

- [Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)
- [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#)
- [Luke 21:25-36](#)
- [Psalm 25:1-9](#)

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.*

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and
yet a king born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
Hymn 66 v. 3

In Love enfold us. Hymn 53, V. 2

Congrats Ya'll we are here, we made it through the first of many holiday gatherings.
Here we are.

Just as we are, fully human, fully exhausted from the cooking and eating of the Thanksgiving Holiday or perhaps still aglow from the time around the table of laughter and gathering.
Regardless of if you ate pumpkin or pecan pie,
we gather here.
Today.

Gathering around the table we share a common meal,
At our feasting tables, we make the recipes we delight in and the dishes that bring back memories and stories.
For some of us gathered here, this year's holiday revealed to us the sharp pangs of those who were not around the table for the first time, whom we love and see no longer.
Our tables were filled with guests even as they may have included empty places of members who were not there.
Each Chair, revealing to us where our heart's love lie.
Perhaps we had a quiet peaceful holiday, perhaps it was too busy and full.
Perhaps it was a dull ache or a marvelous celebration....

Here we are today.
The flip of a calendar.
The first Sunday of Advent.
The First day of December (the year where our Advent Calendars match with December 1 as the first day and thankfully only 20 more days until our daylight starts to return minute by minute)

The twinkly lights shine more and more around us,
brightening our days,

brightening our pathways and revealing to us that even in the darkness, the hard times, there is light, hope, peace and joy.

The winter season is a season of vulnerability.

Trees lose their leaves and we enter into the Season of Sticks...

Things lie bare, silhouettes of their former selves.

The knots and branches of tree trunks are revealed without foliage to cover it.

The imagery carries over to our own understanding of self, too.

We, too, become vulnerable. Not only because it is colder outside and we put on layers, but we are coming to the end of the year and we look back at the year past and the year to come.

We feel this vulnerability within the changes of our lives: the empty chairs that once were filled at out tables, the uncertainty in the change in politics, the changes in our own lives with the progression of age or annual checkups where we literally stand in our birthday suits- awaiting wisdom from those who know more than we do about our own health.

To be vulnerable is to stand revealed,
willing to risk judgement and hoping for community,
putting all of our trust in those around us.

Vulnerability takes courage- the baring of one's heart- to share the most important things in our lives with those gathered around the table with us. Those who are invited to hold that treasure with us and BE with us in that midst of whatever emotional swirl that might invite you into.

Being vulnerable is scary. When I worked with youth on summer mission teams doing home repair, the thing that made me most afraid were the words, "we need to take up for the floorboards and repair the joists." In the heart of South Carolina, this was akin to "let's go ahead and redo it all."

Every time that we took away the floor boards, that outer protective layer... laying bear the essential framework of the foundation of the house, we found that not only the joists needed replacing but so did x,y,z and oh by the way while you are there Q needs replacing too due to the humidity. Taking up the floor boards revealed sooo much more work to be done.

My anxiety about the work came from a place of fear, of not knowing what to do and completely forgetting that in community we are not alone in the work that is to be done. We are with each other. While we might not be able to fix the problem all in one fell swoop, all at once,

In revealing the challenges, we were able to help along the way in the ways that our gifts and talents could be used. I came to realize that my part of the story was to be present, listen, and take one step at a time. The homeowner vulnerably opened their home to us and shared all that they had with us trusting us to build it back up with them.

In the season of Advent, we hear prophets speaking of hope, speaking of what is to come. Their words peel back the layers of work that is to be done. Many of our readings will be apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is the Greek word that literally means "revealing"--- and what is the purpose of these readings? To strike fear? To make us anxious?

I do not believe that this is God's intention to make us afraid, rather these readings reveal God's presence in creation, revealing our roles in community and reveal that vulnerable encompassing love of God who wants to enfold humanity.

God's desire to be in community is revealed in the risky birth of his Son, as a baby. A vulnerable, trusting, fully exposed human baby- love fully enfolded in the arms of humanity. A manger, a young family, shepherds and innkeepers (and before I get in trouble for preaching a Christmas sermon and not an Advent sermon)... Advent is all about the preparations, the revelations we have right in front of us --that God is at work in God's kingdom.

A full-grown Jesus speaks to us about these preparations in our gospel reading today. We can see the signs around us about when to plant or cut down trees, and yet, why is it when we are faced with hardships we question where God is? Why do we think that we have been abandoned and not see community and where hope and new chapters can begin?

Jesus reminds the people of the physical seasons around them and that even if visible fruit is not being born, this delay doesn't mean that it won't bear fruit later. Jesus is speaking not to scare the disciples into believing but to remind them that even in the darkest of times, God is there.

God in the form of the most vulnerable.

God in the form of a king born in a manger, lived amongst us, and turning everything upside down- showing love in the most ultimate form- love that through vulnerability reveals community, salvation, and triumph amidst the darkness.

Jesus gathered around so many tables.

So many tables where people did not agree with him.

So many tables where the courage to ask questions and reveal their curiosity and opposition was welcomed.

Jesus stood, sat, and sauntered about in this community reminding us that in community we can be builders of the community in the midst of the most challenging times.

We may not have the answers or the talents for fixing the challenge but we do have the heart and the presence to be with each other. To hold the treasure of one another to seek wholeness as we peek at what all of the world reveals to us, bidden and unbidden.

In this holy season of Advent may the revelation of God's hope for you, and for us, hold us together in common, seeking to "guard our hearts so that they are not weighed down" rather than we might carry them together.

As we sing in our opening hymn, O Come O Come Emmanuel, God be with us, reveal in us that we too are yours.
Amen.