

Asbury United Methodist Church

143 Ann Mary Brown Drive, Warwick, RI 02888

401-467-5122 asburyumcri@gmail.com

DECEMBER 10, 2023

Advent Two: Being Present with Peace

Worship Leader: Patricia Smith-Disu

Chancel: Becky Arnold

* Please rise in body or in spirit

We Celebrate Our Presence Together: Gathering

Gathering Song "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" Hanna Noh

Welcome and Asbury Mission Statement

We are Asbury! Abundantly thankful to God; Saved by Christ's resurrection; Blessed by God; United by Christ's love for each of us; Reaching out to our church family and our community; Yearning to tell the Good News to all by being Christ's voice, hands, and feet in the world.

Announcements

Becoming Present — an Advent Ritual

"What Can I Give Him" arranged by Mark Hayes

Together

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Patricia Smith-Disu: In our Advent series, we are celebrating the gift of being truly present — to each other and to the call of God to make this world a better place. We can be the gift of presence with those who are experiencing life as less-than-peaceful. But this might also be true of how we are personally feeling in this moment. Our lives can feel a bit chaotic or in need of a makeover. The Good News is that God is continually making a way for do-overs. In this we can find peace, even when life doesn't feel so peaceful. This week we focus on what it means to be a gift of non-anxious presence for those who need it most.

Together

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If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Eric Jones: We unwrap a present on this second Sunday of Advent with great anticipation for the gift that God will reveal.

People: We open our hearts as we open the gift!

Eric Jones: The promise of Peace is the Divine Gift we receive.

People: And what will we do with it?

Eric Jones: The gift of Christ's peace reminds us that we can have serenity even in the midst of non-peaceful situations.

Peace is not simply the absence of conflict.

Peace is an ever-present gift that we can open at any time when we stop, breathe, and trust that we are never alone.

And the gift of peace we can give is to be present for those who feel alone.

People: We light this Candle of Peace as a sign that we will be Present with Peace in the world.

Together:

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise [One], I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: I will give my heart.

Announcements

1. Winter Celebration on Dec. 9(Sat) from 4:30-6:30p. Andrea is looking for volunteers to help set up crafts for adults and children, make/donate hot chocolate and apple cider, lead some Christmas songs, donate snacks/baked goods and clean up. Other ideas and help are also appreciated! Contact Andrea dunnansmed@hotmail.com or call 207-8017
2. The SPR Committee has started collecting donations for our Asbury staff. Please give generously to demonstrate your appreciation of the fine work done by Hanna, Lori, Gary and of course Pastor Yohan. Your donations may be cash or checks written out to Asbury UMC with the notation Staff Gifts on the memo line and can be given to Diane Newman-Goins or to any member of SPRC. The last day for giving is Sunday, 12/17.
3. Christmas Eve joint worship service will on Dec. 24 at 5 p.m. at the church.

Tau Cross

The cross hanging above the altar for the Advent season is called the Tau Cross. It is so named because it resembles the Greek letter of that name. It is also called the Old Testament Cross because, according to tradition, the pole on which Moses lifted up the brazen serpent was a Tau Cross. This is the original form of a cross. The cross was made many years ago by Robert Baldwin Sr.

Birthdays

10th Logan Moore, 11th Barbara Marcoccio, 13th Cheryl Francis, 14th Nađia McGovern

Flowers

The flowers on the altar this week are given to the glory of God and in loving memory of my grandmother, Emma Payden, whose birthday is Christmas Day, by Marian Styles-McClintock.

Prayer of Presence

Let us pray:

**Holy Living Light of God,
you are our Peaceful Presence.
Let this peace grow in our lives each day,
so we can be a Present of Peace to others.
Unwrap and open our hearts.
May it be so.
Amen.**

* Opening Hymn

"O Day of Peace that Dimly Shines" UMH 729

The Peace

The Word Present Among Us: Proclaiming

First Readings

Isaiah 40: 1-11 and 2 Peter 3: 8-15a

Patricia Smith-Disu: The prophet Isaiah lived in a time of exile perpetrated on the Hebrews by the Babylonians. By the time we get to chapter 40, one of our readings for today, Isaiah's disciples are writing after the exile has ended. In this part of the book, we hear themes of comfort and peace and the possibility that the paths of our lives can be cleared for new life. We also hear that we are always held in the peaceful presence of our God. Let us read these excerpts responsively:

"Console my people, give them comfort," says your God.

"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem's heart,

and tell it that its time of service is ended...”

A voice cries out,

“Clear a path through the wilderness for YHWH!

Make a straight road through the desert for our God!”

**Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low;
let every cliff become a plain, and the ridges become a valley!**

Go up on a high mountain, you who bring good news to Zion!

Shout with a loud voice, you who bring good news to Jerusalem!

Shout without fear, and say to the towns of Judah “Here is your God!”

**Like a shepherd you feed your flock,
gathering the lambs and holding them close,
and leading mother ewes with gentleness.**

The new churches of the first century church were encouraged by the writer of the letters called First and Second Peter. These churches were living in a confusing time as they struggled with the belief that Jesus’ return was immanent... but was not yet coming to fruition. In our reading today, the writer invites them to wait with peaceful hearts, even in the midst of what feels like chaos. Hear this excerpt from the Second Letter of Peter:

“This point must not be overlooked, dear friends: in the eyes of the Most High, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. God does not delay in keeping the promise, as some mean ‘delay.’ Rather, God shows you generous patience, desiring that no one perish but that all come to repentance... But what we await are new heavens and a new earth where, according to the promise, God’s justice will reside. So beloved, while waiting for this, make every effort to be found at peace and without stain or defilement in God’s sight. Consider our God’s patience as your opportunity for salvation.”

Witness to the Word in Music “Prepare for the Coming of the Lord!”

Gospel Reading

is the best gift you can give.

In the name of the Holy Presence,
the Divine Gift,
and the Spirit of Peace that is just waiting for us
to unwrap abundant life.

Amen.

Postlude “Joy to the World” Hanna Noh

Praise Spirit through whom our hearts grow, Praise Three-in-One, from here below.

Offering Prayer

Rev. Yohan Go

Present to the World: Sending

Closing Carol

Patricia Smith-Disu: We close our service with a Christmas carol. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow knew the chaos and sorrow of life, sinking into a depression after his wife died and his son was badly injured in the Civil War. When Longfellow heard the bells on Christmas Day, he was encouraged that peace could come again one day to a troubled nation. And we carry that same hope for peace this day.

* **Closing Hymn:** “Angels We Have Heard on High” UMH 238 vs. 1,3,4

* Benediction

“As we strip away the cluttered surface of our lives
and become more present in the moment,
we may be disturbed by what we can now see in the open vista,
especially the suffering of “the least of these.”

We are no longer numb to the cries of those hurting.
We ache for the violence humans do to one another and to the earth.

We see all people and all creation held within God’s love and life.
Our comfortable lives are disrupted as we ask new, hard questions.
But being more mindfully present will also bring greater awareness
of God’s presence, peace, and clarity in the midst of it all.”

[adapted from Amy Oden, Right Here, Right Now]

So now go and be truly present
so you may be a gift of presence for others.
That’s all that is expected —
that the gift that is YOU

Mark 1: 1-8

Eric Jones: The second Gospel reading of Advent from the Gospel according to Mark is the very beginning of the book, setting up the idea that this story of Jesus will be a transformative experience. Drawing on the prophet Isaiah, Mark tells his readers that God is making a way in the most difficult places, clearing open paths in the desert places. John the Baptist shows up in Advent, as he typically does, a sign that the time has come when the Messiah, born of the Spirit, will be present among us.

Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: as it was written in Isaiah the prophet: “I send my messenger before you to prepare your way, a herald’s voice in the desert, crying, ‘Make ready the way of our God. Clear a straight path. And so John the Baptizer appeared in the desert, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to John and were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. John was clothed in camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and he ate nothing but grasshoppers and wild honey. In the course of his preaching, John said, “One more powerful than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie his sandal straps. I have baptized you in water, but the One to come will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”

Song of Illumination

UMH#454 Open My Eyes, That I May See vs1

Sermon

“Being Present with Peace”

Rev. Yohan Go

Fully Present in the Moment: Praying

Prayers of the People

“Right Here, Right Now”

Sung slowly

Together

*Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.*

Pastor: We too often find ourselves multitasking or obsessing about something that isn't quite right or settled or the particular way we like it. We are very accustomed to a preoccupied mind that often has little peace. In this season, we will give ourselves a respite from this pace as we slow down in this prayer time, taking on a more peaceful rhythm.

We will begin our prayers with three questions, each followed by a short silence. Focusing intentionally on thoughts and memories can be a kind of prayer, bringing our lives into a conversation with the Holy. I invite you to take a deep breath and close your eyes if you are comfortable doing that.

The first question is this: Who was a gift of presence to you this week? Did you experience their attention in a way that felt like a special connection? Take a moment to recall this in your mind's eye, seeing it emerge like opening a gift. If you cannot recall such a moment, it is OK... this week you will notice these moments more deeply.

The second question is this: How did you offer yourself as a gift of presence? What did it feel like to extend your attentiveness and availability beyond yourself? Did you notice how it made a difference to someone else for you to be truly present to them?

The third question is this: Is it possible that God's presence is felt more acutely in these moments when we truly tend to one another? What could you do this coming week that would allow God's gift of Peace to flow through you to someone else? It may be as simple as finding opportunities to speak an encouraging word. Or as complex as actually lifting up someone's circumstances through volunteering or donating.

Together

***Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on those who are in distress.

We pray this week for... (speak the names of people you lift up in your prayer and the prayer concerns of our community and the world)

In this prayerful, present moment, we train our attention on thanksgiving and joy. We give thanks this week for... (speak your gratitude and the prayers of gratitude of our community and the world)

In this prayerful, present moment we ask you, Christ Jesus, the Greatest Gift of All,

to help us savor our journey toward the celebration of Christmas.

Help us recognize and create moments of sweet presence rather than filling the voids with the things that do not last.

Help us to stop, notice what we are experiencing, and accept it with open hearts and minds.

In doing this, we allow you to meet us in the right here, right now, right where we are.

Amen.

Together

***Right here and right now we open our senses
to see and perceive the gifts we've been given,
to know and believe that what we must do
is open our hearts to let all gifts flow through.***

Offering

Interlude "O Come, All Ye Faithful" Hanna Noh

*** Doxology**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Jesus Christ, our burdens know,