in the depths of *"things are not how they are supposed to be,"* we can remember the Lord agrees. He agrees so much that he risked the disciples feeling unloved by leaving them in bodily form. He knew he was doing this so he could send his own Spirit who walks every step and breathes every breath internally with us even now.

As you ponder advent, at times you might curiously ask:

Lord, do you love me?

Can you help me see that you work beyond what I might think is loving?

Do you still promise to always come save me?

The advent and coming of Christ answers these questions as emphatically confirmed. Even in disorienting times, may this answer of *"Yes, I am not only coming to help, I'm here within you,"* fill our hearts and souls. May it lead to deep-seeded, shalom-like peace that even in our strong-weakness we believe he really will - always be the one to come to save us.

## The Way of Love | Mark 5:21-43

**Bobby Warrenburg**

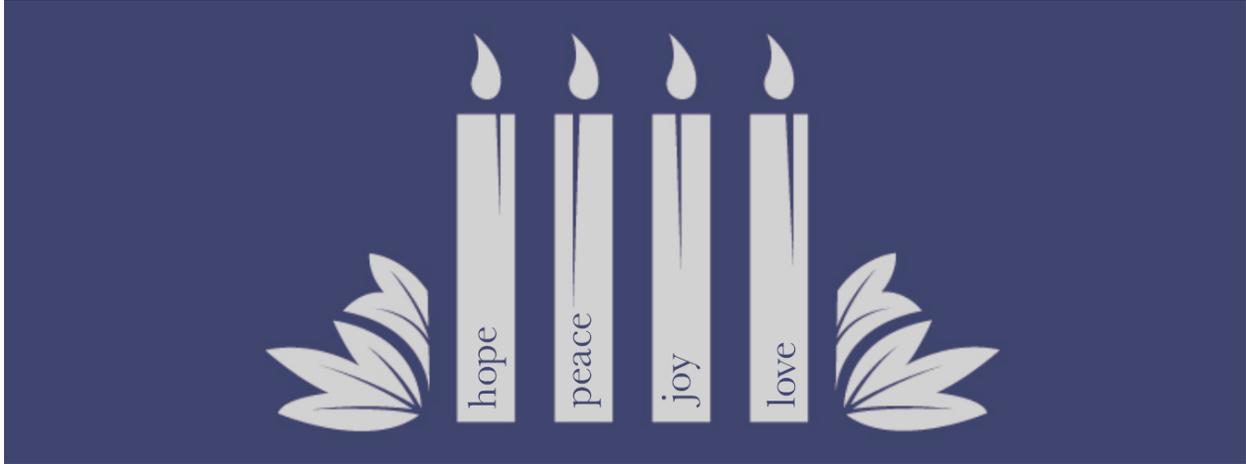
Mark drops in on a day with Jesus. Hold tight—it is a full day. Jesus has just freed a demoniac, decimated a herd of pigs, and been asked to leave town. Crossing the lake, he hardly steps ashore when a crowd gathers, “*pressing around him.*” Before he can finish with one desperate person, another approaches. The plight of the people is palpable. Jesus’ compassion is deep. Mark starts with one story, inserts a completely different one, and then wraps up the first story. Scholars note that the interrupted narrative serves not simply to transmit the feeling of being with Jesus, but it serves a literary purpose as well.

The two stories share a common truth about Jesus and the human condition. As Jessi’s narrative poignantly describes, both the woman and the girl are sick and out of options. Both are waiting for a miracle. Both are called “*daughter.*” And both are ultimately restored to health. The surprising detail of the two woven stories sits at the center. Jesus interrupts the forward motion. He delays. He asks a crowd of people, “*Who touched me?*” He draws the woman out in front of everyone and insists on a personal encounter. Don’t forget: Jesus was going somewhere. A young girl’s life is on the line. Her father is a pillar in the community. Why stop the caravan *after* the healing has taken place? “*Let’s move on!*” seems to be what the disciples are thinking. Jesus understands that the physical condition that dominated this woman’s life needs fuller healing. He stops the caravan to call her “*daughter.*” He affirms the confident persistence that compelled her to seek healing. In fact, faith is highlighted in both accounts: “*Daughter, your faith has made you well*” and “*Do not fear, only believe.*”

Circumstances will change. Suffering will come around again. At times it may feel as if our prayers fall flat. But Jesus gives what cannot be taken away—himself. Amid a day filled with urgency, Jesus offers both the woman and Jairus’ family the lasting gift of himself. The woman probably got sick again, as everyone eventually does. No doubt Jairus’ family faced another crisis. What Jesus gave them was deeper wellbeing: “*Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.*” Jesus demonstrates the way of love as he invites them into patience, mystery, faith, hope.

Faced with uncertainty, we often try to control people or circumstances, or wallow in despair. Can you see the uncomfortable circumstances you are facing as an invitation to draw closer to Jesus? As we saw in this passage, Jesus’ aim is not simply to rearrange events or to “fix it,” but to grow people. Just as we can draw near to Jesus in the midst of hard circumstances, we can also draw near to others as they experience their own challenges. When we can’t bend reality to make it more palatable for our loved ones, we can embrace the way of love by offering a presence that’s willing to go on the journey together.





## The Way of Love | Fog and Rust

**Steve Dagley**, Original song with guitar  
Listen at [nscbc.org/fogandrust](http://nscbc.org/fogandrust)

This song is called "Fog and Rust" and it reflects on Jesus's love through his offer of life and renewal: looking to his promise to provide (and be) living water and bread of life when we feel burned out on our own motivation or weary and even apathetic. "If you knew the gift of God, you would ask and he would give you living water... whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst... the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." I reflected on the state of the people Jesus met, wondering how filled and satisfied they felt before taking Jesus' invitation in faith. And I pray that as we see God's love coming to live in the advent, I would recognize the Spirit in my life and be filled with his living water.