

THE SEASON OF ADVENT: 2020
CHAPEL LANE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
EMBODYING THE CHALLENGE OF BEING A MATTHEW 25 CHURCH

Matthew 25.31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of those who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

What word or phrase struck your eye/ear as you read/listened to this text?

What questions do you wish to ask Jesus/Matthew regarding this text?

What question do you hear God in the person of Jesus asking you?

THE SEASON OF ADVENT: 2020
CHAPEL LANE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
EMBODYING THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING A MATTHEW 25 CHURCH

During this past Summer, the Session of Chapel Lane voted to become a Matthew 25 Church, joining with congregations and Presbyteries and Synods within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in this initiative. The Matthew 25 initiative is an invitation to invest in deepening our discipleship in Jesus' name and committing to engaging God's mission in the world. It, like every initiative, provides a framework to be fleshed out in both theory and action. To be a Matthew 25 Church is to ask: How and Where do we experience Jesus?

The Matthew 25 vision contains three focuses: Building Congregational Vitality, Dismantling Structural Racism, and Eradicating Systemic Poverty. To be a Matthew 25 Church means to be committed to pouring love, energy, and action into one or more of three focuses. These urgent tasks are a direct response to the Gospel of Jesus and a faithful expression of what it means to be Christ's disciples in this time and place.

Building Congregational Vitality is perhaps best thought of as the framework of this initiative, much as our skeleton is the framework of our bodies. With congregational vitality being both the drive and the outcome of engaging as a Matthew 25 Church within our community, we will be found faithful. Our community of faith's vitality is—like with all vital congregations—a measure of our spiritual strength and our capacity for purposeful mission as we seek to more faithfully become the Body of Christ in this time and place. Vitality means a recovery of the meaning of discipleship as we deepen our life in the Spirit.

This is the theme of this year's Advent and Christmas Study guide, the one you are reading, and will also provide the framework for the preaching during these seasons. Many scholars of Christianity believe we are in the early years of a new Reformation, a new reformation. One scholar breaks the history of the Church into thousand-year eras: God the Father, God the Son (the one we were raised in), and now God the Spirit. Others suggest that every five hundred years or so there is a new movement within the Christian faith that leads out of where we have been into a new era. Despite the differences in measuring the epochs, there is common agreement that all signs point to us having entered a new age.

Hallmarks of this new age include a stress on discipleship rather than church membership, and the understanding of the church primarily as a missional entity. Both are important, and are integrally related. A deepening appreciation of discipleship leads to a recovery of every Christian being a disciple of Jesus no matter what denominational affiliation is also claimed. And the body of Christ, which is each church, each congregation, exists to be a missional outpost in Jesus' name. No longer is mission something that is done "over there" or "by saints known as missionaries", it is how our faith is expressed in discipleship.

Vitality in individual disciples will have a direct influence on the vitality of congregations, of the communities of faith known as the Body of Christ. It is commonly understood that what this new Reformation replaces is a time known as Christendom, which is defined as the time when the case for Christ and the way of the world were found in concert rather than in contrast. Examples of these acting in concert to the benefit of the church would include no social or athletic activities (whether for adults or youth) sponsored on Sunday mornings, "Blue Laws" that closed some or certain businesses on Sundays, and the reading of a Bible passage as a part of each day's activities in public school classrooms. For the most part, Sundays are pretty much like every other day of the week as governments of all kinds have stopped protecting the Church. This is challenging for many of us, given how we grew up with it being the norm, and it is easy to blame society. God is inviting us to accept responsibility to be embraced by not only what is but what is yet to come.

Dismantling Structural Racism invites us into learning how racism is an inherent part of the life and history of our country from its earliest days. As a mostly white congregation, we have an opportunity to not only learn but to be transformed by learning how we are advantaged and others persons are disadvantaged by virtue of their skin color, ethnic identity or ancestral background. The Session has provided leadership regarding this subject through the adoption of an anti-racism statement:

"We, as the Body of Christ,
standing in solidarity with our
brothers and sisters of color:

Reject racism.

Promote tolerance.

Choose Love.

In our community.

In our country.

In our world."

Eradicating Systemic Poverty is, like the initiative in Dismantling Structural Racism, about challenging aspects of the systems we live in. Poverty means the lack of a sufficient income to meet basic needs for nourishment, clothing, shelter, health care and stable family life, and when it comes to children, having a long-term negative impact on the rest of their lives. Systemic poverty refers to the economic exploitation of people who are poor through laws, policies, practices, and systems that perpetuate their impoverished status.

What God is asking us to do, what God asks us to do in relationship to Matthew 25, is to pay attention, to practice our discipleship by joining with God in God's mission in the world. Please prayerfully use this Advent/Christmas guide and the worship guides during these seasons to explore with the Spirit's help God's guidance in our lives as disciples of Jesus.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
NOVEMBER 29, 2020

Isaiah 64.1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay,
and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.

Now consider, we are all your people.

While we are waiting, come; while we are waiting, come.

Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel, while we are waiting come.

v 1, "While We Are Waiting, Come", (Hymn # 92. Glory To God Hymnal)

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
NOVEMBER 29, 2020

Thirsty...you gave me something to drink
Isaiah 64.1-9

Thirst can have multiple meanings. To physically thirst is to desire liquid of some kind to quench one's thirst. Metaphorically, to thirst means to dearly desire something, such as "I thirst for a good book". The text from Isaiah illustrates the latter more than the former, as there is no mention of liquid or a physical thirst of any kind. The thirst referred to in this text is also more than simply metaphorical, it is metaphysical: the prophet wants God to manifest a presence that will be awesome and transformative. Knowing that the people cannot approach God, the prophet implores God to come to the people.

The author cries out:

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down
so the mountains would quake,
brush wood would be kindled and cause water to boil
to make your name known to your adversaries
so that nations might tremble at your presence...*

The irony is that the "adversaries" in the poem are not simply the enemies of God, they are the people of God themselves. The prophet appeals on behalf of all the people, confessing their sin and their hopelessness while also holding out great hope for this gift.

The season of Advent is about waiting on God once again, and the again is equally important. God has appeared in the person of Jesus 2000 or so years ago according to the storytellers who noticed and noted and promoted the event. Amongst the first storytellers were the shepherds, followed within a month by a woman prophet and a male prophet according to Luke. And, we as modern day disciples of Jesus await not only the remembrance of that promise, but the potential for the new adventure that is possible because we do remember and we thirst for God's presence and presents once again.

The prophet confesses the sins of the people in bold terms as a way of petitioning the LORD, admitting that the people have ceased to call on God's name. The prophet chooses to do so, to express the thirst for God in terms that hearken God's response. And so, on this first Sunday of Advent, we too, begin the season in which we beseech God to once again disclose God's self. May we have the courage to call on God's name, to not be shamed by our sin, to not be consumed by our anger, and to ask God not to be angry with us, as we join in with the prophet reminding ourselves and each other with this affirmation: "O LORD, you are our Father...we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand...now consider, we are all your people"! May we deepen our thirst for God!

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
NOVEMBER 29, 2020

Thirsty...you gave me something to drink

www.thewaterproject.org

Clean, safe drinking water is scarce:

today, nearly 1 billion people in the developing world do not have access to it

Water is the foundation of life

Today many people around the world spend their entire day searching for it

Time lost gathering water and suffering from water-borne disease limits potential

Education is lost, economic potential is lost, women and children lose more

World-wide, 1 of every 5 deaths of children under 5 due to a water-related disease

www.nature.org

Fresh water is essential for life

2.5%-3% of the earth's water resources are fresh

Less than 1% of this is easily accessible

2/3rds of it is found in frozen glaciers or other inaccessible places

Fresh water challenges in US

More than 1/2 of continental US has regularly experienced drought over past 2 decades

Because of climate change, scientists predict precipitation will decline by 20-25% in much of the western US by 2100

In 2014 40 of 50 state water managers

predicted water shortages over next 10 years

44% of US population depends upon ground water for drinking water

www.nationalgeographic.com

Why Is America Running Out Of Water?

On average, each American uses 80-100 gallons of water each day

www.commondreams.org

Millions of Americans drink unsafe tap water, including those in Flint, MI

US groundwater faces increasing depletion with more wells being dug

www.awwa.org (American Water Works Association: nonprofit org for clean/safe water)

massive investments in water infrastructure systems required, many 100 yrs old
cost would be \$1 trillion dollars over 25 years

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider when it comes to opportunities regarding water?

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 6, 2020

Isaiah 40.1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD:
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are like grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.
the grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.
Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
Lift up your voice with strength.
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"
See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

While we are waiting, come; while we are waiting, come.

Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel, while we are waiting come.

v 1, "While We Are Waiting, Come", (Hymn # 92. Glory To God Hymnal)

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 6, 2020

Hungry...you gave me food
Isaiah 40.1-11

Hunger is an indication that our body is out of balance, that we are uneven in our nourishment. The feeling of hunger is one of the most awesome aspects of the amazing vessel that is our body. The symptoms of hunger build from stages of growling stomachs to weakness to eventually perhaps a headache as our blood sugar level declines. Once again, the prophet known to us as Isaiah speaks about God's presence and presents, this week speaking for God rather than speaking for the people with God. This familiar poem begins with a word that is more than simply an expression, it is a manifestation: comfort. And food is one of the aspects of life, of living, in which we often find comfort.

The words that have come to us from a collection of prophets called Isaiah (there are at least three different "voices" within the collection of Isaiah, and the time frame spans centuries) this day, this week, speak of God desiring to comfort the people of Israel. The prophet preaches to the people sharing how God will comfort the people in extraordinary and ordinary ways, the latter including feeding, gathering, protecting, and leading them as a shepherd does with the sheep. This common image of the relationship of God with the people of Israel, that God is a shepherd, and the people are sheep, is most fondly and poetically portrayed in the 23rd Psalm. The prophet desires that God comfort the people like a shepherd comforts the sheep. Jesus, in sharing the story in Matthew 25.31-46, equally defines being comforted as a giver and as a receiver of God's love.

The prophet wants the people to understand that God has commuted their sentence, that their penalty for unfaithfulness has been paid. The exile will be past tense. The future has the promise of the revelation of God's glory and the people of God are to participate in the process of revelation. They are to do so by preparing the way of and for the LORD. The road into the wilderness (out of exile, returning to Jerusalem) is to be one that is straight and level. Like with what we've experienced in our lifetimes with the building of the interstate highway system, unnecessary curves are eliminated the hills are reduced and the low spots are filled in.

In the give and take between the prophet and the people, a voice exhorts listeners to "Cry out!" "What shall I cry?" is the response and in assessing the resources, the prophet states how humans are fragile and perhaps feeble, illustrated by some of the most poetic words in all of scripture: "all people are like grass...the grass withers, the flower fades...". This reality is countered by an even greater truth: "the word of our God will stand forever." God will tend to the people: gathering, carrying, leading, and feeding them.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 6, 2020

Hungry...you gave me food

If we live with an abundance of food, hunger is most often a temporary experience. If we do not, it can be devastating. The statistics on hunger—just within the United States—are both humbling and mind-boggling. How can we understand what it means to truly hunger?
Food insecurity defined:

lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle

“Food Desert”

Urban area: more than one mile to a supermarket

Rural area: more than 10 miles to a supermarket

www.feedingamerica.org

2019: 34 million people in poverty in the US, family of 4 living on less than \$25,000

2020: anticipated that as many as 50 million persons will face food insecurity

Children more likely than adults to face food insecurity

www.ampleharvest.org (Hunger in America)

approximately 1 in 6 Americans experience food insecurity

2017 Depart of Agriculture statistic:

We throw away a pound of food/person/day, or 100 billion pounds per year

www.bread.org (Bread For The World)

Ending hunger by 2030 adopted in 2015 by 193 countries, including the US

Every year 100 million people in the world join the middle class

Five challenges:

Nutrition: link nutritious food with health

Livelihoods: fair opportunities to make a living

Gender: empower women and girls

Fragility: cultivate peace and justice

Climate Change: resilience for an uncertain future

821 million people world-wide struggle with hunger every day, poverty a main cause

www.concernusa.org

The world produces enough food to feed all 7.5 billion people

Yet 1 in 9 people go hungry each day

The level of hunger in the world has decreased by 27% since 2000

Midland and Midland County

Feeding America website: # of persons living with food insecurity (2016): 9210 (county)

Midlandcountyefpn.org: Midland County Emergency Food Pantry Network

What's useful: kid-friendly meals (Mac&Cheese), PB&J, cereal, pasta/pasta sauce, canned meat, canned fruit, granola bars, tuna, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider when it comes to opportunities regarding food?

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 13, 2020

Isaiah 61.1-11 (1-4, 8-11)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me;
the LORD has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
the LORD has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
the LORD has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives,
the LORD has sent me to proclaim release to the prisoners;
the LORD has sent me to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
the LORD has sent me to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God;
the LORD has sent me to comfort all who mourn;

the LORD has sent me to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

While we are waiting, come; while we are waiting, come.

Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel, while we are waiting come.

v 1, "While We Are Waiting, Come", (Hymn # 92. Glory To God Hymnal)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 2020

In prison...you visited me
Isaiah 61.1-11 (1-4, 8-11)

These words from Isaiah are also familiar because of Luke's use of it as the text for an sermon given by Jesus in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. John the Baptist has been arrested and Jesus, sensing that it is time for him to begin his witnessing, attends sabbath worship and as a known guest is offered the opportunity to share in worship. The attendant hands him the scroll that contains this text from Isaiah and Jesus not only reads it, he concludes his reading by commenting how the text had come true in himself, how he understood himself to be the one the anointed one of the Lord GOD. For us to understand Jesus in this way is natural, for his hometown colleagues, it would have been both equally challenging and comforting. The latter because, well, who does not want a hometown person to do well; challenging because, well, what gives Jesus the right to speak of himself that way? In the end the latter perspective carries the day because "they" drove Jesus out of town and to the edge of a hill in order to have a place to stone him. Luke says that "he passed through the midst of them and went on his way." (Luke 4.16-30)

Isaiah is clear about speaking for the LORD and saying how the Lord GOD (note how one term is capitalized in each case in the body of the text) loves justice, hating robbery and wrongdoing. Isaiah ends this poem with the affirmation: "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. The LORD loves justice, and the people of Israel are to be the LORD's people when it comes to seeing that justice is done in the land, for this poem can be read as the Spirit of the Lord GOD anointing the entire people as well as an individual. The Christian tradition has Jesus as the anointed one but note how the covenant is made with "them" and "they" as well as "I" and "my".

And what is justice? The prophet illustrates by sharing how the people of GOD will receive: "a garland instead of ashes" (an expression of rejoicing rather than mourning); "the oil of gladness instead of mourning" (similar); and "the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." Further, the people will be as strong and steadfast as an oak tree, with strength and commitment to repair ancient ruins, former devastations, ruined cities. Justice means for the hopes and dreams of the people of Israel to be restored to and for and with all the people, including "the oppressed, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the prisoners." Isaiah's understanding from God was that there would be a time in which restoration would be the rule rather than ruin, hope instead of despair, praise instead of punishment, literally, the year of Jubilee which would restore all persons to their homes and relief from all their debts. The people would be visited by God for restoration.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 2020

In prison...you visited me

Of these categories, prison is perhaps the easiest to understand metaphorically, for most of us have never found ourselves in a physical jail or prison because of unlawful behavior of any kind. We may have gone to jail to arrange for the release of someone, we may have posted bail for someone to be released, we may have even participated in a jail or a prison ministry of some kind and found ourselves walking into a jail or a prison at an appointed time to share our presence and our presents with those who were incarcerated.

Prison/Jail Locations

State of Michigan: 31 prison facilities: nearest to Midland: Saginaw and St. Louis

Federal Prison: one Milan; Bop.gov/locations/institutions/mil; visitation policies

Midland County Jail

Prison/Jail Visitation Guidelines

Visitation in a jail/prison can be depressing for the visitor, uplifting for the inmate

Visits help the visitor grow as a person, help the inmate feel less forgotten

An official ID will be required to enter: a driver's license or other authorized ID

Do not wear the colors of green or khaki to the visit, staff wears these colors

Do not wear clothing that is revealing, metal in clothing can trip detectors, inhibit visit

Having a change of clothing in your vehicle can help if you are denied initially

Jewelry of every kind is discouraged

Many civil rights of inmates have been taken away, the right to visitors has not been

Understand that going through metal detectors will be a necessity of the process

One's attitude can have an impact on whether the visit can be successful or not

Those who will encounter you within the jail/prison are working, respect their direction

You will be required to fill out an application for visitation to initiate the process

Limitations:

No mobile phone or any kind of recording device will be allowed inside the facility

No purses, bags, backpacks will be permitted

Visits will have a limited time frame, arriving early can maximize the time

Vehicles used to travel to the facility are subject to search by officials

Each facility will have visiting hours, weekdays are usually less busy than weekends

Each facility will have its own policy regarding who can be visited when

The staff on duty has ultimate call on whether you can visit or not

Prison/Jail visits: where there is a will, there is a way

In person: challenging because of Covid-19

Many institutions rotating to video visits of some kind

Do you know someone who is incarcerated, or someone who has a family member who is?

How can you support them?

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider when it comes to issues regarding incarceration?

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 20, 2020

Second Samuel 7.1-11, 16

Now when King David was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the King, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefor thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be the prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.

Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Luke 1.46b-55

"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 generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

While we are waiting, come; while we are waiting, come.

Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel, while we are waiting come.

v 1, "While We Are Waiting, Come", (Hymn # 92. Glory To God Hymnal)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 20, 2020

Stranger...you welcomed me
Second Samuel 7.1-11, 16
Luke 1.46b-55

The books of Samuel are part of the historical collection of books in the Bible and they deal, along with 1 and 2 Kings, the story of Israel's monarchy, or experience with kings. In the Hebrew scriptures, 1 and 2 Samuel are one text, the division into two in English translations of the Bible follow the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew texts into Greek which, according to one tradition, was completed in 70 days by 70 rabbis (thus the word Septuagint, a word that includes the Greek word for seventy). 1 Samuel focuses on Samuel in chapters 1-12, who is viewed as a transitional figure in Hebrew history leading into the time of the monarchy, and Saul, Israel's first king, in chapters 13-31. David, whose reign is found beginning in 2 Samuel 5, figures prominently in the latter.

David is portrayed in the history of Israel out of two different sources: one has him as a musician, the other as a shepherd. These two sources have been combined in the telling of David's story, which grew to include him as a great warrior (David and Goliath) who grew to command an army of soldiers in successful campaigns against the enemies of Israel. David is also personified as a great politician in his ability to not only unite the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel and his astuteness in choosing Jerusalem as the capital of the united kingdom. Jerusalem also contains the Hebrew word for peace: shalom, and salem, an English form of the word names not only a city in North Carolina, but a brand of cigarettes. 2nd Samuel, including today's text, is all about David leading up to Samuel. David is secure in Jerusalem and in conversation with his chief aide, Nathan, muses about building a house for the tabernacle, the ark of the Covenant which has served from the days in the wilderness as a symbol of the LORD's presence with the people. The LORD comes to Nathan in a dream and says that it is not up to David to make the LORD a house and that the LORD will make a house (a lineage) of David. Which, of course, happens.

The text from Luke 1 is a song which carries the traditional name "The Magnificat", so named because of the first word in Latin. It closely resembles a prayer uttered by Hannah found in 1 Samuel 2.1-10 in the wake of God answering her prayer for a child, delivering and naming that child Samuel, and then bringing him to the temple in Shiloh where he was mentored by Eli. In Luke it is an affirmation—magnifies declares the greatness of—by Mary of how God has blessed her through a pregnancy of her own. Intentional contrasts abound: Hannah was childless while her husband's other wife had multiple children; Mary is a young woman (the meaning of the word translated 'virgin') and is engaged, not yet married. Each is 'visited' by the Lord and is found to be a woman worthy of welcome.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 20, 2020

Stranger...you welcomed me

United States definition of homelessness, anyone without a:
"fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."

Statistics taken from endhomelessness.org (2019 stats) based on a "point in time" survey that is annually taken in the United States in cities, towns, counties

17 out of every 100,000 people were experiencing homelessness nightly January, '19

70% are individuals; 30% persons in families with children

60% of all persons living in homelessness are male

Amongst individuals, 70% are men and unaccompanied male youth

amongst homeless persons, overall 37% (50% of individuals) are unsheltered

on a single day it's estimated there are 200,000+ adults over 50 who are homeless

Groups: persons of higher risk

persons of color are % wise more likely to be homeless than Caucasians

chronically homeless persons include disabled: 17% of the population

homeless Veterans make up 7% of homeless population

unaccompanied youth make up 6% of homeless population

Over the past five years, temporary housing beds

(Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, and Transitional Housing has decreased by 9%

Shelters able to provide a bed for 51% of individuals, 100% of families

Over the past five years, permanent housing beds increased by 20%

Many Americans live in poverty: 38.1 million or 11.8% of the US population

In 2018 6.5 million Americans spent more than 50% of income on housing

Doubling up, or sharing a household, is shared by 4 million US citizens

Nationalhomeless.org

Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked

Poverty makes it challenging to pay for food, healthcare, childcare, education

Issues/challenges contributing to poverty:

Lack of employment opportunities

Decline in public assistance

Lack of affordable health care

Domestic violence

Mental Illness

Addiction

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider regarding opportunities to welcome strangers?

CHRISTMAS EVE
DECEMBER 24, 2020

Isaiah 9.2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

A child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

*O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife, and discord cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace.*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee, O Israel.

Verse 7, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Hymn # 88, Glory To God Hymnal)

CHRISTMAS EVE
DECEMBER 24, 2020

Luke 2.1-21

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
And on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Raise a song of gladness, peoples of the earth.
Christ has come, bringing peace, joy to every heart.
Alleluia, alleluia, joy to every heart!
Alleluia, alleluia, joy to every heart!
"Raise a Song of Gladness" (Hymn # 155, Glory To God Hymnal)

CHRISTMAS EVE
DECEMBER 24, 2020

Stranger...you welcomed me
Isaiah 9.2-7
Luke 2.1-21

These two texts are among those best known amongst persons who are part of Christian worshiping communities. When Luke composed his *Gospel*, he wrote with a keen awareness of the prophetic testimonies that spoke to the promise of a Messiah, a Christ, both terms meaning "anointed one". When we pause and slowly read the words from Isaiah 7 and Luke 2, both of which speak to the promise inherent in a child—a son—being born, we are struck by the joy that is found in both. The birth of a child—of any and every child—is a reminder of how God continues to not only sustain but promote the importance and value of life within God's creation. And each child comes to us as a bit of a stranger from God, a stranger to be welcomed. Separated by over 700 years, these texts are connected by joy.

According to Isaiah, the people who have "walked in darkness", lived in despair, have had their fortunes reversed, that in the midst of the deep darkness has come a great light, resulting in a great delight, a delight akin to that found in "joy at the harvest", "exult(ation) in dividing plunder" after a victory over a foe. The oppressor of the people has been defeated by God and the result is devastating for the former enemies. It is a graphic both/and text: great joy, great destruction; exultation and humiliation.

In Luke, the story is the birth story of Jesus. We take this for granted, having heard it so many times, and we've heard Luke as many times as we have because it is the most telling, as well as compelling, of the birth narratives. Mark and John have none, Matthew's is brief. Luke shares how a governmental act—a census—sends Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem from Nazareth, and with Bethlehem known as the city of David, it is the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy. "While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child", Luke simply and profoundly records. Other than the normal chaos of travel and the note that there was no convenient place found for them to lodge (presumably because of others also found in Bethlehem because of it being their ancestral home), Jesus is successfully born.

Thus, as with the poetry from Isaiah, there is a back story behind the birth of a son: a military yoke has been broken in the one case, a census relocates a family at the time of a birth. One difference is that in Isaiah, the son is bestowed with numerous descriptive titles, while in Luke, there is no name given at all for the son (that won't occur until the time of his circumcision (Luke 2.21). Luke does have another important aspect to his story: the birth of this child who is to be welcomed is shared with the world through the interaction with the shepherds. *Gospel* means "Good News", welcome to the world, Jesus!

CHRISTMAS EVE
DECEMBER 24, 2020

Stranger...you welcomed me

Midland Michigan/ Midland County Michigan survey

January 2015 Point in Time

500 individuals reported staying in emergency shelters or being homeless (.4%)

25% had been homeless for more than a year

Children under 18 years of age constitute 30% of total

Michigan comparisons:

13,068 persons homeless (.14%)

5551 persons in homeless facilities

16 per 10,000 persons are in a homeless family

Midland facilities

Open Door: "Restoring Hope and Transforming Lives"

"We meet people at their point of need, transitioning them from a point of crisis to a posture of hope. Next we walk with them, teaching and modeling how to enjoy God, utilize their gifts to serve others, and live godly, interdependent lives."

The work:

Generous Hospitality: Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Emergency Assistance

Personal Development: Work Programs, Individualized Goal Planning, Community engagement

Application and Accountability: Case Management, Counseling, Spiritual Formation

Direct Service

Food: 48,545 meals served

A community soup kitchen operates Monday-Saturday Noon -1.30pm, with soup and sandwiches available to take for an evening meal.

Shelter: 11,763 nights of shelter

Two shelters are operated: one for men, another for women and children

Men's shelter: 19 beds with capacity for 23

Women/children's shelter: 18 beds with capacity for 21

Each guest is provided with food, shelter, clothing, and assigned a case manager

Clothing Ministry

clothing is available to shelter guests every day, to public for emergency needs

Shelter House, Midland: "Hope, Healing, And Empowerment"

One in every four women and one in every seven men will experience domestic violence or sexual assault in their lifetime. Shelter House provides safety, shelter, advocacy, and counseling. Help is available 24 hours/day, 365 days/year.

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider regarding opportunities to welcome strangers?

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 27, 2020

Isaiah 61.10-62.3

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD;
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
with a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;
as he died to make us holy, let us live to make all free,
while God is marching on.

Glory, glory hallelujah! Glory, glory hallelujah!

Glory, glory hallelujah! God's truth is marching on.

v 3, "Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory", (Hymn # 354, Glory To God Hymnal)

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 27, 2020

Luke 2.21-40

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel."

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

*Thanks, we give and adoration for your gospel's joyful sound;
May the fruits of your salvation in our hearts and lives abound.
Ever faithful, ever faithful to your truth may we be found.
v2, "Lord, Dismiss Us With Your Blessing", (Hymn # 546, Glory To God Hymnal)*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 27, 2020

Naked...you gave me clothing
Isaiah 61.10-62.3f
Luke 2.21-40

These two texts have in common the idea of rejoicing. The prophet not only wishes to verbally rejoice, but it is also to be a total body effort: "my whole being shall exult in my God". And in Luke we hear how Joseph and Mary and Jesus (now named) encounter Simeon and Anna, devout Jews, in the temple in Jerusalem as they have gone for the time of purification of Mary and the dedication of Jesus as the firstborn male child. Simeon and Anna are inspired by the Holy Spirit to rejoice in the presentation and presence of Jesus.

The prophet rejoices in how God has clothed him "with the garments of salvation" and "with the robe of righteousness", bedecked as beautifully and splendidly as a bridegroom and bride for their wedding. This promise of God is as sure as the earth producing fruitfully and faithfully as a garden, the righteousness and praise of the prophet (and God's people) to spring up as surely as what has been sown in the garden. The prophet can not keep silence, the prophet will not rest, until the proclamation of what the LORD has done has been experienced in the world, shining like the dawn or a burning torch, allowing the nations and all of the kings to come to know. And the people of God will also know themselves by a new name, which indicates a new status: "a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD...a royal diadem" in God's hand.

Luke's story continues to point to the responsibilities of the parents in the wake of the birth of their son. The child must be circumcised: a religious event performed in its "time", eight days (seven days, a week, plus one), a symbol of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. Mary is required to undergo purification in accordance with requirements after having given birth, and Jesus is presented to God, echoing Samuel's presentation in the Temple at Shiloh (1 Samuel 2.24). Reflecting their social status, Mary and Joseph sacrifice two turtledoves or pigeons, the offerings of the poor.

As in Isaiah, the story from Luke is also one that refers to clothing, albeit metaphorically. The law of Moses is a "clothing" of protection and guidance for Mary and Joseph as Jews. The child is circumcised according to the practice initiated by Abraham, representing the covenant between God and God's people. Mary seeks purification through cleansing, which allowing her to fully return to her community. Simeon and Anna, the pairing of a holy man and a woman prophet amplify how God has "dressed" this story with faithfulness. Finally, the time in Bethlehem and now Jerusalem having come to an end, the family returns to their home in Nazareth, Jesus clothed with "the favor of God" which was upon him.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 27, 2020

Naked...you gave me clothing

Greenamerica.org

When we clean out our closets, we often use three piles for clothing: keep, donate, and toss (or throw away). Even though many Americans donate clothing, textiles still make up a shocking amount of the US waste stream. The EPA reports that Americans generate 16 million tons of textile waste a year, equaling just over six percent of total municipal waste (for context, plastics make up 13 percent of our waste stream). On average, 700,000 tons of used clothing gets exported overseas and 2.5 million tons of clothing are recycled. But over three million tons are incinerated, and a staggering 10 million tons is sent to landfills.

Donating: Many people donate their used clothing to outlets that resell clothing.

One such outlet is Goodwill, another the Salvation Army. With respect to Goodwill, five percent of clothes they receive are sent to landfills, largely due to mildew issues. The rest remain in their 3200 stores for four weeks before being moved to Goodwill outlets, found in 35 states, where items are sold for 99 cents a pound.

What doesn't sell at the outlets is then sent to Goodwill Auctions, where huge "mystery" bins full of items are sold for as little as \$35 each. Finally, what clothing remains gets sent to recycling centers where they will be cut into rags, processed into softer fiber used for filling furniture and building insulation, or sent overseas.

Overseas Exports: Secondhand clothes that don't sell in the US or go into textile recycling are often exported. Roughly 700,000 tons of used clothing gets sent to other countries annually, with a mixed outcome. In some cases, the clothing provides jobs. In other cases, the sheer volume of exported clothing has suppressed local clothing industries and developed an increased reliance on other countries. It's estimated, for instance, that the cost of a secondhand garment is as low as five percent the cost of a new garment in Kenya, meaning local industries are unable to compete with the influx of cheap, used clothing.

Three steps one can take to reduce one's impact on the Earth when it comes to clothes:

Reduce clothing purchases. Donating is better than landfilling, but it does not erase the impacts of the clothes we buy and discard

When buying clothes, choose second hand.

When purchasing new items, look for "recycled content" products to ensure we are creating demand for recycled textiles.

Synopsis: Donating usable clothing to Goodwill or Salvation Army or a second-hand clothing store allows for clothing use to be sustained, and organizations such as Goodwill and Salvation Army (as well as an increasing number of clothing companies) are committed to recycling what can't be worn.

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider regarding opportunities around clothing ?

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
JANUARY 3, 2021

Jeremiah 31.7-14

For thus says the LORD:

 sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
 proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."
See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
 among them the blind and the lame,
 along with child and those in labor, together;
 a great company, they shall return here.

With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they will not stumble;

 for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.
Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away;
Say,

 "He who scattered Israel will gather him,
 and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,

 and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
 and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
 over the grain, the wine and the oil,
 and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.

 I will turn their mourning into joy,

 I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

 I will give the priests their fill of fatness,

and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;

There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,

But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

Chorus and v1, "There Is A Balm In Gilead", (Hymn # 792, Glory To God Hymnal)

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
JANUARY 3, 2021

John 1.1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

*Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega; he the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been
And that future years shall see.*

v1, "Of the Father's Love Begotten", (Hymn # 108, Glory To God Hymnal)

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
JANUARY 3, 2021

Sick...you took care of me
Jeremiah 31.7-14
John 1.1-18

The text from Jeremiah is a prophetic poem announcing the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. After decades of despair and separation from their homeland, the opportunity to return to their ancestral homes is sung with great fervor.

Their return is a promise of the LORD: "For thus says the LORD". The people will be gathered "from the land of the north" from "the farthest parts of the earth." Their return will be safe and sure, they shall walk "by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they will not stumble", cared for as a father cares for his children.

The LORD is understood as the one who will redeem the people from the exile, as well as the one who sent them into exile in the first place: "He who scattered Israel will gather him." "For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him." And this redemption will be joyful: "they shall be radiant", "their life shall become like a watered garden", "the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry", the LORD will "comfort them, given them gladness for sorrow"; and everyone will be blessed: the priests will have "their full of fatness" because of the resumption of animal sacrifices", and "the people shall be satisfied with the LORD's bounty." Everyone will be blessed. Yes, even "the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, a great company, they shall return" to Jerusalem. Presumably, the blind will be assisted by those who can see.

This is one of the themes of the introduction, the Prologue, to John's Gospel, the other text for the second Sunday after Christmas. Given that John has no traditional birth narrative, this poem represents a "birth" narrative in his Gospel. These are familiar words, and the author has deftly drawn parallels between Jesus (not so identified until the end of the poem) and John the Baptist, signifying how John was a gift from God sent to testify to the light of God, Jesus. The text also reflects the resistance within the Jewish community to accept Jesus as God's gift, as God's personification of the Word, to restore God's law.

Not everyone could "see" that this was true. There were persons who were "blind" to what God had done and was doing in the person of Jesus through the passion and purpose of the Holy Spirit. For those who could see and understand, this presence of God was the light that shined in the darkness of Jesus' day and ever since, much as the deliverance from exile was a light that shined in the darkness of Jeremiah's day.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
JANUARY 3, 2021

Sick...you took care of me

From: "Anatomy And Disease" by Alexandra Villa-Forte, MD, MPH, Cleveland Clinic, accessed from www.merckmanuals.com.

The human body is remarkably well designed. Most of its organs have a great deal of extra capacity or reserve: They can still function adequately even when damaged. For example, more than two thirds of the liver must be destroyed before serious consequences occur, and a person can actually live with only one lung or one kidney. Other organs can tolerate little damage before they malfunction and symptoms occur, the heart and the brain are examples.

From: "Disease, Illness, Sickness, Health, Healing and Wholeness: Exploring Some Elusive Concepts" by Kenneth M. Boyd, Edinburgh University Medical School, accessed from mh.bmj.com.

Definitions: Dis-ease is literally the absence of ease or elbow room. Today the word is used most commonly without a hyphen to refer to a physical disorder, with synonyms of "illness" and "sickness". "Illness" can be defined as "ill health; the state of being ill" (although older meanings reflect how the word "ill" is a contracted form of "evil") and "sickness" can be defined as "affected by illness, unwell, ailing...".

Another way of understanding them is to define "Disease" as "a pathological process"; "Illness" as "a feeling, an experience of unhealth"; and "Sickness" as "the external and public mode of unhealth."

The World Health Organization defines "health" as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." To try to define healthy as simply the absence of disease or infirmity leads to difficulties: ill health cannot be defined simply in terms of disease. Things are even more complicated when assessing mental ill health. "True" wellbeing requires an "essential reference to some conception of the 'good life' for a human being" and "some conception of having a measure of control over one's life, including its social and political divisions."

For religion, wholeness and healing are intimately related. Healing is understood by religion not only as the natural process of tissue regeneration sometimes assisted by medical means, but also as whatever process results in the experience of greater wholeness of the human spirit. Wholeness is always imperfectly realized in the fragmentariness of human experience; and for religion wholeness is discovered most commonly in the mode of expectancy, both in the midst of life and in the face of death.

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider regarding opportunities around health?