


ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2023

An Advent Devotional Prepared by the Congregation of Trinity A2

“AT THIS CHRISTMAS WHEN CHRIST COMES,
WILL HE FIND A WARM HEART? MARK THE
SEASON OF ADVENT BY LOVING AND
SERVING THE OTHERS WITH GOD’S OWN
LOVE AND CONCERN.”

Mother Teresa

IN EACH DEVOTION

- Scripture
 - Devotion
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 - Song
 - Quote and Fact about Ableism
- 

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2023

SCRIPTURE: MICAH 5:2

But you, O Bethlehem
Ephrathah, who are too little to
be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for
me one who is to be ruler in
Israel, whose coming forth is
from of old, from ancient days.



DEVOTION

by Pastor Sarah Mayer-Flatt

My favorite Advent hymn is O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. The old lyrics, the biblical references, and the seemingly haunting melody floods my heart with expectation and hope every year. O Come, Emmanuel is a prayer and a promise. Emmanuel means “God with us.” It is in Jesus that God promises to always be with us, and when we sing this hymn, we are reminded of that truth while we pray for God’s presence in our very lives.

Advent is known as a season of hope; a time to reflect and slow down on what it means that God became flesh and lived among God’s people, healed and cured the sick and the outcasts, welcomed the sinners, and died for all of our salvation. That’s a lot to squeeze into 4 of the busiest weeks of the year! Praying for Christ to be present in our lives (through song) is such a faithful opportunity we have to remember we, too, are part of the story of Christmas, and the family of God.



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2023

PRAYER

O Come, Emmanuel, to our hearts and our world. May we remember your promise to always be with us, especially during the darkness of December and the busyness of our lives. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

Think about a person you know who has a disability. How do they reveal God in this world to you?

QUOTE

There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more. - Robert M. Hensel

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism can look like the lack of compliance with disability rights laws like the ADA.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Andrew Peterson



MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, so that in the power of the Holy Spirit you may be rich in hope.



DEVOTION

by Pastor Kathy Schell

In my years of ministry as a hospital chaplain, I encountered so many heroes, or “ordinary individuals who find the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles”, as Christopher Reeve defines it in today’s quote. There was the young man who struggled with chronic mental illness, determined to manage his illness so he could get a job and support himself. The woman in her 70s with alcoholism who moved into recovery and eventually became a peer counselor in our treatment program in order to help others with the same problem. The mom who worked hard to regain functionality in our rehab program after a horrendous motor vehicle accident, even while grieving her preschool aged daughter who had died in the same accident. My hospital colleagues who showed up every day during the worst Covid times, determined to do their utmost to care for our patients, even when knowing that some of them would die in spite of our best efforts. And I can look around our Trinity congregation and see similar heroes!

All of these ordinary people sought out hope, clung to hope, nourished hope. Sometimes that would be their hope in God, but they also found it in the support of others, in books, memories, art, scriptures. I believe that hope is as essential to us as food, water, and the air we breathe. I love that God is called the “God of hope” in Romans 15.

What I find interesting is how our hope can change over time. One example is how someone’s hope for a “cure” can change to hope for healing, whether that healing be in mind, in relationships, in emotions, or in spirit. The hope of the earliest Christians changed when the Lord did not return during their lifetimes. Advent remains a time in the Church calendar to focus on hope, a time of waiting in expectation.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2023

PRAYER

God of hope, in this Advent season of hope, renew your hope within me through the power of your Holy Spirit.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What has given you hope in the past? How has it perhaps changed over time to give you the hope you have now? If you find your hope running low, can you hope to have hope?

QUOTE

A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles. - Christopher Reeve

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is using phrases like "That's so lame" "That guy is crazy" or "You're acting so bipolar today."

Open Up - The Brilliance



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 8:18

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.



DEVOTION

by Pastor Roger Harms

I think I was being lazy when I would read about “the glory about to be revealed to us” and think that it would only come in heaven. But for this life, the suffering would continue? (Romans 8:18). That does not give any help and hope to those who have limits on their capacities now. It does not give people hope for God’s glory and love to be revealed in the days and years to come here on earth. The world has not been built for people with disabilities. But small amounts of progress have been made. Can there be more change? Can God’s glory come closer and closer to ALL OF US? What can I do now to give hope to those with disabilities?

“This is my wish ... that peace would find its way to every boy and girl”, the featured song proclaims. Let us lift our lights and shine to all the world, for every boy and girl, for every human of every status and situation. Let us lift our voices and ring the bells so that all know God’s love for all peoples of the world. And let us listen to every voice, hear their concerns, learn about the suffering of peoples with disabilities, and seek to bring God’s love and peace to their lives. And as the song ends, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.” I hope God sends me to join the others already working. But I can certainly ask God to let the work start with me.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2023

PRAYER

O Lord of love for the world, help me to work to do what I can to reduce structural and systemic barriers that affect the children of God with disabilities. And help me to bring peace and light to the world, so that all can feel God's love for us through Jesus. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What can I do to help people with disabilities to see that God's love is for all people?

QUOTE

Limits on people's capacities to conduct activities that are essential to everyday life are imposed by structural and systemic barriers. These barriers are part of a social system that regards some bodies as "normal" and some as "other", rather than considering a broad range of bodies and possibilities... This relegates people with disabilities to the status of lesser citizens because of their lack of access. - Meg-John Barker

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

The world wasn't built with people with disabilities in mind, and because of that, the world we live in is inherently "ableist."

This is My Wish
Let There Be Peace on Earth
Voctave



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 52:7-9

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good things, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"



DEVOTION

Kim Bailey

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52: 7)

What is beautiful? Who is beautiful? On whose beauty standard is it based? Is it the correct one? We as people ask all these questions. But God doesn't make any of these observations of what is beautiful? Isaiah just says how beautiful are the feet who bring good news. And good news is wonderful. Especially when the news is about the Israelites exiled in Babylon who were getting out of exile. This is also a precursor of the good news of Jesus their Savior. God was giving them their freedom and salvation. The people could gather together and celebrate together. The beautiful and the not so beautiful-without any conditions.

This same message of peace and salvation is found in the new testament with the coming of Christ and his crucifixion. Jesus brought the same message to everyone. To the good looking and not so good looking, to the blind and the lame. He also was not afraid to eat with the poor and tax collectors. Or share the good news of Jesus Christ with them either.

We should emulate Jesus and not be afraid of others who are different from us. We should embrace them and share all of the good news that Jesus brought to all of the people.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2023

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for this glorious day you have made for us. Be with those who are less fortunate. Open our eyes to see everyone as you do-with love and understanding. Be with us and those we pray for today and always. Amen



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you tell someone about Jesus? Who do you need to give the good news about Jesus Christ our Savior?

QUOTE

The goal is to condition oneself to weed out these internalized ableist words from our vocabulary, as well as challenge our internalized beliefs about disability." - Catkin O'Grady

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism can be failing to incorporate accessibility into building design plans.

Winter Snow - Audrey Assad



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 40:1-5

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.



DEVOTION

Liza Altenburg

Growing up outside of the Lutheran tradition, the Bible was this mystical tome reserved only for clergy, with its treasures kept just beyond my reach and funneled to me secondhand, filtered through sermons and interpretations. I still feel rebelliously joyful when I turn those pages by myself, like I'm part of a secret club that it turns out isn't so secret after all. Reading scripture, I feel an electric buzz, a high-five from the Holy Spirit that seems to say, "Welcome to the conversation - where have you been?"

And at the very same time, a profound sense of responsibility envelops me. God's word is no longer filtered through the men of the cloth who I revered as keepers of the divine. God's word is for me - yes, ME - in all its grace and hope, and in every demand for engagement, reflection, and action.

Isaiah 40:1-5 strikes a chord in its beautiful simplicity, reminding us that God's love is immeasurable—yet sometimes in our humanness, we draw boundaries around it. Those feelings of being on the outside looking in are echoed in the experiences of those we may unintentionally exclude. But this scripture calls us to the ministry of the little things: the braille that whispers hope to fingertips, the ramps that roll out a welcome mat, the loop system that brings a sermon to life for ears straining to hear, and the livestream capabilities that bring church into the homes of those who can't be physically present. These acts might be small, but they carry the weight of mountains in their message of inclusivity. (cont)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2023

As I make my way through Advent, I feel called to look beyond the typical preparations that have become my comfort zone - putting out the nativity scene, hanging the stockings, and singing Christmas carols. What small acts can we introduce to ensure no one misses out on experiencing God's love? Every step we take to make our spaces and our communities more inclusive is a step toward living out the message of Isaiah. It's how we prepare the way for the Lord in the most literal sense—by ensuring that everyone can navigate that road to encounter Him. When we make God's love accessible to everyone, we're not just reading His Word—we're living it.

PRAYER

Holy One of Inclusivity and Love, help us to continue to seek and find new ways to be Your Presence in this world so that all may know and feel your redeeming love. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What childhood experiences affect your faith today? How can you look beyond the typical Advent preparations into preparations of welcome and inclusion?

QUOTE

There's nothing more debilitating about a disability than the way people treat you over it. - Solange Nicole

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism can look like buildings without braille on signs, elevator buttons, etc.

Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus
Eliza King and Hillside Recording



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2023

SCRIPTURE: MARK 1:1-3

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”



DEVOTION

Page Boyer

In Mark 1:1-3, Mark writes of the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” Serendipitously, the motto of my alma mater—chosen by Congregational minister and founder of Dartmouth College Eleazar Wheelock—is “Vox clamantis in deserto.” The literal Latin translation is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

Having pondered these words for over four decades, on the one hand, a solitary voice crying out in the wilderness can be frightening, lonely, frustratingly maddening, exhausting, and seemingly futile. Viewed from a different perspective, however, one voice crying out in the wilderness stands as an exemplar of unwavering courage, visionary leadership, and unequivocal power, uninterrupted by the interference of societal noise and often nonsensical chatter. As Isaiah’s words confirm, “one voice crying out in the wilderness” was enough to launch a seismic, thunderous, world-changing movement when a child was born under the star of Bethlehem on a cold winter’s night. Lauren Daigle’s lyrics to Light of the World “Behold” Version instantiates the unfettered joy that the shepherds, Magi, and “all who wait, all who hunger, all who’ve prayed, and all who wonder” must have felt at the nascent stirrings and awakening discernment of what this child’s birth was to initiate:

The drought breaks with the tears of a mother. A baby's cry is the sound of love. Come down, come down, Emmanuel. He is the song for the suffering. He is Messiah, the Prince of Peace has come. He has come, Emmanuel. (cont.)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2023

As Trinity's congregation seeks a deeper understanding of ableism (one might characterize ableism as the malady) and disability justice (similarly, one might think of this as the cure) –with the very clear vision to convert enhanced appreciation into action—"one voice crying out in the wilderness" could not be more appropriate. As Haben Grima notes, "Ableism runs so deep in our society that most ableists don't recognize their actions as ableist. They coat ableism in sweetness, then expect applause for their 'good' deeds." A universal example to which all of us may relate is the following fact about ableism: Ableism can look like building inaccessible websites. How many times has one clicked and clicked and clicked with the same fruitless outcome? Might a small adjustment or accommodation in programming (equity versus equality) change one's entire experience from negative to positive?

PRAYER

Most merciful, all-knowing, and powerful God, you have created each one of us exactly as you intend for your purpose. "For you formed my inwards parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it full well" (Psalm 139: 13). We sing with Lauren Daigle: *"The world waits for the miracle, The heart longs for a little bit of hope, Oh come, oh come Emmanuel."*

REFLECTION QUESTION

Does recognizing one's temporary able-bodied, able-minded state alter one's perspective on accessibility?

QUOTE

Navigating ableist situations is like traversing the muckiest mud pit. Ableism runs so deep in our society that most ableists don't recognize their actions as ableist. They coat ableism in sweetness, then expect applause for their "good" deeds. Attempts to explain the ableism behind the "good deeds" get brushed aside as sensitive, angry, and ungrateful. - Haben Grima

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism can look like building inaccessible websites.

Light of the World "Behold"

Lauren Daigle



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2023

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:14-15

He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.



DEVOTION

Tina Karns

As we await with great joy the coming of our Lord Jesus, I reflect on who Jesus was. He was not judgmental of others. He embraced and rejoiced with others. He helped those who wanted help, but did not assume help was needed.

People who have disabilities would like to be embraced for who they are. They have many talents in their own right. Never assume they want to be changed or “fixed”. They do not see themselves as needing such. Many, many in the deaf community like who they are and do not wish to be changed. They rejoice in their community.

It is not an injustice to have a disability. Please do not look down on those with disabilities. Respect them, engage with them. Everyone has a role.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2023

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Please help me to appreciate those around me. Not make assumptions to fix others; but to rejoice in each others unique abilities.



REFLECTION QUESTION

How would you feel if someone thought you needed to be fixed?

QUOTE

There will always be injustice in the world, because, you know, humans. The question is how we will choose to respond to the injustice around us. - Bruce Reyes-Chow

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is the assumption that people with disabilities want or need to be "fixed."



O Little Town of Bethlehem
The Sanflowerz

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 1:9

The true light that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.



DEVOTION

2023 Trinity Confirmation Class

There are a lot of disabilities that people have that you can't see. Some of these are autism, adhd, deafness or hearing loss, blindness or loss of sight, being mute, having anxiety, and having bipolar disorder. It is not okay to call them names or make fun of them. It's not okay to be disrespectful. Never assume that a person doesn't have a disability just because they look normal. It's also really important to have integrity to follow these rules even when people who have disabilities aren't around.

Jesus came to the world understanding that some people have more challenges and differences than others, but it doesn't make them any less human. Jesus tells us to love ourselves, our neighbors, and everyone. Jesus celebrates our uniqueness and Jesus helps us where we have challenges along the way.



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2023

PRAYER

Comforting God, help us see one another as the beautiful humans we are and help us to appreciate the things that make us unique. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

Have you ever done this before without knowing? Have you ever witnessed someone being mean to someone with disabilities? Have you ever thought about what you're saying before you say something that might be offensive? Do you know anyone with a disability? Have they been made fun of? Do you treat them any differently?

QUOTE

Don't judge a disability by its visibility. - Unknown

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

It is ableist to use disability as a punchline or to mock people with disabilities.

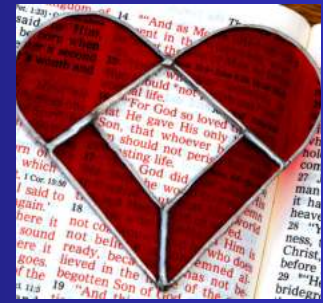
Comfort, Comfort Ye My People
The Many



MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 3:16

For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.



DEVOTION

Barbara Anderson

Our world is filled with boundaries—not just physical ones like rooms and roads and fences, or having a heart condition, diabetes, or being paraplegic. There are also boundaries that can be even more powerful—ones that are ideas. Ideas like love, charity, inclusiveness, or hate, anti-anything, rejection. We can be limited by our boundaries or we be expanded by them.

The verse from John tells us about the extent of God’s love for us. What kind of god would lay his life down, so we can be with him throughout eternity? God’s love is not limited to a few, but is given to everyone. He loves the world without exception. God’s love has no limitations. His love has the power to expand our lives—it is boundless.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2023

PRAYER

Holy One, help us always to feel the extensive and all-inclusive love that you have for each of us. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What are some things you feel bound by? What would it look like if we were not limited by those boundaries but expanded by them?

QUOTE

Medical knowledge tends to express bodies in terms of what they can't do, and media representations often value bodies in ways that overlook their uniqueness. - Anna Hickey-Moody

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is refusing to provide reasonable accommodations.

Emmanuel (Acoustic)

Stacy Riddle



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 6:51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.



DEVOTION

Brad Hubbard

“You are what you eat.”

I have found this to be true. As a cardiologist, I spend a lot of my time advising diets for my patients. For patients with hypertension and heart failure, we discuss low sodium diets. For patients with coronary artery disease, we discuss heart health diets. As Christians, what sort of spiritual diet do we consider?

Jesus uses bread several times in the Bible whether feeding the crowd or talking about eternal life. Just before our reference scripture, in John 6:32-35, Jesus said, “it is not Moses who has given you the bread of heaven, but it is my Father. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life.”

In all these verses, John is using the present tense. Bible scholars felt that Jesus is saying that not only will you have the promise of eternal life, but that your life will be qualitatively better by believing in him now on earth. When he talks about my flesh, he is already referring to his death on the cross when he gives his whole self for the life of the world.

Our spiritual diet needs to include Holy Communion in which the bread and wine symbolize Christ’s body and blood. Through this meal, Jesus nourishes faith, forgives sin, and empowers us to be witnesses to the Gospel.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for amazing love and grace that you have bestowed on us. Thank you for being the Living Bread which came down from heaven. We are forever grateful for your mercy and love. In Jesus name, Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What things are you craving in your spiritual diet? Where and how might you satisfy these cravings?

QUOTE

You can tell a lot about what a culture considers deformed by looking at its villains. They're more likely to be disabled in some way, but also more likely to be dark, old, fat, or fey. - Jess Zimmerman

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is choosing an inaccessible venue for a meeting or event, therefore excluding some participants.

Still, Still, Still
Maggie Amini



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 1:10-13

He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or the will of the flesh, or the will of man, but of God.



DEVOTION

John Althaus

Can you see it? It is staring at you right in the face. Do you recognize it? It is a simple image made out of Popsicle sticks laid out on top of a dark background. It's really very obvious if you focus and think about it.

How about now?

It's JESUS and even though the image was right in front of you in plain sight, it was still hard to recognize, I admit. Perhaps that is the way Jesus operates through the Holy Spirit. The Lord comes into our lives and speaks to us through various means, methods and images that are not always easy to recognize. It takes work. The Lord will wink at us ... a "God Wink" if you will. He winks at us through the people he sends into our lives. He winks at us through the situational crises that come into our lives. He winks at us through the music we hear or the images we see on the TV or our phones. Are we paying attention? Are we listening? Are we cognizant of the opportunities the Lord presents to us? Open your eyes, you may be surprised.

One way the Lord winks at us is by sending people into our lives that have disabilities. How does this fashion the way we see the world? As it turns out, quite often we are oblivious to these souls. We may not want to be but we just are. WAKE UP!!!

On this particular occasion two elderly women boarded a bus in which all seats were occupied. The women were carrying packages and felt as if the young man occupying a seat should give up his seat. They started expressing their opinions in a rather loud and obnoxious manner which became obvious to all the others on the bus.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2023

Unfortunately, the young man was wearing a headset so he could listen to music without disturbing others. He did not hear the boisterous complaints from the women who could only see him from the back. Finally, his friend pulled the headset off one of his ears and told him that he had better give up his seat to one of these elderly women. He turned his head, realized the problem and gave up his seat. However, it took some time to comply because the young man had no legs from his knees down. Eventually, he was able to maneuver out of the seat and into the aisle with the aid of crushes, a metal pole and the help of his friend. The women who had made such a fuss over an unavailable seat entitled to them were quite embarrassed, as they should be. Wake up! The world is not always about you! Pay attention! You might find an opportunity to help someone in need.

Accompanying Video

PRAYER

Holy One, let us find you in all of life's moments. Thank you for being present and embedded in our lives, even when we don't acknowledge or honor it.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Tomorrow when I wake up, will I come to grips with the role I play in the world and seek out opportunities to improve the lives of others less fortunate than me?

Tomorrow when I wake up, will I be aware that the Lord is right in front of me and guiding my life in oh so many profound ways?

QUOTE

Ableism is discrimination against people with disabilities. It is the harboring of beliefs that devalue and limit the potential of people with physical, intellectual, or mental disorders and disabilities. For instance, people might believe that autistic people will never be an asset to society, and that they need to be "fixed" or "cured."

FACT

Ableism is using someone else's mobility device as a hand or foot rest.

You're Here

Francesca Battistelli



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 9:2-5

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils. For you have shattered their oppressive yoke and the rod on their shoulders, the staff of their oppressor, just as you did on the day of Midian. For every tramping boot of battle and bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire.



DEVOTION

Pastor Krister Ulmanis

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light”, wrote the Prophet Isaiah. Those words make me reflect on vision in general and those for whom it is to live with the lack of vision. After all, if there is anything we all take for granted, it is our eyesight.

I’ve had glasses since 1966 but my whole understanding of vision and impairment changed in 2017. That’s when I had a stroke on my left eye – retinal vein occlusion is the official name for what happened - but it was explained as being a stroke. Couldn’t even see the big E on the chart in the optometrist office. A needle in my eye every two weeks in the beginning is now once every 7 weeks. But at no time have I been told that my eye might be returned to normal or I would lose it all together.

Isaiah’s words are a reminder that in the season of Advent we journey once more towards the birth of the Light of the World. It is a time of stillness and anticipation of the joy to come. “See the wonders of the season” we hear so often, without reflecting on those for whom that may not be possible. Yet the joy of the season comes even when we are unable to see with our eyes. Which makes me wonder about my reflection question...

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2023

PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, creator of the universe. We give you thanks for this Advent season and the anticipation of the coming of the Light of the World. We give you thanks for the beautiful way you allow us to “see” this light in our lives in so many ways.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What are the many ways we see the great light the Prophet Isaiah speak of, even if we can't see it with our eyes?

QUOTE

Because, let's face it, when sighted people are not accusing us of pretending to be blind, they are making jokes about our blindness. - M. Leona Godin

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is framing disability as either tragic or inspirational in news stories, movies, and other popular forms of media.

What a Glorious Night

Sidewalk Prophets



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 9:6

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.



DEVOTION

Valerie Brader

God doesn't promise us a life without burdens; in fact we know we will have to carry things on our shoulders. We can read the names for our Savior and discount the burdens that Isaiah reminds us would be placed on Jesus' shoulders. After all, if someone is wonderful, wise, mighty and strong, then surely His shoulders can bear the weight of saving the world with ease...

Too often we are hesitant to talk about how heavy the burdens on our shoulders feel and believe we need to behave as if those burdens don't exist. This Advent, let us pray that God transforms us into safe havens for those who need acknowledgment of how hard life can be. Together, let's help fulfill God's promise of a light yoke and easy burdens for all.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2023

PRAYER

Comforter and Redeemer, be with us on our good days and our bad days. Help us to know and feel that you share our burdens and our joys. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What burdens are you carrying today? How are they affecting your faith life and relationship with God?

QUOTE

It was hard not to imbibe the message that the realities of disability have to stay hidden, even when the disability is the subject." -
Sophie L. Morgan

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is casting a non-disabled actor to play a disabled character in a play, movie, TV show, or commercial.

Waiting for You
The Many



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2023

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:26-28

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."



DEVOTION

Helen Harms

The Cherry Tree Carol is one of the many Christmas songs about Mary and her relationship with Jesus and Joseph. There are a great many non-biblical stories and songs that have mythologized Mary- oftengiving her superhuman abilities. But if we look at the Biblical text, very little is mentioned about her. In fact, after the birth narrative of Jesus, Mary fades into the background and becomes a minor character in the story of Jesus. In the gospel of Luke, Mary is greeted by the angel Gabriel as the "favored one". What made Mary "favored"? Did she indeed have superhuman abilities? Is that why God chose her? If we look at the New Testament, we can conclude that Mary was a rather ordinary person and may indeed have felt from time to time that she would just as well done without God's favor.

That should give each of us hope. If God could work through the ordinary person of Mary than God can also work through the ordinary persons each of us are and continue to be. We need not be superhuman or inspiring. Martin Luther was great at reminding us that we cannot by our "own reason or strength" do anything remarkable, but it is the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. That is the true miracle! God's will and God's work is accomplished through ordinary people as God works in and through us.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2023

PRAYER

Dear God. Thank you for giving us your servant Mary, an ordinary person, who through you was able to do something extraordinary. Help us/me to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our/my lives/life. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you feel God working in and through you? How can you use your ordinary gifts and characteristics to be Jesus in this world?

QUOTE

“Ableism looks like calling people ‘inspiring’ for navigating a system that is designed for exclusion, while doing nothing to hold the system accountable.” - Carson Tueller

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is putting content into the digital world that doesn't have audio description or closed captioning.

Hallelujah, Christ is Born - Caroline Cobb



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 1:1-10

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, the spirits of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And he will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear.



DEVOTION

Rev. Floyd Schoenhals, Bishop Ret.

I've had the naive notion that I was always going to be permanently able to do everything I wanted to do. I used to ride my bicycle 100 miles or more a week or run long distances. When I was with my older brother, I couldn't understand why it was difficult for him to walk very far without difficulty.

I'm older now and have had to deal with a multiplicity of health issues, including chronic back pain, which has limited my mobility. I now realize that I am and have always been only "temporarily able".

All of us are all only "temporarily able". We are like the shoot that springs from a dead stump and a branch that issues from those roots. Yet the Spirit of the Lord rests on you and me and we continue to bring forth fruits of love that bless others and the world God loves.



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2023

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for the promise of hope you give to us as we struggle with the changes and challenges related to our abilities. Pour out your Spirit upon us. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How able do you feel are you? What do you about feel about others that you perceive are not as able as you?

QUOTE

We should celebrate neurodiversity - the world would be poorer and life duller if we were all the same." - Neil Milliken

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is talking to a person with a disability like they are a child, talking about them instead of directly to them, or speaking for them.

This is Love

Paul Baloche and

Kathryn Scott



MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2023

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 10:39

Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.



DEVOTION

Judi Moldenhaur

Everything about Jesus upends our human assumptions and society's norms. Jesus's life and ministry are filled with paradoxes in which the usual hierarchy of power, expectations, and values are reversed. Jesus – the King of Kings, the Messiah – was born in a stable surrounded by barnyard animals instead of in a luxurious palace filled with servants; that paradox is reflected in the song for today: a flower blooming in the middle of winter. Jesus hung out with individuals whom “respectable” people would avoid – everyone whom the “respectable” people deemed to be sick, crazy, poor, foreign, or low class. Jesus even said that the meek would inherit the earth, not the strong and powerful that society teaches us to strive to be. The paradoxes built into Jesus's actions and parables shows us that none of us are better than anyone else and that we are loved equally in God's eyes.

The paradox for ableism and its assumptions is that ultimately, we all will become unable to function – it's called death; dying is a disability. Death is the loss of life. So, Jesus's words about losing your life to find your life make no sense unless you see them as God's ultimate paradox – as evidenced in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus yet again upends our norms: death has lost its sting and disability becomes rejoicing. This Advent, may we feel the love of God embrace us through the greatest paradox of all: Jesus, Emmanuel, born in Bethlehem.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2023

PRAYER

Lord God, thank you for sending Jesus to be our example for confronting our assumptions of ableism and all other ways society would separate us from one another. Grant us the grace to support one another and make our surroundings more accessible to all.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What paradoxes in life have you experienced that show God's love and grace in the world? What one thing can you do this Advent to make a difference in – that is, to reverse the usual hierarchy of power, expectations, and values – the life of someone who struggles under the burden of ableism?

QUOTE

Ableism is connected to all our struggles because it undergirds notions of whose bodies are considered valuable, desirable, and disposable. - Mia Mingus

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is assuming people have to have a visible disability to actually be disabled.

Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming - The Brilliance



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2023

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2:14

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.



DEVOTION

Trinity Member

After working 30 years full time as a pediatric dental hygienist, I needed to switch jobs for the sake of my shoulders, wrists and back. I chose to work with children with special needs as a teaching assistant in one of the local public elementary schools.

Everyday was a new adventure, encouraging and supporting my students as they discovered ways to communicate with us and their environment. Some days were discouraging as I could see no advancement in the students assigned to me. But then sometimes, I would see small glimmers of positive change. God was doing his work “under the radar”.

One day especially stands out in my memory . In the past, my student, who was “non verbal”, had struggled reading and pronouncing simple words. But on that particular day, he read and said two words perfectly! I was totally elated! Glory be to God! He could see my excitement and joined in with a big smile. After that day, he had his ups and downs but continued to progress slowly. As others after me continue to empower him to find his “voice” and his gifts, I have no doubts he is shining brightly.

Glory to God in the Highest.



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2023

PRAYER

Dear Father, help me to empower those around me to find their gift.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Where do you see the Glory of God in your everyday life?



QUOTE

It's called internalized ableism. It is the process of taking in the ideas and prejudices of society - that I am undesirable, tragic, something to be shunned and/or pitied unless I'm able to make others feel good about themselves - and incorporating these ideas into your very cells." - J. Albert Mann

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is questioning if someone is "actually" disabled, or "how much" they are disabled.

I Wander As I Wander
Future of Forestry.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 62:1

For God alone my soul waits
in silence; from him comes
my salvation.



DEVOTION

Joani Laginess

Now, I'm going to play Devil's Advocate and ask if there are times when perhaps separate schools or classrooms might be the better choice? Take a child that is born deaf... his/her natural language would be American Sign Language (ASL). If that child is mainstreamed into a public school with an interpreter, who are that student's peers? Is it the adult ASL interpreter assigned to the student? Is it a room full of other age-appropriate children that don't know ASL? Or is there really no peer group for that child in an otherwise "hearing" classroom. I have a Deaf brother and I am ashamed to say that our family did not learn sign language. (I'm an ASL interpreter now, but I went back to school when I was in my 40's to learn ASL to better communicate with my brother). However, my parents did send my brother to the Lutheran School for the Deaf in Detroit Michigan (sadly, now closed), where he enjoyed a rich, classroom life with true peers...children that were deaf like him. He formed lifelong friendships with these peers.

I'm glad this Fact About Ableism was paired with the quote, "Every person with a disability is an individual." Clearly, not all disabilities are the same, and thus can't be "remedied" or dealt with in the same manner. One quote that really had an impact on me when I was learning ASL was from Helen Keller: "Blindness cuts us off from things, but deafness cuts us off from people."

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as we await your coming, help us to have moments of silence to reflect on your goodness and grace. Make us a welcome refuge for ALL your people.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What can you do to make a Deaf person feel welcome at Trinity?

QUOTE

Every person with a disability is an individual. - Itzhak Perlman

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism can look like segregating students with disabilities into separate schools.

Someewhere in Your Silent Night
Casting Crowns



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023

SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 26:12

Lord, you establish
peace for us; all that we
have accomplished you
have done for us.



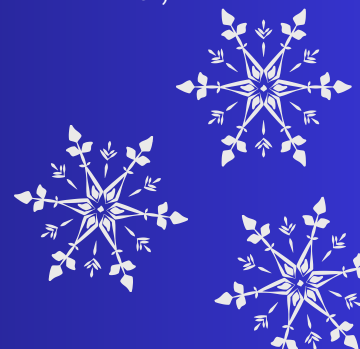
DEVOTION

Peggy Deames

So often we are anxious to take credit for our accomplishments, but today's scripture reminds us that God deserves the credit, the glory, and the honor. God is the giver of peace (and comfort and joy as our song of the day references) and so many more good gifts including the greatest gift, Jesus.

And so we are invited to share gifts of all kinds with our neighbors. Indeed in this season we hurry and scurry to search out the perfect presents. Just maybe we already have what begs to be given - perhaps peace and comfort and joy and love. Furthermore, let us not forget that our neighbors have gifts that they are desiring to share - perhaps more peace and comfort and joy and love.

This advent imagine a global community that lives out the giving and receiving of gifts already here. Just think of the relationship building of such reciprocity. Consider how pleasing that is to God, the bestower, seeing all flourish.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023

PRAYER

Grant us hearts that seek to give and receive all good gifts. Especially may we be sensitive to the marginalized in our world who desire to share in the greatest of gift exchanges. To God be the glory. AMEN.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What good gifts are you holding onto that are begging to be shared with the larger community and what good gifts are we shunning/ignoring when we overlook the marginalized in the world?

QUOTE

The disability is not the problem. The accessibility is the problem. -
Mohammed Jemni

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is asking someone if they are off of their meds.

Comfort and Joy

Aaron Stewart



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 15:13

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.



DEVOTION

Dani Johnson

I remember hearing this verse as a child and feeling intimidated and fearful about what God wanted from me, about how God wanted me to live my life. Does God really want me to die for my friends? Jesus died for his friends. Indeed, there are many people throughout history who have sacrificed their own lives for the lives of others.

Does God want all of us to act in love to such a great extreme as to lose our own lives? I would say yes, but maybe not always in such a literal sense.

When I was a child, I remember driving down the road with my grandparents on our way back from picking up fast food for lunch on the road. After we had all eaten, and our trash was put back into the bag, my grandmother took the bag, closed it up, opened the window and threw it out of the car. I was horrified and told my grandma that she shouldn't litter like that. She shrugged it off, saying that it would blow away, and that everyone does it.

Sometimes losing our lives means losing a way of life. Out of love for our friends and our neighbors, we need to be willing to give up ways of life with which we've become comfortable or are convenient. To live in a world that is equitable and just, we need to observe and hear and listen to the stories of people living lives that are different than our own. We must look beyond our own experiences and imagine how our actions and our choices affect the people around us, and even people we will never know.

Change is not easy. We get used to living our lives in the same ways without always considering how our habits, our lifestyle or even our language affect other people and the world around us. Changing our attitudes or our actions for the sake of someone or something besides ourselves feels like a sacrifice because it IS a sacrifice. This is what God is asking us for. Let us look upon our friends with enough love that we are willing to give up something in our own lives for them.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2023

PRAYER

Holy One, keep us mindful of the ways our words and actions affect the world around us. Give us courage to change and grow in ways that would show your love to our friends and neighbors. Amen



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is a word, or a behavior that used to be a part of your life that you intentionally changed because of how it made another person or group of people feel?

How did it feel when you were relearning that behavior? How does it feel to imagine going back to that word or behavior now? Do you have a habit or behavior that you want to change because of how it affects the world or other people? What is stopping you from changing? Is there a small step you can take today?

How are you differently abled today than you were when you were younger? How have these differences changed the way you live?

QUOTE

Ableism to me stands at the core of all accessibility barriers and leads to accessibility being an afterthought to the development of all products, services, goods, and infrastructure in our world. - Alycia Anderson

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is using phrases like "It's like the blind leading the blind" and "My ideas fell on deaf ears."

The Wonder of All of the World
Aaron Stewart and Allison Medina



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”



DEVOTION

Jessi Grieser

The University Musical Society at the University of Michigan puts on Handel’s Messiah every holiday season. And we deck out the stage in giant poinsettias and the soloists wear red, and we hang a big festive wreath over the organ and it’s all very appropriately Christmasy. Which can sometimes make it hard, with all the singing about “wonderful counselors” and “glory to god in the highest” to remember that the actual point of the Messiah is the story of Easter, not the story of Christmas. It’s about the passion, not the birth.

We read Luke 2 at Christmas, and dive right into the snuggly part of the story. Matthew also starts there, with the story of the baby. But John and Mark do it differently—they cut straight to the chase with John the Baptist announcing Jesus. No manger, no inn, no angel having a long talk with Joseph. They start not with the baby, but with his purpose.

Christmas seems like a weird time to think hard about sin. When we confess the Brief Confession, we ask for the things we have done and the things we have left undone. But there’s no spot in the confession for the sins we’re just in—the states of affairs of racism and sexism, and ableism, all intertwined and working together. And it’s kind of easy at this time of year to think about only one end of the story and miss the point: Christ was born to take away the sin of the world. And if we’re the hands and feet of Christ, we’re supposed to be actively undoing that sin, too—in our actions, in our words, in our thoughts.

Handel, quoting Isaiah, reminds us that “for unto us a son is given,” and when he was, so was a pretty demanding challenge. When we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate the call to dismantle sin, root out its intersections, and heal it in ourselves and the world. At Christmas, we focus on the beginning of the story, but we keep before us always that the point of the story is the end.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2023

PRAYER

God of the humble and God of the haughty, help us all to recognize not only the sins we commit but also the sins in which we often silently live. Grant us the wisdom to recognize the ways in which we participate in ableism and racism and their intersections, that we may remember why you came to us and work to dismantle them in our hearts and in the world.



REFLECTION QUESTION

As Lutherans, we often talk about being “Easter People.” What does it mean to be an Easter Person at Christmas? In what ways have you noticed the existence of these sins that we are just “in”, especially the sin of ableism? In what new ways are you feeling called to address and change them?

QUOTE

Ableism is a tool of white supremacy because while mental illness in Black, Indigenous and people colour is used as a reasoning as to why we should be locked away, it is used as the reason why white men should go free. - Imani Barbarin

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is assuming that you know what somebody with a disability needs without having a conversation with that person.



O Come All You Unfaithful
Sovereign Grace Music

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 1:18-21

The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly. But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.



DEVOTION

Sarah Altenburg

There is something magical about Christmas Eve. There is something about the story that even though we are fully human, saint and sinner, God came down in human form to live amongst us and to guide us into the way of eternal life.

I often find myself sitting back and reflecting on Christmas Eve, and it is often on the things I did that year that weren't entirely Christ-like. Yes, I am indeed a human as well. I reflect on how the "sinner" part of my identity shone through in the past year, and yet, how I was still invited to wait, expectantly, for the Son to come into this world, to redeem me and to love me unconditionally, in the state of my full humanity.

Often times, we hurt others by saying or doing things not intended to be harmful in our core. We say or do things that are ableist, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, etc. I have unintentionally said and done things that are all of the above. Every year, we too have been hurt and hold grudges for being treated in ways that are far from Christ-like.

Christmas Eve is a time to once again welcome the Baby into our lives for transformation. It is a time to sit with our full humanity and recognize that each year we can be more Christ-like than the last. It is a time to let go of grudges that hinder our own lives, and live into hope. It is a time to think about what changes we will make in the year to come to live even more into the "saint" part of our identity as a child of God.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023

PRAYER

Jesus, we wait for you today. We wait in expectation, anticipation, and wonder. Please come into this world and, once again, remind us that you love us unconditionally. Allow us to follow you and learn what it is to be Christ-like. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTION

What are you holding on to from the previous year that is getting in the way of your relationship with God? What would it look like to lay that at the foot of the manger and lean into new life?

QUOTE

Ableism is something you encounter and digest every day, which you process and hurt from - but it's also something you learn to live with. You can only remember specific ableist acts until a new one takes its place, but the culmination of that pain sits with you indefinitely.

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is asking invasive questions to satisfy personal curiosity.

Mary's Lullaby - The Brilliance



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2023

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 1:14

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.



DEVOTION

Pastor Sarah Mayer-Flatt

Merry Christmas! Christ is born -- God has become flesh and lives among us now and forever! This Advent season we've been expectant, hopeful, and making preparations for Jesus to come. We've also been shopping, and wrapping, and baking, and wondering if the bills will get paid, and off to parties and programs that celebrate the season. And we've learned more about ableism: the belief that able-bodied people are better than disabled persons. Jesus being born in the midst of our lives is something we celebrate together!

On this day of Christ's birth, spend some time reflecting on where you have seen and experienced the full grace and truth of God's glory. What does it look like in your life? In our community? In the world around us? Being able to bear witness to God's goodness in our lives, and the lives of disabled people has been a gift this season. May we move forward into the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany looking for God's glory in places within ourselves and out to the heavens.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2023

PRAYER

God of all people, we give thanks for the gift of your son, Jesus, who came to earth to save us. Thank you for revealing your grace and truth through the lives of all people, regardless of ability, letting us witness and experience your glory in our lives. Amen.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are some meaningful traditions you have in your life that point you to witnessing God's glory, which IS full of grace and truth? How have you received and given grace this Advent season?

QUOTE

If we believe ourselves to be feminists or advocates, and neurodiversity and disabilities are being left out of our conversations, because they make us feel uncomfortable: we are no feminists or advocates. Neurodiversity and disabilities affect every single community, and belong in every conversation concerning our advocacy.

FACT ABOUT ABLEISM

Ableism is touching a person with a disability or their mobility equipment without consent.

O Come All Ye Faithful - Chris Tomlin



Merry Christmas

FROM THE PASTOR AND
STAFF OF TRINITY
LUTHERAN CHURCH

