



'Till We Meet Again!

Week of December 12 and 13, 2020



REFLECTION FOR THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020

¹⁴And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

¹⁵And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved.

2 Peter 3:14-15a

Hopeful and expectant Advent greetings my friends!

I have been having many thoughts on the season of Advent's meaning in our current "season of life."

Advent is traditionally a time when we are called to wait in hopeful expectation for the return of Christ! Christ's return as the babe born in Bethlehem and perhaps even more importantly Christ's return in glory to recreate the world!

Over 2,000 years of waiting for Christ's glorious return has prompted most of us to lose perspective on the second part of this "waiting" and focus solely on the upcoming season of Christmas. However, in the book of 2 Peter we find an example of an early Christian church that was getting tired waiting for Christ's glorious return. In fact, when 2 Peter is written the people were not annually celebrating the season of Christmas, they were all waiting for Christ's glorious return to the world.

Peter offers some practical advice to this community of faith as they are participating in this time of "hopeful and expectant waiting"

that I think can shed some light into our current world situation.

For the vast majority of 2020 we have been engaged in battle against Covid19. Regardless of how each of us may individually feel about this virus, the virus itself has absolutely altered our lives and the world around us. Now as scientists and medical professionals are nearing effective vaccines to slay this virus, we enter a season which leads us to Christmas and a season that is filled with traditions that many of us love and long for.

Many of us hold on to memories of "Christmas past!" We remember with longing hearts coming together as family and friends, the feasts that celebrate the day, the worships that are filled with Christmas carols, the sharing of gifts with one another and other traditions that bring meaning and focus to an individual's understanding of Christmas.

While we continue to insist to anyone who will listen that we "hold on" to the true meaning of Christmas (the birth of the Christ child) our actions, behaviors, and longings for our own "traditional Christmas" betray us.

It would be easy for us to focus this year on what we are losing because of this virus. It would be easy for us to sulk and mourn over our desire to celebrate Christmas like there is no real threat. Yet, I would share, that perhaps this season of Advent and the coming season of Christmas could profoundly impact our understanding of our faith!

If our eyes and our minds are focused on the prohibitions of the 2020 Advent/Christmas season, we will miss the outpouring grace of God dwelling within our midst right here and right now. We will miss the way in which so

many of our fellow disciples are lovingly and freely sharing gifts of hope with others. We will miss the young ladies in our community of faith who are collecting supplies for animals in shelters. We will miss the families involved in sending Christmas greetings to young women and men serving in our armed forces. We will miss the folks among us who are helping to feed the hungry in our community and helping to keep those who are homeless from sleeping on the cold ground. If we are focused on what we and our families will be denied this Advent and Christmas season we will miss the opportunity to tell one another the stories of the centuries of Christians who didn't celebrate the day of Christmas with feasts and gifts and candles and lights, but rather with the simple recitation of the stories of the birth of Jesus.

In other words my friends, if our eyes and our minds are focused on the prohibitions of the 2020 Advent/Christmas season, we will miss the opportunity to sing praises to God for what God is doing among us in the world right now!

My hope and my prayer my friends are that we might take heed to Peter's advice!

¹⁴And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight.

¹⁵And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved."

So, while we hopefully and expectantly wait for a return to what we consider "normal." While we hopefully and expectantly wait for the return of Christ to make all things new. We live at peace knowing that God has accomplished all that is necessary for us to live eternally with the Lord and we open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts to bear witness to how our God comes among us this season of our lives and give the Lord thanks and praise!

Until next time

Keep trusting God, keep washing those hands, and be at peace; hopefully and expectantly!

PJ



REFLECTION FOR TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8 2020

¹³***Sing for joy, O heavens!***

Rejoice, O earth!

Burst into song, O mountains!

For the Lord has comforted his people

and will have compassion on them in their suffering.

¹⁴***Yet Jerusalem says, "The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us."***

¹⁵***"Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?***

Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?

But even if that were possible,

I would not forget you!

¹⁶***See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.***

Isaiah 49:13-16a

Greetings my friends!

Simply to give you a little context; the above Scripture is written in a time and a place when the people of Israel were taken into captivity in a far away land. Most scholars believe that this passage was penned to paper after the Israelites have been in captivity for nearly 200 years. The author of this passage is sharing what it will be like when God acts to free the Israelites from the captivity just before this passage begins. Verse 13 is the climax of this section of Scripture and verse 14 shares the thoughts of the people of Israel to the prophet's words.

Certain passages of Holy Scripture have taken on much greater meaning to my life per-

sonally since the beginning of the pandemic. The psalms which were written for God's children to provide guidance in daily living during times of both plenty and times of want to have certainly sustained me through this pandemic. Now, in the season of Advent, I have been taking great comfort in the words of Isaiah.

For you see, Isaiah is writing to a people trying to inspire hope and faithfulness that God has spoken "Freedom" to the people of Israel, yet the "Freedom" that has been spoken of has not yet been fully revealed in the world around them. Nonetheless, because God has spoken "freedom" truly "freedom" is certain to come.

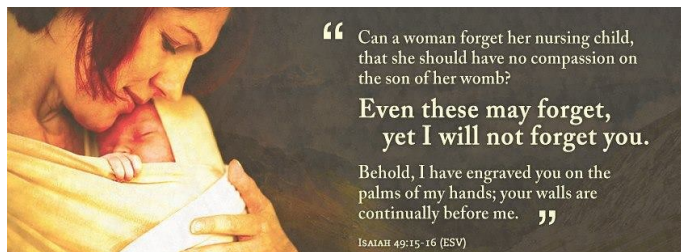
The people are living in the "in between time." The "in between time" of a sure and certain promise of God being made and that time when it will be fully realized!

We all live in this "in between time" as Christians! In the waters of baptism our God has declared that indeed we are children of the living God and will inherit the eternal kingdom alongside our Lord. And while this promise is sure and certain, this divine reality is not realized at this moment in time.

The global pandemic of 2020 has brought this feeling into a microscopic focus. It has been 10 months since the pandemic restrictions starting to be enacted. The wearing of facemasks, the washing of hands, the sanitizing everything in sight, the social distancing, and the "no hug" policy have greatly impacted the way we live. For our sisters and brothers living in care communities, the restrictions are even greater. For these sisters and brothers dining has been adjusted, visitation of family and friends has been restricted and many other social contacts which we once may have taken for granted have been momentarily taken away.

Yet my sisters and brothers, we have not been forgotten!

We have not been forgotten by our God! We have not been forgotten by our community of faith! We have not been forgotten by our family and friends!



“ Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?

Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. ”

ISAIAH 49:15-16 (ESV)

*Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child?
Can she feel no love for the child she has borne?
But even if that were possible,
I would not forget you!*

¹⁶See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.

So, it is on this cold winter day in December of 2020 I declare to you a simple truth! Today we are one day closer to the end of this pandemic than we were yesterday!

The vaccines are coming, and prayerfully these vaccines will allow for the resumption of a more familiar and comfortable life soon. Yet, my friends I truly believe that when we emerge from this time of pandemic, we will carry with us some of the many lessons that we have learned during this time. Prayerfully we will carry forward that truth that we have responsibilities to all people within our community to keep them protected. Prayerfully we will carry forward the functional lessons, that it is OK and even good for us to wear facemasks when we are feeling "under the weather" to keep others protected. Prayerfully we will carry forward the frequent washing of hands and sanitizing during the cold and flu season. Prayerfully we will carry forward how our community of faith and people whom we loved attempted to keep us safe, keep us connected, and keep our faith alive during a difficult season of time. Prayerfully we will carry forward the fragile nature of life itself and remember to let people know we love them before we part company and always attempt to not let anger or frustration rule a day which was always meant by God to be filled with love. Prayerfully we will carry forward the truth that we are each and all loved by God, that God has each of our names and all our

names written in the palm of God's hand and that our Lord is never far away. These and so many other lessons have been shared during this time. Lessons of life, lessons of love, lessons from a God Who has each of our names written in the palm of God's hand!

Until next time!

Keep trusting God, keep washing those hands, and be a peace with one another!

PJ



CARD MINISTRY

Spread Some Holiday Cheer. As of Monday, December 7, 510 holiday cards have been dropped off at LoC. We need more cards—non religious, please. Use cards you have leftover or ones you receive in the mail. Our goal is to have a card for each resident of Gracedale, Cedarbrook/Ft Hill, and ManorCare 1 and 2 in Bethlehem - over 1,000 cards. Please personalize the cards by writing a message inside ("Season's Greetings" or "Thinking of You"), signing only your first name, placing the card in its envelope unsealed, and dropping them off in a plastic bag on the back porch of LoC by Tuesday, December 15. Cards will be delivered by UPG volunteers - no stamps are needed. Thank You for being a blessing to others.

THIS WEEK IN THE UPG DECEMBER 12—DECEMBER 20

Saturday December 12

4:45 PM Worship
(LiveStream Facebook St.P)

Sunday December 13

Worship available on YouTube
11:00 AM Sunday School Drive-Thru
Christmas Party

Monday December 14

7:00 PM Coffee & Conversation
(Zoom)

Tuesday December 15

9:00 AM Staff Meeting (Zoom)

Wednesday December 16

7:00 AM Fellowship Meeting

Thursday December 17

6:30 PM Bible Study (Zoom)

Friday December 18

Saturday December 19

4:45 PM Worship (LiveStream
Facebook LoC)

Sunday December 20

Worship available on YouTube
46ers Zoom



Third Sunday of Advent