

December 20, 2020

Fourth Sunday of Advent



St. John

United Church of Christ

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Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Susan Blain

Week Four *The readings this week tell the beginning of the almost-too-familiar story of Incarnation. 2 Samuel 7 reveals God longing to be among the people. At long last “at rest from their enemies”, King David worries that the Presence of God with Israel dwells in temporary shelter. David wants to honor God with a more permanent tabernacle. But God’s Prophet Nathan challenges him: “Are you the one to build God a house?” Since the time of Exodus, God has been content to “move about” with the people in their midst, in tent and shelter, intimately engaged with them as they make their precarious way in the world. God’s desire is to “plant” the weary people in a place of safety with wise leadership, and access to God’s own Presence.*

Although in another generation Israel will build a Temple with a space set apart for the Holy One, in this moment God desires to live life “on the ground” with the people. David’s descendants, however, will have a different kind of house: a dynasty formed from the family of the humble shepherd, called into leadership by God.

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of God again seeking dwelling place amidst the people, in Mary’s womb. Mary, who is part of a poor branch of David’s house, will offer the Holy One shelter and nourishment to grow into the fulness of human life.

One of Mary’s ancient titles in the Church is Theotokos, “God-Bearer”. Her dialogue with the Angel sets the stage for the Holy One to continue the direct and intimate involvement of the Divine with humanity—incarnation as one of us—Divine love and presence becoming flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. Her song of joy in the Magnificat declares the promise of such Love, to change the world from within to become a place of justice and peace.

Why would God choose to be at work in the world from the inside out? How does it feel to know God longs to be with us?

Scripture Texts

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38

LIGHT FOUR CANDLES:

O Holy One, we light this fourth candle,
And marvel at your desire to be one with us.
Let its flame summon hearts grown cold
Into the warmth of a people living in
The Light of Love.
Fill our lives with Love,
making room there for friends and strangers,
all who desire to know you, God with us, as we work
for justice and peace in the service of Hope.

God be with us in this Light of Love.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Sing out, my soul!
Sing of the holiness of God:
Who has delighted in humanity; lifted up the poor,
satisfied the hungry, given voice to the silent, and
grounded the oppressor?
God has blessed the full-bellied with emptiness,
And given the gift of tears to those who have never
wept;

God has desired the darkness of the womb, and
inhabited our flesh--

Sing of the longing of God: Sing out, my soul!
and inhabited our flesh-- Sing of the longing of God:
Sing out, my soul!

INVOCATION

O Wondrous God, send your Messenger to us today
with a word of grace
if we are fearful, move us to Confidence.
If we are weary, offer us Rest.
If we are empty, fill us with Hope.
We have been searching for you far away;
Let us find you at home in our midst,
Changing hearts and minds urging us to join your
work of Love.
We pray in the name of the One who is coming,
Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

God's promise to David

7 When the king was settled in his palace, and
the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding
enemies, ² the king said to the prophet Nathan,
"Look! I'm living in a cedar palace, but God's chest is
housed in a tent!"

³ Nathan said to the king, "Go ahead and do
whatever you are thinking, because the LORD is with
you." ⁴ But that very night the LORD's word came to

Nathan: ⁵Go to my servant David and tell him: This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build the temple for me to live in. ⁶In fact, I haven't lived in a temple from the day I brought Israel out of Egypt until now. Instead, I have been traveling around in a tent and in a dwelling. ⁷Throughout my traveling around with the Israelites, did I ever ask any of Israel's tribal leaders I appointed to shepherd my people: Why haven't you built me a cedar temple? ⁸So then, say this to my servant David: This is what the LORD of heavenly forces says: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be leader over my people Israel. ⁹I've been with you wherever you've gone, and I've eliminated all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great—like the name of the greatest people on earth. ¹⁰I'm going to provide a place for my people Israel, and plant them so that they may live there and no longer be disturbed. Cruel people will no longer trouble them, as they had been earlier, ¹¹when I appointed leaders over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. And the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make a dynasty for you. ¹⁶Your dynasty and your kingdom will be secured forever before me. Your throne will be established forever.



MESSAGE: “Where does God live?”

This week we move from one prophetic message

(Isaiah) to another (Samuel.) You might remember that Samuel was the prophet who anointed the shepherd boy, the son of Jesse, who became King David. In case you are curious, King David ruled somewhere between 1035 – 970 B.C. and the Babylonia exile was from 597 – 538 B.C., so we are going backwards in time. (B.C. counts backwards from when Jesus was born and A.D. started.) Crazy, right?

Anyway, what does this story have to do with Advent and Christmas? First of all, it describes God's promise to David that his dynasty would continue (verses 9 – 11, 16).

My thought about this text has to do with the question of where is God? Ancient people thought that God could only be found in certain places such as in the Ark, inside a tent, or in a temple. God was trying to teach King David, through the prophet Nathan, that God was with David all his life. (verses 8-9). In other words, God doesn't stay in one place.

God longed to be with us and now God is with us in the gift of his son, Jesus, as an impression of God. Jesus is born just as any other person, and lived among us. God, through Jesus, experienced everything that humans do. God lives everywhere and we can “see” God wherever we see love. Who taught us that? This baby whom we will celebrate his birth in just a few days. God incarnate. God made visible in this very special child. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Most Holy One, we are so grateful that you have blessed us in so many ways. First, by sending this child who will grow up to be our savior and redeemer. That's the best gift anyone could ask for. Secondly, we are grateful that vaccines have been prepared for all of us, to put an end to this pandemic. We are grateful for the scientists, all the technicians, all those who volunteered to be in the research studies, and all those who are working very hard to transport this vaccine to us. **Thank you** for sending all those people in answer to our prayers for help.

Thank you for our faith family and friends that have helped us stay connected to each other when we had to isolate ourselves. Please send comfort to all the families who have lost loved ones from this disease.

Thank you for sending people who are helping those who have been out of work because of the pandemic; all those who are finding ways to feed those who are hungry, all those who are finding ways to teach our children, all those who are calling shut-ins and those who are lonely.

We pray for them all but give you, Gracious God, the glory for making this relief possible. We continue by praying the prayer your son taught us. . .

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as
it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.**

THANK YOU FOR SHARING: *(Please send a donation for the UCC Christmas Fund. The address is on the front page.)*

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us.
We bring forth our offerings – our tithes, our treasures, our least coins –
to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

DEDICATION:

O Faithful One, accept these gifts of our hearts and hands. May they be multiplied and magnified as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Let us go forth without fear, creating in our lives a space for the One who longs to dwell with us, to share our lives, and bless our world, and lead us into the Kingdom of Justice and Peace.
Amen.

Pray for the family of Jim Underwood, Bill Underwood's father, Trisann's father-in-law and Connor and Tyler's grandfather. His services were Thursday morning.

VIEWING BY DECEMBER 23, ON YOUTUBE, FACEBOOK, AND ON OUR ST. JOHN WEBSITE.

www.stjohnfairview.org



PRAYER LIST: Rich Schmitt, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, Amy Annis, Janice Petroff.

THERE WILL NOT BE A BULLETIN FROM ME ON DECEMBER 27. HOWEVER I INVITE YOU TO VISIT THE UCC WEBSITE FOR A SERVICE CALLED "A VERY UCC CHRISTMAS". IT WILL BE ON YOUTUBE AND FACEBOOK AT 9 AM ON SUNDAY 27.

ucc.org/christmas_pageant_2020

ALSO, YOUR CHURCH IS PREPARING A VIDEO FOR YOU. IT IS A SMALL CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE OF WORD AND MUSIC. IT SHOULD BE READY FOR