**Advent Reflections 2024**

**Week 1: Circle of Hope**

*“…we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people…”  (1 Timothy 4:10)*

“Remember!” is the most repeated commandment in the Bible. Perhaps it is unsurprising then that the church calendar is cyclical. Each year we return to Bethlehem in Palestine, and the stable with a manger. Each year we remember the baby born to a peasant girl; a baby who would show us the extent of God’s love. For centuries, people had been waiting, hoping for God to be present in a new way; to bring light into our darkness, and to heal the brokenness of our world. However far we may have wandered from God, however distant hope and healing may seem, we are invited again this Advent season to return, to look in the manger, and find hope.

*Expanding our circles*

How might you expand your circle to include others in this celebration of hope?

**Week 2: Line of Peace**

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”  (Isaiah 9:6)*

The first Christmas ruptured time, creating a dividing line: before… after… The birth of this baby meant that nothing would ever be the same again. Through Jesus would come a new understanding of God as Love—Love that would stop at nothing to be reconciled with humanity. Through Jesus we would realize the divisions we have created are a temporary illusion—we are all one. Through Jesus we would glimpse what we were created to be, what we have the potential to become as children of God. Because of Jesus, we embrace this new reality and live at peace with God and one another.

*Drawing new lines*

Are there lines of division you need to erase? Or lines to draw under old hurts and grievances?

**Week 3: Heart of Love**

*“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God... This is how God showed his love among us: God sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.”  (1 John 4:7, 9)*

At the heart of the Christmas story is love: God’s love for a hurting world. After 2000 years of Christmas traditions, we have made this story easy to love—a perfect baby sleeping soundlessly in sweet smelling hay, while fluffy sheep and reverent shepherds gaze on blissfully. But this was love born into hardship and struggle. It is a story of love in the midst of political oppression, religious scorn, and community shame. Violence and fear accompany the birth. Inclusive and unconditional love is radical and dangerous. It is not for the faint of heart. May we rise to its challenge.

*Opening our hearts*

What can you do today to express radical love for another? What might change in you if you accepted such love from God?

**Week 4: Star of Joy**

*“When the wise men saw the star, they were* *overwhelmed with joy.”  (Matthew 2:10)*

Travelers in search of the legitimate king of the Jews went first to Jerusalem, the seat of power. But the star led them to a most unexpected place—a house in Bethlehem where they found a young child with his mother. Despite the mundane poverty of the scene, they believed this was the anointed king, and they worshiped him. Unlike neon flashing signs, stars are easy to ignore. We have to be willing to stand in the darkness and look up to see their faint light. But, hard as it is to imagine from our earth-bound perspective, starlight is inconceivably bright and travels incredible lengths to reach us. Whatever darkness we experience, may the beauty of the stars open our eyes to the joy of Immanuel, God with us.

*Shining like a star*

How can you communicate Christmas love, hope and joy to someone today in a quiet, beautiful way?