



Awaken

AN ANTIRACIST ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Volume I

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Colorado • Utah • Wyoming

*This devotional is brought to you by the Antiracism Ministry
of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ.*

Greetings

Dear Rocky Mountain Conference,

Peace and grace to you as we enter our holy season of Advent -- the time of the waiting, the time of yearning for the light. Our Conference is blessed with the creative talents of two Associate Conference Ministers -- the Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott, who initiated the development of this special Advent devotional as a part of his anti-racism commission for the Conference, and the Rev. Erin Gilmore, who continues to challenge us to live deeply from our hearts as we encounter the forces of darkness in our world. I give thanks for them, and for all of you, who dedicate your lives to help build a better and more just world for all.

Bless you this Advent season...may you find the dawning of the light in Christ in the days ahead.

Rev. Sue Artt

Conference Minister

Rocky Mountain Conference, UCC



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*The Rocky Mountain Conference exists to inspire, challenge, and empower
generous faith and justice communities across the West.*

Awaken!

The season of Advent marks the beginning of the Liturgical calendar. How fitting for these first weeks of the Church year to make us wait. We go from an unilluminated, bleak, and cold season to one of exuberant celebration and fulfillment because Jesus is born to us. But, now, we wait and our waiting is not in vain.

One might ask the question, “what makes a devotional Antiracist?” Antiracism is about dismantling the system of power and oppression which is racism. This devotional is antiracist because its entries are prayerfully and carefully curated with the aim of questioning power, privilege, and oppression. This is done with the recognition that even Christian scripture, inspired though it may be, is replete with narratives of the powerful imposing their will on people with less power and little representation. In some of those moments God breaks in and commands God’s people to care for the orphan, the widow, and the sojourner. In some of these moments God’s will is exemplified in Jesus when he overturns the tables of dishonest money changers, keeps company with tax collectors and sinners, and brings those who have been ostracized into community. Sometimes, in Scripture, God’s will is made manifest in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost who empowers the disempowered, accompanies the lonely, and advocates for those without representation. In other places, we witness humans following familiar patterns.

This antiracist devotional offers a reading of scripture that challenges base human inclinations and thereby encourages us to walk in the way of Jesus by bringing wholeness, community and righteous indignation in such a time and space where the good, and oftentimes contrary, news of the gospel is needed in the world.

Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott

Associate Conference Minister

Rocky Mountain Conference, UCC

Advent I—Hope

“...The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah...”

Jeremiah 33:14-16

“Are we there yet?” These words have come from the mouth of every child who struggles with patience on a journey. The struggle to be patient, when a great prize or destination is ahead is a universal one.

On the steps of the Alabama state capitol, at the conclusion of the triumphal March from Selma, AL. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered these words in his speech “Our God is Marching on!”

“I know you are asking today, “How long will it take?”... “How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?” Somebody’s asking, “When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?” Somebody’s asking, “When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, and truth bear it?”

I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because "truth crushed to earth will rise again."

How long? Not long, because "no lie can live forever."

How long? Not long, because "you shall reap what you sow."

How long? Not long.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

In our text, the Prophet Jeremiah rehearses God's promises. While God's promises are trustworthy and true, in the experience of his audience, God's promises of justice, safety, and salvation has not been made manifest. How long must Black people wait? How long must people suffocated by the death grip of racism wait? How long must we languish in a rising sea of injustice? How long? In this season of Advent, we wait with hope and expectation, in tiptoe anticipation, for what is already and not yet. We wait, intentionally, actively, persistently for the fulfillment of God's promises. Let us work to make the reign of God present in our midst.

Let us pray:

We're waiting, O God. Help us to actively wait; binding ourselves to you and marching in anticipation of justice, righteousness, and peace. Amen.

-Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott

Advent II—Faith

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Luke 3:1-6

When I read this text from the gospel of Luke I can’t help but hear my biblical studies professor’s voices in my head, “when an author includes names, places, and titles, pay attention, they are including it for a reason.” Following that advice, I find it curious that the author of the gospel of Luke begins chapter 3 reminding us who is in power: Tiberius has been Emperor for 15 years, Pontius Pilot, the governor, Herod, the ruler of Galilee and his brother Phillip rules Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias is the ruler of Abilene. The author also includes the high priests of the temple, Annas and Caiaphas. Here is the whole industrial, military, political, religious complex of their day.

After all these power structures are named, the author of Luke tells us that the word of the Lord, came to the son of Zechariah out in the wilderness - outside the temple walls, outside the city gates, outside the dominate power structures on the edges, in the least expected of places...and there proclaims a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

On this second Sunday in Advent, the author of Luke invites us to pay attention to the industrial, military, political, religious complex of our day and ask ourselves in who and in what do we place our faith? In who and in what is our identity forged?

Out there beyond the power structures of his day, John the Baptist invites people into a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sin. To repent is about changing direction. It is about returning to one's true Source. It is about making an active choice to participate in the kingdom of God, and therefore it also about making an active choice to not participate, to not collude, to not conspire with Empire. To be an anti-racist is to choose to participate, to place your faith in, to actively work towards the building of the kingdom of God, which in John's words is where "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Let us pray:

I return to you today, O God. Help me to return to you tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that, and every day hence for this kingdom work of building an anti-racist beloved community is a life-long journey, and I need you at the center of it. Amen.

-Rev. Erin Gilmore

Advent III—Love

“...And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"

Luke 3:7-18

“Justice is what love looks like in public.”

-Cornel West

Love is a loaded word. It can be laden with syrupy sweet sentiment and even used as a tool for emotional manipulation. Has anyone ever heard the words, “If you really loved me, you would...” Perhaps you’ve never heard those words uttered, but maybe you can understand their impact.

In our text, John the baptizer, called folks to repentance and that repentance looks a whole lot like love. Love must be more than an emotion. Love must be actionable; full of justice, respect, humility, and compassion. John’s call to repentance was a call to love God and neighbor. This love looks like just and equitable treatment. This love looks like benevolence for those experiencing hardship. This love looks like conscientiousness and concern. This love looks like demolishing racist systems of power and oppression. This love looks like, feels like, tastes like, smells like, and acts like justice.

Repent, turn to love. The reign of God, is at hand.

Let us pray:

-Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott

Advent IV—Joy

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Luke 1: 46b-55

Perhaps, you have heard of the term 'Black Joy.' It may sound complex, and in many ways it is. 'Black joy', as a term, celebrates how people of African descent, find ways to experience joy and delight despite the multiple oppressions visited on them. It is a practice of joy as resistance. In spite of marginalization, dehumanization, vilification, intentional disenfranchisement and perpetual gas lighting, people of African descent continue to find reason to thrive, to laugh, to love, to celebrate.

Here we find Mary, a teenaged girl, subject to her culture. She is young, brown, female, without agency, and pregnant...and Joseph is not the father. In the midst of her experiences of oppression and marginalization, Mary sings. The song she sings praises God because of what God is doing in her and the ways God delivers God's people. Mary sings out of a well of joy of which the oppressive forces know not of. Mary's song is a disquieting annoyance in a world that has no purpose for her other than subjugation. Mary's joy is resistance.

Joy sings, shouts, and dances in the face of a bleak world and defiantly declares a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Let us pray:

God, in you we find joy. Make us to know joy that actively resists oppression in this time and on behalf of all seeking justice. Amen.

-Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott

Write about a time you experienced joy in an impossible circumstance...

Christmas

“...And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Luke 2: 7

I have always been curious. Sometimes that curiosity has landed me in trouble. This trouble has come not because I had one question concerning a particular subject, but because my questions were multiple and contrary. By contrary, I mean that the questions I posed offered challenge to settled understandings. I approach this text with the same kind of curiosity. When reading the story of Jesus' birth, I have many questions. I've listed a few for your consideration;

Why was there no room for Joseph, a very pregnant Mary, and Jesus in the inn?

Why hadn't Joseph made preparations with his kinfolk to stay with them?

Was there really no room for them OR was the holy family denied lodging because they knew of Mary's pregnancy and they heard, through the proverbial grapevine, that Joseph was NOT the father?

Do we make room for Jesus to be born, to us and in us, today?

Mary, a young woman without voice and agency, was forced to journey to a strange land. It was not the land of her fore parents, but that of her betrothed. And in this strange land, she is afforded no luxury, no kindness, no softness, no hospitality. In a strange land, she is without a place of warmth and safety to do the difficult, and often deadly work of laboring and child birth. In a strange land, finding no place, no home, no kindred, no compassion, Mary labors and gives birth in a sanctuary created by angles and animals. Was hospitality really and truly unavailable or was it denied because the people she needed to community for her hardened their hearts to her and the child in her womb?

On this Christmas Day, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, anointed one of God. His coming was not easy; there were hardships along the way. We remember his mother, Mary who, already vulnerable in society on account of her gender, surrendered herself to God for the sake of the redemption of the people who refused to receive her.

Make room in your heart, and space in your life, for the one God has sent to make crooked places straight and rough places plain. Keep your eyes open for the ones seeking community and hospitality in your midst.

Let Us Pray:

God who births and brings to bear, we praise you for sending Jesus to be light unto our feet and lamp unto our paths. Increase our capacity to receive him, increase our capacity to hear him, increase our capacity to heed him, increase our capacity to follow him. Amen.

-Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott

Rocky Mountain Conference Antiracism Ministry

VISION:

To foster and sustain an Anti-Racist Beloved Community.

Mission:

The Antiracism Ministry of the Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ seeks to educate, support, and mobilize individuals and congregations to become antiracist and engage antiracist action as a deliberative expression of Christian faith and practice.

Means:

We strive to foster anti-racist community through programming, relationship, actions of protest and solidarity for the just and equitable treatment of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color.

