

Presbyterians *Read*



Second Week of Advent

Theme: Paying Attention to God's New Reality

If you do not want to miss out, you must pay attention to that other world, the unreasonable, inexplicable world saturated with God's holiness, that is in the long run more decisive and more satisfying than the available world offers (p. 27).

Prayer

Light a candle and place it at the centre of your discussion circle. To open, invite someone to read the following prayer from p. 23:

In this Advent season, teach us the new song, which heralds the new world that is coming, the new reality that is taking shape before our eyes. May we rejoice in its truth and power and join all creation in its loud amen!

Follow the prayer with a few minutes of silent reflection to centre in God's presence. Close the silence with a re-reading of the same prayer followed by an "Amen."

Overview of Theme

We have trouble seeing beyond the delights, frustrations and even horrors of the material world. We get lost in life as it is and forget that God is powerfully at work. Advent is a time when we slow down and pay attention to the truth that "the one who is to come from God has already come and begun his work" (p. 33). Jesus has ushered in a new reality of love for neighbours and enemies, solidarity between the rich and the poor, justice for those on the margins and freedom from fear and oppression for all. Jesus has made it possible for us to recognize, experience and live into the kingdom of God that is here and now and not just there and then. This week, Brueggemann invites us to pay attention to this "new world" in our midst, to develop eyes to see "the unreasonable, inexplicable world saturated with God's holiness" (p. 27). He reminds us that we do not have to do it alone; God has given us his son, and, through Jesus, we are being transformed into people made for this new reality.

Opening Discussion Prompts

Share an example of a time in your life or the life of the church that you could see God at work. What or who helped you to see?

In which areas of your life do you feel you need to slow down or pay more attention to see “God’s holiness”? What do you need to let go of for this to happen?

Biblical Reflection

Read the following passage slowly. If you have time, invite someone else to read it a second time. Reading it twice, especially when using a different translation with a different voice, allows people to hear new things in the passage. After reading the passage, use the questions below to guide your discussion.

Isaiah 9:2–7 (NRSV)

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Biblical Reflection Discussion Points

This passage from Isaiah is full of images to describe a coming saviour and what his kingdom will be like. What images stand out to you the most? Discuss their meaning.

Isaiah’s vision is one of abundance: light in darkness, joy in harvest, burdens lifted and a saviour born for us. How are you living into this vision? What does/could your faith community do to help people become citizens of this new reality?

As you “pay attention to the other world, the unreasonable, inexplicable world saturated with God’s holiness” (p. 27), where is God calling your attention? Where, what or who might God be calling your attention to that you’ve failed to see before?



Weekly Spiritual Practice

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE

In Isaiah's prophecy, a new reality is born into the world through the messiah. Those who embrace the messiah will no longer walk in darkness but will be guided by his light to see the new world he brings. Through Christ, we have been given the ability to see this reality, but we are often too preoccupied with our lives to pay attention to what God is doing in and around us.

This week, our spiritual practice is practicing the presence—intentionally living into a deeper awareness of God's activity in our lives. The following spiritual exercises have been adapted from Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (pp. 71-73) to help enhance your awareness of God and God's kingdom in everyday life. Please choose one or both to try this week.

- In the morning, consider how you will live your day in God's presence. Throughout the day ask yourself if you are still living your intention to be in God's presence. Ask God to give you the eyes to see the world as God sees it.
- Develop prayers that help you stay awake to God. For instance, find a verse or prayer that you will pair with a certain thing you do every day (e.g., a prayer you always say while you are in the shower, while you are cooking or while you are driving). Let these prayers lead you into deeper encounters with God.

Closing Prayer

As watchmen look for the morning, so do we look for You, O Christ. Come and make Yourself known to us in our daily lives and the world. Help us to rest in your presence always. We pause now to embrace your nearness, saying "Jesus" as we breathe in and "here I am" as we breathe out.

[Leave time for people to practice breath prayer: breathe in "Jesus," breathe out "here I am"]

Increase our attentiveness so that we will learn to see You where You are: on the margins and at the centre, with our friends and our enemies, in every moment of suffering and every moment of joy, and with us and with the others that we fail to recognize. You are right here, in it and through it all. Open our eyes so that we may see your holiness radiating in all of life this Advent season. Come, Lord Jesus, Come.

Breath Prayer

For this closing prayer, we will be using "breath prayer"—a form of prayer that many will not be familiar with. It is helpful to explain it ahead of time. Explain that, as they breathe in, they should repeat a name for God that is dear to them (e.g., Abba, Healer, Lord, Shepherd). As they breathe out, they should express a desire of their heart (e.g., "hear my prayer," "show me your way," "forgive me," "shower me in your love"). In the closing prayer, we've used "Jesus... here I am," but participants are welcome to choose their own words.

