

FAITH @ HOME

Week of December 1, 2019

First Sunday in Advent

ADULT AND SMALL CHILD

READ: Romans 13:11-14

REFLECT: Nobody likes waiting. We would so much rather have something to do than be told to wait. For children, many of whom will be eagerly anticipating the presents under the tree, waiting focuses on Christmas rather than the coming of Christ. Try to tease out that hopeful expectation with lots of opportunities to “put on the armor of light.” Talk about what it means to live honorably in these Advent days. (You might have to go to the dictionary to look up that word. It’s a big one.) The early church thought it meant that we shouldn’t occupy our time with bickering and quarreling, but how might we live honorably in these days? What can we do?

RESPOND: This year just might be the year that you want to ditch the Advent calendar filled with chocolates and embrace a new tradition where each window contains something to do. The Rev. Molly Baskette creates a new calendar each year. You can sign up for her email list to receive the current one but older versions can be found here: <https://revmolly.tumblr.com/>. The Rev. Traci Smith offers an Acts of Kindness Advent Calendar in her Esty shop (https://www.etsy.com/shop/AuthorTraciSmith?section_id=20290274) and there is a free calendar from 2008 on her blog (<http://www.traci-smith.com/free-2018-advent-family-faith-practices-calendar/>). Begin each day together with your Advent calendar.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ELSA ANDERS COOK



Elsa Anders Cook is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ who has served churches in New York, Maine, Washington, and Pennsylvania. She volunteers at church now while supporting her husband in his service as a Major in the United States Army. Together, they have two little ones. She blogs at cookingwithelsa.org.

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ADULT AND ELEMENTARY

READ: Romans 13:11-14

REFLECT: Odds are that in your life with an elementary-age growing human, you are answering lots of questions about time, especially during this season. *What time is the party? When are we opening presents? When are we eating? Are we there yet? Do we have to go? Why can't we go right now?* Fortunately, you and Paul find yourselves in deep solidarity. The Christians in Rome have a lot of those same questions for Paul.

Paul, in one of his best moments of redirection, loves his friends in Rome by inviting them to use their time differently. Instead of asking questions about who, what, when, where, how, Paul explains how to make good use of our time, how to keep ourselves focused instead of being anxious. Paul talks about putting on the armor of light and during this season of outdoor decorations and lit up trees, this is a great way to talk to your elementary kiddos about how to harness their own excitement.

The armor of light might look like spending time with a classmate you don't normally spend time with. It might look like volunteering at your local food bank or animal shelter. Putting on the armor of light might look like making cookies for your local fire station or some church friends who might be in a hospital or a nursing home. When we think about how to spread the light of God's love around, we think about time in a different way. Instead of always waiting for something wonderful to happen, we can take God's love--the armor of light--with us into the world and no one has to wait to be loved.

RESPOND: Talk with your children about time management. Come up with a way to use your time in loving ways this week, being especially focused on folks who might need some extra love and cheer.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: RACHEL JONES



Rachel Jones is the associate editor for Forward Movement. She and her husband live on a farm with a dog, too many cats, several rabbits, and a flock of very opinionated chickens.

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ADULT AND YOUTH

READ: Psalm 122

REFLECT: Has this ever happened to you? You've got two huge tests, back to back, coming up – it's like teachers don't communicate with each other and want you to fail or something. But that's not all. The competitive sports team you play on just made it to finals, so your coach has called for extra practices, and the most important concert of the year is in less than a week, and let's just be honest: your solo piece is not ready at all. You feel overwhelmed by everything, to say the least. You just want a break.

If you also noticed, though, today's reading was all about the places we live – houses and cities and walls that surround us. Because I think the Psalmist also knew something about peace and perhaps about feeling overwhelmed when he sang, "Peace be within your walls and security within your towers." (Psalm 122:7, NRSV) Even when everything seems to be happening at once and busyness threatens to destroy your sanity, home is a place of peace and comfort – or that's at least the hope of what a home should be for every single one of us.

RESPOND: There's nothing cozier than a mug of homemade hot chocolate, especially on a cold, wintry night. With your family, fill your favorite mug and don't forget to add whipped cream, marshmallows or sprinkles. Then, answer these questions together: 1. Picture your house in your mind right now: Of all the different nooks and crannies, what's the most peaceful spot in your house? Why? 2. What, if anything, feels overwhelming in your life right now? Each answer can be a prayer, to which you collectively clink your mugs of hot chocolate together at the end and say, "Amen."

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: CARA MEREDITH



Cara Meredith is a writer and speaker from Seattle, Washington. Her memoir, *The Color of Life: A White Woman's Journey Toward Love and Justice*, released in 2019 (Zondervan). You can connect with her on her website at <https://www.carameredith.com/>.

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First Sunday in Advent

ADULT AND ADULT

READ: Romans 13:11-14

REFLECT: Today's Bible reading encourages us to prepare ourselves for Christ's return. To continue in sin is to be spiritually asleep, and many people are indeed asleep. They are comfortable in their sin and will be caught unaware when Jesus returns. It is time for all of us to wake up. It is time to rub the sleep from our spiritual eyes so that we can discern the nearness of our salvation. When we awaken from the spiritual slumber we've been in, we will then "lay aside" immorality and sin, choosing instead to live honorably to glorify the Lord. We will walk in the light of Christ's love, being a beacon of hope to all who see us. When we walk in the light, we feel compelled to share that light with others. It's time for Christians to share the good news of the Gospel with as many people as we can. We shouldn't want anyone to be asleep when Christ returns.

RESPOND: As you read this Bible reading and reflection, are there any areas in your life which you need to lay aside? Do you make excuses for blatant sin? Are there any areas in which you struggle to live uprightly before the Lord? If so, confess those areas to the Lord, ask Jesus to help you live a life that's pleasing to him. Do you have on the armor of light? Are you boldly walking in the light that is Christ's love? Share Christ's light with an unbeliever today. You won't regret it.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTOR: ARETHA L. GRANT



Aretha Grant serves her local church as a Bible teacher and elder. She loves writing and is the author of *Overcomer: 25 Keys to Walking Victoriously*. Aretha resides in Hagerstown, MD with her husband and two youngest children. You can read Aretha's blog at www.arethagrants.com.

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