



PREPARE THE WAY

Connecting to your stories of yearning, tension,
and liberation to prepare the way for embodied hope.

This Advent season, we are inviting you to give space, voice, and community to the feelings that live inside of you, especially the feelings that may feel very much at odds with each other. We think of so many things in binary terms, including our feelings. It can be easy to think that if we are happy, then we aren't sad; if we are joyful, then we have defeated our grief; if we are healed, then we have overcome our brokenness.

But that is rarely the reality.

So this season, we invite you to gather around these feelings and these stories, and to imagine how these seemingly conflicting realities prepare the way FOR each other.

ADVENT 2022

A Note on What's Inside

A Weekly Meditation: This is a very short meditation based around our sermon series at our Sunday Gatherings, designed to be understandable by you and kiddos alike! You can read these meditations anytime that works best for you, if that happens to be on an actual Advent Sunday, that's great, but if the only time you have space or your family can be together in one room is at 8:00 pm on a Tuesday, then that works too.

The meditations also include questions for discussion, reflection, or journaling that serve to root your mind, body, and soul in the themes of each Advent Sunday.

An Advent Wreath: You'll probably notice that your advent wreath is only a simple wooden base and candles. That's because we invite you and your family to bring the whole of your creativity to the wreath. Pick a theme that you are living into this advent season; pick an emotion or a feeling you could build your wreath around; bring your own artistic flare to it, or ask everyone in your household to bring a piece of themselves to it. Below you'll find a few examples over the last few years to spark your creativity. And if what you are drawn to this season is holy simplicity, the base and candles stand alone in beautiful minimalism.

We hope that this Advent kit allows you to think, talk, and play your way through the wonder of the Advent season.



1st Week of Advent

HOPE | LAMENT

Light one candle.

*As you enter into this sacred space,
notice the flame of the candles.*

*Fire gives light and warmth.
It is also ferocious and chaotic.*

How is this light moving tonight?

*As you feel comfortable, Let your
bodies mirror the movement of the
flame... waving, vibrating, moving.*

*Then, breathe together
before you begin.*

READ

JEREMIAH 9:20

ISAIAH 2:1-5

*As you end your grounding time, use a
snuffer or gently blow to put out the
candles.*

*Then, watch what happens after the flame
goes out. The light is still there, just
different.*

*Take a moment of breath to watch as the
smoke from the flame fills the room.*

The light is all around us now.

"Lament is not anti-hope, not even a stepping stone to hope. Lament itself is a form of hope. Our hope can only be as deep as our lament. And our lament as deep as our hope."

- This Here Flesh

When you hear the word lament, what do you think of? What images? What actions? What feelings come to mind?

Lament is not a practice we see very often anymore. It's too loud, too vulnerable... too consuming. Lament is a messy affair (maybe even a little snotty); lament is that deep feeling of grief and disappointment when all that you hoped for — the justice, the compassion, the goodness — collides with the reality of what *DID* happen.

Hopefully declaring what you want to see happen in your life or in the world, fighting and working hard to see it come to life, only for things to not turn out the way you planned can leave us feeling exposed, silly, or naive. It's a vulnerable practice.

So instead of lamenting, instead of grieving what was lost, we often pretend not to care at all. That's easier and safer.

Can you think of a time you hoped for something to happen, for something to be better, only for it not to happen? How did you feel? Where in your body did you feel?

And the reason lament is so vulnerable is that it goes hand in hand *with hope*. You cannot have lament without hope, because lament is born out of knowing that you (we) are meant for so much more, and, really you cannot have hope without lament, because having hope in a world that is *not* perfect, that is so out of pace with the Harmony way, means you know, at some point, you will be disappointed; that thing you most hope for may not happen.

Both are necessary in the world we live. Both are necessary to survive in the world as it is, even as we yearn for the world as it could be, as we yearn for a world where swords become plowshares.

Lament and hope are practices that have to return to again and again. And once more, lament and hope are at their most powerful when they are held in collectively, with those who can hold all our stories of that vulnerable disappointment, loss, grief, and want for something better.

What stories of hope are you holding inside of you now? What stories of lament? Wonder together how those stories may be connected.

2nd Week of Advent

PEACE | RAGE

Light two candles.

As you enter into this sacred space, notice the flame of the candles.

Fire gives light and warmth. It is also ferocious and chaotic.

How is this light moving tonight?

As you feel comfortable, Let your bodies mirror the movement of the flame... waving, vibrating, moving.

Then, breathe together before you begin.

READ

MATTHEW 3:1-12

As you end your grounding time, use a snuffer or gently blow to put out the candles.

Then, watch what happens after the flame goes out. The light is still there, just different.

Take a moment of breath to watch as the smoke from the flame fills the room.

The light is all around us now.

“I am not convinced we can tell the truth alienated from the truth of our emotions. They are necessary company. Sometimes, no matter how threatening it may be, it is seeing the face of anger that can finally shake a people of their numbness.” - This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley

As you read that story of a man dressed in camel's fur, who eats locusts and honey; a man who doesn't live in a home, with hair probably matted and wild; a man who yells at religious leaders that they are "a brood of vipers" and warns of unquenchable fire that will burn away injustice... **What would you feel if you came across a man like this? What would you think of him?**

What is so interesting about this story is that in all his wild crying in the wilderness, in all his rage, in his calling out of the hypocrisy, he was preparing the way for peace.

And this is the interesting thing about rage, about anger...sometimes it's good! Anger isn't a bad emotion. The trick with anger is that sometimes it can become destructive, all-consuming, and hurtful for you and others. **Can you think of a time you've been angry like that? What did it feel like? How did you act?**

If you've felt anger or rage like that before, it may be strange to think of rage and peace as being connected, to imagine that maybe, sometimes, rage is actually preparing the way for peace. Sometimes you need rage to clear out injustice, oppression, and violence so there's room for peace to go.

Can you think of a time you were angry in this way? Angry at something that DESERVED it? Was that different than the other kind of anger?

Rage and peace are good company, maybe even necessary company. And when you have access to both, when you honestly are connected to both rage and peace, that is the only way your rage can be helpful, and your peace can be authentic, at least when we live in the world as it is. The goal and vision and hope of peace keeps your rage from becoming destructive, and the power and honesty of raw, real rage creates a peace that is grounded in reality rather, not fearful and weak.

What stories of rage and peace do you hold in your body today? What is bringing you peace? And what in your life right now is bringing you rage? And how can you bring those two things closer together?

3rd Week of Advent

LOVE | FEAR

Light three candles.

As you enter into this sacred space, notice the flame of the candles.

Fire gives light and warmth. It is also ferocious and chaotic.

How is this light moving tonight?

As you feel comfortable, Let your bodies mirror the movement of the flame... waving, vibrating, moving.

Then, breathe together before you begin.

READ

MATTHEW 1:18-25

As you end your grounding time, use a snuffer or gently blow to put out the candles.

Then, watch what happens after the flame goes out. The light is still there, just different.

Take a moment of breath to watch as the smoke from the flame fills the room.

The light is all around us now.

"If there is anywhere on earth a lover of God who is always kept safe, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown to me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again, we are always kept in the same precious love." - Julian of Norwich

This is a season where we repeat the words the angels spoke to Joseph in this text, and later to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock, "Do not be afraid." An odd command, given the state of the world. Both then and now.

Think of a time you have been afraid? What were you afraid of? Do you think someone telling you to NOT be afraid would have helped? Why or why not?

The truth is, there is a lot to be afraid of; so many things that feel outside of our control. We can plan and plan to keep ourselves safe, but at the end of the day, there is very little we can do to protect ourselves from the things we are most afraid of.

So what do we do? If safety is not something that can always be guaranteed — if safety is not a thing we can always promise to each other.

Joseph had made a promise to love Mary through what was perhaps the most terrifying moments in both of their lives.

And perhaps, in times of fear, that is the promise that we can offer to one another. While it may not save us from the fear, maybe it's the promises of those who love us most that make us courageous enough to take that first, fearful trembling step toward a world that does not promise that we will be safe forever.

Maybe, the reason that the angels said "do not be afraid", to the shepherds, to Joseph, is because there is so much to be afraid of in this world, but love is not one of them. And that was what they had come to offer. Perhaps, when they were saying "do not be afraid", what they meant was, **"I love you. Love is here. You are not alone."**

Who are the people that you most like to be close to when you are afraid? And why?

4th Week of Advent

JOY | SUFFERING

Light four candles.

*As you enter into this sacred space,
notice the flame of the candles.*

*Fire gives light and warmth.
It is also ferocious and chaotic.*

How is this light moving tonight?

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bodies mirror the movement of the
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before you begin.*

READ

LUKE 1:39-56

*As you end your grounding time, use a
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candles.*

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different.*

*Take a moment of breath to watch as the
smoke from the flame fills the room.*

The light is all around us now.

"Joy doesn't replace any emotion; it holds them all and keeps any one of them from swallowing us whole... Society has failed to understand this. When it tells us to find joy in suffering, it is telling us to let it go, to move on, to smile through it. But joy says, hold on to your sorrow. It can rest safely here."

- This Here Flesh, Cole Arthur Riley

This month, we have spoken about how seemingly conflicting emotions and experiences can, in fact, prepare the way for each other. Just as anger, fear, and lament made way for Jesus.

And the funny thing about joy is that it has a funny way of preparing the way for all of it.

Think of a time you would describe as joyful. How did you know you were feeling joy? What made it different than just being happy or excited?

Joy is a little different than all the other experiences we've spoken about in that we could have put it with any of them. Joy can sit alongside any experience and prepare the way so that we can fully feel it without getting overwhelmed.

In many ways, joy keeps us human in a world that would often see us stripped of our humanity.

Joy says, come as you are in all your messy, wonderful, and deeply-loved glory.

Whether it's found in laughter, quiet, deep breaths, time spent with creation, or time spent with someone you love, joy draws you closer. Joy deepens connection to yourself and to others.

Joy is an act of resistance against the lies of Empire because it can be felt even in the most profound of suffering, in places where happiness and hope may not yet be able to reach.

Joy says, let me walk with you through lament and hope, through rage and peace, through love and fear; let me come with you, and I will help you survive all of it.

Has there ever been a time when you have felt joy in a time that was hard? What was that like? Who was with you? What were doing?