

First Fifteen: November 22-26
Scripture for Sunday November 28 – Luke 21:25-36

Monday: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Going Deeper: Even though Advent begins next Sunday, we are already surrounded by messages of Christmas though the programming and commercials on TV. We hear the music of the season playing in stores, on the radio, and on our favorite streaming source's added "Christmas" station... way back in October! People are ready to celebrate and forget the memories of the past year... and yet we all know someone for whom this season will be a season of absence more so than celebration. These words from the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah lay the foundation for us. They lead us into the message and gift that God desires all to receive. Jeremiah cries out telling the people of God the LORD is on the move, the promise made long ago is about to come to fruition! A righteous leader will rise up who will do what is right and just and challenge the people to embody his path of justice to set the wrong in our lives and communities right so all can live in safety. The one who will do this will be called "The LORD Is Our Righteousness." (Jeremiah 33:16 CEB) So much is laid upon the coming season... our longing for joy, peace, and normalcy. A shimmering light in what we hope will remove the darkness and turbulence of this past year. In this season of darkening days, we are called to look for the one who is light... the One whose light shines in our darkness. I invite you to consider this name of the promised One, "The LORD Is Our Righteousness." What do you hear in this name? As you reflect upon it, what feelings arise within you, what is stirred in your spirit? Where are your thoughts drawn by this title for the Holy One whose incarnation we prepare for during Advent?

Prayer: The LORD our Righteousness... hear my prayer. Open my heart and mind to receive the true blessings of this season that is filled with so many other distractions. Help me focus on what is important and let go of what I no longer need. As my senses are filled with music and my heart with the expectations that will come help me find your balance and your message of peace within all the other clutter. My Lord and my God open my eyes to see beyond all the distractions so I can experience your blessing this day and beyond. Amen.

Tuesday: Isaiah 43:1-3a & 8-13

Going Deeper: When does the season of "Christmas" begin? There used to be a standard, you celebrated the seasons of the fall, that led you to Thanksgiving Day. Then, at least in the house I grew up in... THE season had begun! We call these last few weeks a season, and they are... a season in our lives, a season where the world seems to take on a different hue as people seek to find hope and light in our darkening days. But this moment in time is far more than a season, these days and weeks can be truly liminal and transformative. Our reading in Isaiah begins with a word of encouragement, as we pass through the rough moments in all our lives we are not alone, we have a savior. We are not promised the absence of struggle, but this One who is our savior gives us a gift we often may overlook. I am struck by the words of Isaiah 43:8 "*Bring out the blind people who have eyes, the deaf ones who have ears.*" (CEB) Listen to these words, can

you hear the echo of another who called out to those with ears to hear and eyes to see? The gift of these moments, these weeks that we are entering is not that our struggles are removed, or even lifted for a while. Instead, the gift they bring is a new way seeing, and hearing leading us into a new way of living amid the darkness of the seasons of our lives.

Prayer: Give me eyes that see and ears that hear. I don't think of myself as blind or deaf, and yet I must acknowledge there have been times when I was blind and unable to hear what was needed to learn from the circumstances and people who I saw as a hardship or a problem. Lord during this season, these times of preparation and transformation help me see what you have given me, and help me hear the guidance you offer. Give me eyes that see and ears that hear. Amen.

Wednesday: Romans 13:8-14

Going Deeper: I am one of those early shoppers. I like to acquire the gifts I want give to my loved ones early so I will be free of stress and worry and can focus on what really matters. I took the advice of someone once, who waited until the last day to get all the gifts he needed, saying it was such a wonderful adventure! As I said I tried this once and only once! In these verses from Romans 13, Paul tells us to pay attention, to wake up from our slumbering way of moving through our life. He asks us... "Do you know what time it is?" Time is our most valuable commodity, and the one thing once it is gone, we can never get back. How we conduct ourselves and embrace the challenges and opportunities of each new day are not to be taken for granted. Paul challenges us to use these moments to live fully and faithfully... by being guided by the most powerful commodity in our lives... love. To live a life guided by love is also not something we can put off. Not merely for the sake of others for whom we desire to share it, but for ourselves, as we allow the embrace of love and its gift of acceptance to transform us. Afterall, we can only share that which we ourselves have taken the time to acquire, understand, and receive.

Prayer: It is hard to accept the limits of our lives. As I consider you, my God for whom time is limitless, help me embrace your call to use my time guided by love... not just any love, but your love for me. Lord of Love I ask for your Spirit to work within me. I do not want to sleepwalk through this season. I hear your call to live more fully alive as I embrace my faith more deeply allowing your love to guide me through the challenges and opportunities I will face. Help me to see these as gifts allowing each of them create a deeper awareness of what must be shared and how best to do it. Amen.

Thursday: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Going Deeper: Coming home during the holidays is a powerful theme. Its message resonates in the music we hear, and in one of the most memorable commercials of all time, the Folger's "Peter Comes Home" Commercial from 1985. These words from the Hebrew Prophet Zephaniah embody our human desire and longing to come home, and yet we know coming home for the holidays can be filled with mixed emotions where old

hurts and forgotten memories are reopened. The home that Zephaniah envisions is captured by verse 17 *"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He takes great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."* (Zeph. 3:17 NIV) Whether the home you think of during the holidays is your childhood home, or having your family come home to you, the message and hope of this season is that God's desire for all of us is to know we are seen, heard, valued, and delighted in! When was the last time you felt someone delighted in you? Can you allow those feelings to rise within you? If this is hard for you to do, is there someone you need to welcome home and share your delight in them?

Prayer: Our God of wonder and delight, help me hear this call to come home as a welcoming experience that frees me from lingering memories that are not so delightful. As we move through this season help me see and seek ways where I can create "home" for others, both those I know and love, as well as someone I may simply share a passing moment. Lord of love wipe away my fear for what the future holds as I trust your abiding presence that seeks to quiet my heart and surround me with your joy. Amen

Friday: Colossians 3:12-17

Going Deeper: Several years ago, I received a Christmas Card with an image of a snow-covered hillside and a lone evergreen tree surrounded in light. I don't remember the exact wording, but the greeting said God's coming into our world was like that image of snow... softening the hard edges, smoothing the rough terrain, and filling in the dips and gaps of our lives. These words from Paul's letter to the church at Colossi give us the corresponding actions that turn this greeting card image into a real possibility for our lives and our world. As we begin Advent this Sunday, I pray you will give yourselves grace and create space and time to listen and receive the gifts of God's peace knowing these next few weeks are far more than "a season." This time a liminal, and these moments create sacred space where the veil of God's love and mercy grow very thin. I encourage you to read over these few lines in Paul's letter and listen to where you are drawn, what phrase, or behavior speaks to you inviting you to come closer and learn more. Stay with this word or phrase and invite God's Spirit to help you understand it's meaning or your need to follow its teaching.

Prayer: Lord, may your peace create calm in my life and in our world. May your gentleness be evident in my manner. May my heart, mind and spirit be open to you so you can lead me to where I am holding on to the past or my fears of the future that keep me from being present in this moment right now. Help me focus my thoughts on what is good, true, and lifegiving today and know your grace holds all our lives together. Amen.