



Praying the Scripture at Home 3rd Sunday of Advent ~ 13th December

1. **Breathing exercise:** Try to do this at least once a day. Be still. To start take three deep breaths... inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four (*all through your nose, which adds a natural resistance to the breath*). Then, close your eyes and focus on your normal breathing. On the in-breath be aware that it is life-giving, nurturing; a gift from God. On the out-breath be aware that you are feeding the plants and trees around you; you are blessing the world around you. Stay with that for a while: The in-breath as a gift from God; the out-breath as your gift to the world. Repeat the following: "*Be with me Lord, clothe me in your presence*", for as long as you are comfortable and be aware of the God whose love envelops you.
2. **Opening Prayer** - God, the living word, we ask that we may be aware of the power of your word speaking in our lives. We ask your spirit to come among us and light the fire of your love in our hearts. As we gather to explore this word for ourselves and each other we do so in an atmosphere of openness and respect for all gathered here and for your presence among us. AMEN
3. Read **Sunday's Gospel (John 1:6-8, 19-28)**. Read it a few times – come back to it again over the next few days. *Is there something about the story that maybe you never noticed before? Is there a word, phrase, idea that strikes you? In the stillness repeat that word or phrase in your mind. Stay with this for a few moments and let its meaning sink into your heart.*

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. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

- Is there something that puzzles or disturbs you? Why? -What is it calling you to do?
- What then should we do? ... What then should you do? What is the Gospel asking of you?
- What is holding back, blocking God's love for you? What do you need to let go off?
- Where do you recognise God in our world? How can you bring this message to others?
- What change does this passage call you to today? What is the Good News you proclaim?

4. Consider this

Sometimes life just hurts. I wish there were a more delicate way to say that. I wish there were a clever way to explain this fact away – maybe some whimsical cliché that we can all have a chuckle over? But I've got nothing. The truth is there are days when the burdens of life can weigh on us so heavy that we're not sure how we'll lift it, much less carry it around. Around the middle of December it can be easy to be swept up in the holly, jolly tide of Christmas cheer. If life has dealt you a good hand, it's a quite enjoyable time of the year. But if life has dealt you a bad hand, if you have lost a love one during the year then that tide of Christmas joy can feel like it's drowning you. What do we do with this? For starters, we can call to mind that Advent is a season for people who are in darkness waiting for the sort of light that will save them. You can't commercialize or turn a profit on this sort of thing. Living in darkness and waiting for a great light isn't very easy to market either. Maybe that's why it's so easy to forget (or avoid) this reality when we're rushing through the season's numerous to-do lists. Author Taylor Caldwell writes, "I am not alone at all, I thought. I was never alone at all. And that, of course, is the message of Christmas. We are never alone. Not when the night is darkest, the wind coldest, the world seemingly most indifferent. For this is still the time God chooses." This season is still the time God chooses to bring the world's greatest hope into the very darkness of life that can seemingly weigh us down every day. There is, indeed, hope for those who live in darkness. May we stand in solidarity with those for whom darkness is an all too familiar reality this season. May we experience and share this light together. And maybe, just maybe if we look through the chaos, the pain and the struggle we see our true hope, the child in a manger.

Closing Prayer - God of compassion, may your advent call lead us to be signs of hope and love in our community. May we be lights breaking the darkness. We ask this through Christ Jesus our Lord, your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of Holy Spirit, **Amen**