

1st Week of Advent: Hope Liturgy

Invocation

O God of Boundless Time, the Church has invited us to reflect on a “Year of Love.” With this in mind, let us call upon the simple everyday moments of this past year that got us through, perhaps to just the next moment, to set the table for our worship today. We invite in the energies of gracious exchanges between friends, family, and strangers who surprised us with kindness. We call forth memories of tenderness gifted to us by art, by shared experiences, by a favorite song, or by a meal made from the heart. Spirit of Seasons, bless this sacred time that we gather with the love we bring with us from our lives this year. When brought together, may the love of this community be felt, believed in, or perhaps simply hoped for as we pray with you now. Amen.

Litany of the Advent Candle

One: My kin in Christ, as we gather to light the first candle of the Advent wreath, may we take a moment to honor the times hope was hard to find, grasp, or sense this year. Praying for those impacted by wildfires and war...

All: For the earth and all of creation trying to heal from loss after loss after loss.

One: Holding in our hearts those grieving beloved people, pets, and places...

All: Those longing for a hoped-for vision of life and the world that has not yet come to pass.

One: Let us take these aches and longings and bring them to this wreath, to this circle that is more ancient than our knowing. With our diverse experiences, let us light this candle of hope. (Light candle.)

All: As an honoring and an offering of God’s grace given to us from beyond our wildest imaginings.

One: Bringing light into dark spaces, giving warmth to the cold...

All: Bringing community to isolation, offering tenderness to trauma.

One: O God of Hope and Light, shine upon us today

All: With our hearts pointed towards the morning sun and our spirits open to your good news. Amen.

Prayer of Transformation and Grace

Poet Kim Stafford invites us to “ask about your enemy’s wounds and scars...Feed your enemy’s children. Learn their word for home...their sorrow’s history...Make tea. Break bread.” Let us pray:

O God of Reconciliation, in whom there is no “us and them,” guide us to be students of repair and hope. Help us to hold onto our humanity when conflict arises with others and within ourselves. May we be humble enough to seek wise counsel when we’ve lost our way and to listen to our inner voice when the world is loud and weary. Bless us in our reconciling living, O Spirit of Grace, that we may begin and begin again as often as we need. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Offering-Basket Weaver, receive these gifts offered to you and the greater good of all. May they be used to heal, to enact justice, and be tools for the Gospel in our community and with all our resources. Amen.



THE GREATEST OF THESE...

LOVE...

Children's Moment



To help us reflect on a "Year of Love," let us spend some time with those who put that love into action. Each week, we will reflect on an ancestor from the United Church of Christ and how they bring the Advent gifts alive for us today.

First, we must go all the way back to Africa in 1753, where Phillis Wheatley was born. In 1761, Phillis was sold as a slave in Boston to John and Susanna Wheatley, and it did not take long for Phillis' incredible intelligence and gifts to be noticed. With assistance from her own daughter Mary, Susanna educated Phillis in reading, writing, religion, language, literature, and history. By the young age of 12, Phillis began publishing her poems. Soon after, her fame spread across the Atlantic. She was deeply spiritual and was a member of Old South Church in Boston.

In her poems, Phillis introduced topics that others wouldn't touch, and that could only be written from a life lived like hers. She wrote of both the joys and sorrows of life and her own experience as a formerly enslaved person (she was freed from slavery in 1774). Throughout her poetry, she captured an extraordinary vision of hope and made history as the first woman and the first person of African descent to be published in America. Consider some of her poem titles: "On being brought from Africa to America," "To a Lady, on her remarkable Preservation in a Hurricane, in North Carolina," "On Imagination," "To S.M., a young African Painter, on seeing his Works," and "A Hymn to Humanity."

If you were to write a poem or a story about your life, what would you call it? What title would you give it? What unique story do you have to tell the world about yourself, about God, about life or humanity? This Advent, how might you be inspired to share more about yourself and listen deeply to the stories of others?



THE GREATEST OF THESE...

LOVE...