

12.6.2023 Advent Midweek 1

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

2 Peter 3:18-15; Matthew 6:25-34

“Pause to Consider”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The theme of this year’s Advent midweek series is “Pause, Prepare, Ponder,” reminding us of the reading from 2 Peter, “*we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.*” During Advent we are awaiting God’s immanent reign of love where suffering, injustice, warfare, crying, and death are no more.

To state the theme of Advent and Christmas in this way is to also sound very contrary to our cultural Christmas of a perpetual baby Jesus, who is never revealed to be Emmanuel, God with us, raised and alive urging our faith to be active in love.

Advent is a moment to briefly pause allowing God’s grace, love, and wisdom to blossom again in our lives. At the end of the year, after many accomplishments as well as disappointments, goals reached and setbacks, Advent is a time to pause and consider the God who so loves this world.

Yet in a world that more and more demands rapid response and action, why should we “Pause, Prepare, Ponder?” More than ever, we have a wealth of information and knowledge literally at our fingertips. With a swipe or two, we can find information, participate in meetings, and order all types of goods and services. The kingdom of heaven truly seems to be in the palm of our hand. Yet we seem to take less and less time to consider ourselves, our world, and God. We seem to have forgotten there is a difference between knowledge and the wisdom that comes from spending time with God.

In the gospel reading for this evening, Jesus says, “*Look at the birds of the air...and consider the lilies of the field...*” Jesus is inviting the listener to pause and look, to pause and consider God’s abundant love for this world. Advent is about pausing for brief moments of consideration, looking for signs of God’s unfolding love in Jesus Christ.

Yet taking precious time for reflection seems almost reckless in light of the world’s problems and suffering, always demanding our response. Yet I would argue from experience that time spent in prayer and meditation is never wasted. Moments of prayerful consideration do not lead us away from the world; rather, prayer and meditation are precisely what sharpen and clarify our focus upon this world. Prayer always leads us back into daily life, proclaiming Christ alive through deeds of love.

Tonight's readings from 2 Peter and Matthew give us vision and courage to ask, "Who is this God who loves me, my neighbor, and all this world?" As I paused to consider these readings, I was reminded of a book that I used to have my students read by the Japanese theologian, Toyohiko Kagawa (1888-1960). The book, titled "The Science of Love" (『愛の科学』), is Kagawa's dialogue with our human faculties of faith and reason.

In the final chapter of the book, Kagawa envisions the entire cosmos as if it were the vast bud of a flower, blossoming and unfolding with God's eternal life and love. The new heaven and earth, the kingdom of God that we await is God's very being of love. God's love is the power of transformation changing everything, always evolving, always sharing the resurrection life of Christ, who is the new heaven and earth.

As we await Christ's advent, we "pause and consider" asking, "Who am I?" and "Who is God?" Waiting in prayer, God moves us from fear and worry to a new vision of ourselves. In the final pages of the book, Kagawa writes,

Love is the ultimate revelation, the final sanctuary. Only before love, do I bow. Love possesses all of me. God is love...Love leads us into the deepest reality. Only love sees God. By the wondrous eyes of love, God and humanity see one another together. Through love, human eyes become the eyes of God. Through love, for the first time, God and humanity are united. Love is the beginning and the end of God. Love is infinite.

In tonight's gospel in talking about food, drink, and clothing Jesus highlights how little human beings have changed. Rather than looking at the world through God's eyes of love, humanity looks for signs of God in our wealth of possessions. We objectify "the Beautiful" and "the Good" as if they themselves were divine.

By asking us to look at the birds and lilies, Jesus is asking us to consider God's care for the least and smallest in creation. Jesus didn't spend time with the powerful or the wealthy, or with the beautiful or the good. Jesus spent time with the least and the outcast, the weak and the sinful. When Jesus says, "look and consider," he is asking us to look at the world through his eyes of love for this world. His vision moves us from worry to hope, transforming us every moment into children of God.

During Advent pause and consider God's love for you, your neighbor, and the world. God will move you from prayer to an active faith of love for this world.

Pause to consider. God is transforming you. Look at the world with his eyes of love. Amen.