

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



ADVENT PROGRAM

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Rooted in the Reformed tradition, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is committed to the formation of women and men for theologically reflective ministry and to scholarship in service to the global Church of Jesus Christ.

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Miller Summer Youth Institute

Metro-Urban Institute

World Mission Initiative

Zeitah Excavations

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EVENTS

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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 7, 2019

SCRIPTURE

AMOS 5:18-27

18 Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, not light;

19 as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it?

21 I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

24 But let justice roll down like waters,

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

25 Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 26 You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; 27 therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

DEVOTIONAL

The Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Dahle Sterling '88/'98

A worn-out old saying is, "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." One may still find much truth in it, though.

"Looking over the fence" is a form of escapism—the belief that we should be able to find a "back door" away from our challenges and problems, without doing due diligence and "finishing the race." For some people, this "back door" becomes their relationship with God. How many Facebook memes have you seen that promise God will miraculously fix your problems, answer all your prayers, or bring "deserved" wealth your way if you just "re-post this"? There, God is a kind of "genie in the lamp"—rub it right and the genie will fulfill three wishes.

In this text, the prophet Amos says "No." Nope. No. When we choose a relationship with the living God, we accept God's call along with God's promises. And that call is not to the latest in worship fads (contemporary, traditional, "laughing in the Spirit," contemplative, Pentecostal, or throwing clams at the sun) or to hyper-generosity as a way to sway God's favor your direction. The prophet warns that this God thing is real stuff—and that if you think engaging the God of Israel is a cure for everything you don't like and a pass-key to the blessings closet, then you're in danger of, in the words of another old saying, leaping "from the frying pan into the fire."

So where is the good news? First of all, we are called to justice-seeking and righteousness. Amos hints that in them we will find both God's presence and God's enabling power. When we work for justice and seek to live "rightly," we will find our sails filled with the divine breeze of God's Spirit. Jesus hit the ground running in these pursuits. Even as a newborn, he brought together shepherds and kings, the oppressed and the oppressors. He brought them together to the cradle of truth and light. In his teachings Jesus gave us the blueprint for right living and the essential understanding that we are "in this together." As pastor/author Rick Warren once wrote, "It's not about you."

In this Advent season, may we shoulder afresh and with passion the call of God to the work of bringing in the Realm of God—for our neighbor, our world, and even ourselves. And may we be healed of the foolish idea that Jesus came only to make "me" happy rather than to reconcile the world—and me—to God!

PRAYER

O God of redemption, God of the call, and God of exceeding-abundant grace, grant in this hour that the scales may fall from our eyes and we may behold the glorious work you are seeking to do in and through us as members of the Body of Christ. Forgive us for turning you into a talisman or a blank check to bring about our personal desires, especially when they are counter to your in-breaking Realm. May justice indeed roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream! In the name of the Lord of the Advent, Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
616 North Highland Avenue
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