

WAITING
AND
WATCHING
ADVENT WORD REFLECTIONS

Hugo Olaiz • Miriam McKenney
Richelle Thompson • Scott Gunn

with Michael B. Curry • Ian S. Markham

Foreword by Sarah Stonesifer Boylan
Art by Sybil MacBeth

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ISBN: 978-0-88028-491-2

Printed in USA



**Forward
Movement**

inspire disciples. empower evangelists.



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FORWARD MOVEMENT
Cincinnati, Ohio

FOREWORD

In my family Advent tradition, we light the Advent wreath candles during our dinner prayers. Then we pray together the collect for that week from *The Book of Common Prayer*. The burning down of the purple and pink candles provides a clear demarcation of time's movement toward the holiness and excitement of the celebration of Christ's birth.

For the past seven years, AdventWord has given the faithful the holy opportunity to pause during the hurried season of Advent. With a focus on one word each day, the initiative offers time for personal reflection and the opportunity to connect with a global community of prayer via social media.

Every year, I witness an outpouring of community, prayers, and thoughtful responses to the words and themes. Whether a hand-drawn comic, a picture found in the camera roll, or a personal, written meditation, the global AdventWord contributions are diverse in voices and mediums. My understanding and embrace of the season of Advent has expanded through this community and the generosity of people sharing their lives and faith.

The words for each day come from the Sunday Advent lectionary readings. A group of Episcopalians—lay and ordained, from around the church—gather and explore together the scripture passages through a process of *lectio*

divina. This method of reflecting on scripture is a powerful experience, and I encourage you to use it in your devotions this season. By reading and reflecting on the scripture passages, you'll deepen the experience of AdventWord and this season of holy expectation. The beginning of each week includes the scripture citations from which each word has been drawn.

The Way of Love appears as a theme for the third week of Advent. The Way of Love offers a set of practices to follow Jesus, and the meditations for this week indicate how these practices are reflected in our scriptures and daily life.

Certainly, social networking has changed since the brothers of Saint John the Evangelist started this initiative in 2012. From Pinterest and Tumblr to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the approaches and platforms have evolved, but the message has not. God is calling us to set aside time for reflection during the holy season of Advent, to mark this time as different from others as we wait and watch for the Christ child.

This year, I am delighted that Forward Movement has joined the AdventWord initiative as a partner with Virginia Theological Seminary. While the online daily AdventWord reflections are purposefully brief, this book from Forward Movement offers more in-depth meditations as well as prompts for response and prayer for each day. On Sundays,

the reflections from this book will be shared with our online community, building and strengthening our relationships however we engage with God's Word.

In addition, artist and prayerful doodler Sybil MacBeth has joined our team. Author and artist of the book series, *Praying in Color*, Sybil uses doodling as a way to center her prayers. In the book, each day includes space and an invitation to add your own visual prayers. Offer them to God—and if you feel inspired—share them with our online community.

This 2020 season, AdventWord and Forward Movement look forward to walking with you on this holy journey of waiting and watching. Join in the global prayer network and post your own visual or written meditations on social media. Make sure to tag #AdventWord or our official accounts to create an inter-connected Advent Calendar. Connect with us at:

www.AdventWord.org

www.facebook.com/AdventWordOrg

Twitter & Instagram: @AdventWord

Let us set aside the next few weeks to enter into holy time, the season of Advent.

—*Sarah Stonesifer Boylan*
AdventWord coordinator
Virginia Theological Seminary

ALMIGHTY GOD, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 211

Readings for the First Sunday of Advent

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

Isaiah 64:1-9

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29

TENDER

Tender is probably not the word you associate with the passage from Mark 13 used on the First Sunday of Advent. No, here we find the apocalyptic teachings of Jesus: bold words about the sun being darkened and stars falling from the sky, about the Son of Man coming with great power and glory.

The word “tender” does appear in this passage, but it’s in the context of reading the signs of the times: “As soon as [the fig tree’s] branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.” Jesus isn’t talking about the branch being loving or kindhearted as we usually think when we hear the word “tender.” He’s talking about reading the signs when you see that the branch is sensitive, when it’s delicate to the touch.

Jesus certainly sees and understands the signs around him; he knows that he is entering the “time of trial” as Mark says, the “time of darkness” as Luke puts it. Soon will come the

betrayal, denials, abandonment, trial, torture, and the cross. This Jesus, who one day will come with great power and glory, is also the one who suffers and weeps and asks his friends to stay awake with him in his time of trial, in his time of darkness.

But even more, this same Jesus who gives glimpses of his power and majesty in overturning the tables of the moneylenders and confounding the self-righteous in their attempts to trip him up is also the one who can read the signs of human pain and need in those who reach out to him. And he responds tenderly.

To the leper in the beginning of Mark's Gospel who begs Jesus to heal him—"if you choose"—Jesus responds not by showing how powerful he is or by immediately healing him with the snap of a finger but instead by saying, "I do choose." Jesus touches the man even before he makes him clean. Jesus sees the tenderness of the man's pain and responds with the tenderness of his loving heart.

To the little children and their desperate parents who approach him to seek a blessing, only to have his disciples shoo them all away as if they are unworthy of his attention, Jesus responds with tender care, even as he is indignant with those who call themselves his followers and yet cannot see the signs of human need.

When we feel weak and overwhelmed, let us hang our hope on the blessed truth that this same Jesus who one day will come with great power and glory is also the one who walks alongside us right now, with tenderness in his heart and balm for our weary souls. Let us echo the words of the old spiritual that says, “When my heart within is aching, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.”

—*Michael B. Curry*

Response

Practice intentional tenderness with everyone you meet today, and reach out with a call, text, or email to someone in particular need.

LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*

—*A Prayer Attributed to Saint Francis*

SAMPLE





MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30

DELIVER

These days, we can get almost anything delivered to our homes. We order groceries, consumer goods, books, and of course, meals that are delivered to our door. Often we use “delivery” to mean something that is brought to us. A convenience.

But deliver has another meaning. In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “Deliver us from evil.” Deliver used this way means to free us from captivity. The ancient Israelites were delivered from pharaoh as they crossed the Red Sea. The psalms are full of hymns about deliverance, as in Psalm 31, which begins, “In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.” Saint Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians, “For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19).

This season of Advent is, in many ways, about deliverance. Ironically, many of us receive deliveries as we shop to prepare for Christmas gift giving, yet our focus on that type of delivery steers us away from Advent's invitation to deliver us from chaos, fear, and anxiety.

In Advent, we prepare to meet our redeemer. Whether we are preparing to meet Jesus Christ when he comes again in glory or to meet him as we adore him at Christmas, our work is the same. We prepare our hearts to meet him, that when we meet Jesus, he “may find in us a mansion prepared for himself” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 212).

You see, we need deliverance. Our world is messed up. Our lives are messed up. We are sinners who cannot save ourselves. We need a savior, a deliverer. Advent invites us to repent, to turn to Jesus. We are invited to reject rampant consumerism and the idea that we can find our happiness in earthly things and to embrace our true joy, the peace that passes all understanding.

In other words, more deliveries won't fix us. But deliverance can. Jesus offers us the free gift of gracious love. His life shows us true life. His death has conquered death. Jesus offers us redemption from sin and freedom from death. Jesus is our deliverer.

—Scott Gunn

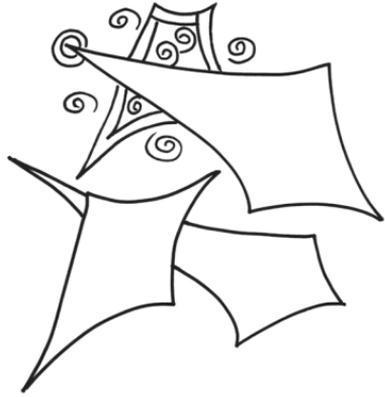
Response

From what do you need deliverance?

STIR UP YOUR POWER, O LORD, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 212



SAMPLE



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1

STRENGTHEN

My 16-year-old son has accomplished in the past year what I haven't been able to do in a lifetime. He has taken control of his body and tapped into a quiet but fierce resolve for physical health. In fifteen months, he has lost 100 pounds, stretched five inches taller, and developed broad shoulders and sculpted arms. Not everyone recognizes him on first glance.

He calls the transformation his “glow-up;” I call it remarkable.

The combination of a strong genetic tendency for stoutness and a medical condition that makes it very hard to lose weight—and ridiculously easy to gain it—thrust me headlong on a slippery slope to obesity, with seemingly few grab handles for brakes. Add in a dash of childhood trauma, a few garden-variety insecurities, and a boatload of bad food choices, and the scales tipped. Not in my favor.

I've gained and lost hundreds of pounds. Every night, I go to sleep planning a fresh weight-loss approach. By mid-morning,

I'm hunched over a keyboard, munching on a Pop-Tart. Please don't judge. Believe me, I've done plenty of that myself.

As I reflect on the word strengthen, I keep turning to the letter from the Apostle Paul to the people of Philippi. Writing from prison, Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in their love of Christ. He encourages them, even as he worries about his own possible execution. He offers these powerful words in the fourth chapter: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Paul can't be much more explicit than that to the early followers of Christ and to those of us today. But reading the sentence and believing it intellectually is much different than acting with full faith that it is true. I haven't found the courage yet to turn completely over to Christ this prison I've built. Some days, I'm certain I can tackle the challenge on my own; other days, I'm desperate for a quicker fix, a medical miracle. I am confessing to you at the same time I'm coming to see for myself that the only way to true physical health is through a spiritual transformation. I must acknowledge my weakness and claim dependency on God to find the strength I need to wage this battle.

The other day, I dropped my son off at his gym. He goes five days a week, without fail. I noticed for the first time some words engraved into the pillar of the building: "Psalm 118:22." I pulled into a parking spot and looked up the reference on

my phone. This verse says, “The same stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”

Sometimes, I can hear the whisper of God’s voice. Other times, I need a flashing neon arrow—or words chiseled into a fitness gym’s façade. *Hey you. Yes, you. Jesus here, with an important message. Listen up. Take heed. You can do all things through me. I will strengthen you.*

—*Richelle Thompson*

Response

Write out the verse from Philippians 4:13 and post it where you will see it frequently. Reflect on each word of the sentence independently. In what ways are you willing to rely completely on the strength of Jesus?

STRENGTHEN, O LORD, your servants with your Holy Spirit; empower us for your service; and sustain us all the days of our lives. *Amen.*

—*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 309

