



▶ DAILY DEVOTIONAL.

Saturday/Sunday, 5/26-27/18

“Words of Boldness”

Acts 4:23-31 (NIV)

The Believers Pray for Boldness

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

*“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.*

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Family Activity: This week in worship our theme is that the Holy Spirit gives us boldness. As a family, pray about and agree on something that you can do that would be bold for God. Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you in your activity this week. Perhaps God is calling you to be less wasteful or perhaps to be more generous. Maybe God will lead you to serve or to talk to someone about faith.

Discuss:

- How did we glorify God?
- How easy or hard was it to be bold for God?

Monday, 5/28/18

“Pentecost”

“A time of connecting with a community that is committed to let everything they do be done in love.” (For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 67.)

Acts 4:31 (NIV)

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

- What does it mean for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

- How can you speak boldly of God? What characteristics of God do you believe God wants you to share through words and behavior?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come. Touch me with the flames of your power that I may live boldly as a follower of Jesus. Amen.

Tuesday, 5/29/18

“Advent”

“A time of anticipation that One will come who knows our needs and limitations and will help us overcome them.” (For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 3.)

Matthew 24:42 (ESV)

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Advent means “come,” and it is the beginning of the Christian year, following Pentecost. It is symbolized by purple or blue. When we are in the season of Advent, we anticipate the coming of Christ at Christmas, at the fulfillment of time, and every day. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas. One might expect the Bible passages prior to Christmas to focus on Jesus’ birth story (which is only in Matthew and Luke). Instead we are guided toward preparing our hearts and minds for the very presence of Jesus in whatever way we experience him. We are to pay attention, be alert and stay awake. This is a very different message than our cultural message of decorating, shopping and partying.

- How does Advent change your perspective on Christmas?
- How might you experience Christmas differently this year?

Prayer:

*“Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.”* (Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus, hymn)

Wednesday, 5/30/18

“The Twelve Days of Christmas”

“A time of acceptance of the gift of love in the realization that in each new Act of Love, everyone’s love is renewed.” (For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 17.)

Luke 2:25-32 (NIV)

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the LORD’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign LORD, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

The 12 days of Christmas are the 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany. The song dates back 150 years and was most likely written as a counting song for children. Contrary to widespread belief, the twelve days are not a countdown to Christmas and the song was not written as a Catholic catechism song.

Christmas is the first day of the Christmas season and is observed with the color white. The twelve days are a time to celebrate Christmas; therefore, many households leave indoor and outdoor decorations until the 12th day. Imagine how our perception of Christmas would change if we used our energy to celebrate Christmas after Jesus' birth, rather than before his birth. Imagine what it would feel like to live in a spirit of celebration, rather than anticipation.

At the end of the month, I'll be travelling to Colorado for some continuing education and to see my son and granddaughter. I am extremely excited about seeing Spencer and Rukah, especially since we will have three full days together. I have lots to do to get ready. However, the anticipation will not match Rukah's voice shouting "Nana" as she runs and jumps in my arms. Nor will it equal the long hug with Spencer.

- What would Christmas feel like in your life if your focus was on the 12 days of Christmas rather than Advent? What could the church do differently?
- How does it feel to you to switch your energy from the days before Christmas to the days after? Why do you think people focus more on preparation than on celebrating and giving thanks? How would a change make a difference in the life of PWUMC?

Prayer:

O God
We are thankful that you have given us
Eyes of Faith
We can look at a Star
and see a Place
We can look at a Baby
and see the Future
We can stand at the beginning
of a New Year
and see Hope
For we are the people who know
the end of the story
as well as we do the beginning
Amen.

(For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 17.)

Thursday, 5/31/18

"Epiphany"

"A time of sharing love received in a way that will overcome human needs and limitations."

(For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 23.)

Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)

The Magi Visit the Messiah

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."*

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

I love Epiphany! It is always on January 6th, and is symbolized with stars, wise men and gifts.

Epiphany is a mega aha moment for the three wise men. Finding the Christ child, they are hit with the realization that he is the very essence of the Messiah, the one who comes to save and bring peace to the world. The season lasts between four and six weeks and is a time of thanksgiving for this big aha experience.

- If we pay attention to the Christian calendar, we are in a spirit of thanksgiving from Christmas day through the end of Epiphany, seven-eight weeks. How might our New Year's resolutions reflect this? How might verse 12 direct us?
- What direction do you feel God is leading you? Considering verse 12, prayerfully contemplate what direction God is leading PWUMC. How do you see yourself participating in this direction?

Prayer: Dear God, this journey called life can feel overwhelming, confusing and lonely. When I am feeling far away from you, help me to see the star, listen to wise words, and experience the presence of Jesus. Guide me to love beyond myself, to give more than I receive, and to follow the path you place before me. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Friday, 6/1/18

"Lent and Easter"

Lent is "a time of personal examination as to how we have kept our agreement to love." (For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 37.)

Mark 1:12-13 (NIV)

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted (or tested) by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 40 days (not counting Sundays) prior to Easter. Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon occurring on or after the vernal equinox. So Lent is determined working backwards (as is Advent). Lent simply means “lengthen” as in a reminder that the days seem longer with more daylight. Lent is observed with purple, the omission of “Alleluias” during worship, and some sort of devotion/action that encourages people to focus on Jesus’ suffering. Oftentimes, people give up a kind of food. The purpose is to create room in one’s life for self-examination of one’s faithfulness to following Jesus.

- This year Lent began on February 14, so Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day were the same day. Which day did you observe? Which one provides an intentional opportunity for self-examination?
- How does participation in these services strengthen the Easter experience?

Easter is “a time of realization that even in the face of crucifixion love survives, deepens, and raises us to new heights.” (For All the Seasons by John Winn, p. 55.)

Mark 16:6 (NIV)

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.”

During Easter and the 50 days following, the altar in the sanctuary has been adorned with butterflies and I have been wearing a stole with embroidered butterflies. Butterflies are a symbol of hope, new life and making things new. The butterfly is a reminder of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead to new life.

I remember going to the grocery store a few years ago on the Friday before Easter. I was puzzled as to why the store was so busy. Carts were full, and many had a large ham. Then it hit me. Sunday was Easter and folks were preparing for large family gatherings!

- Without diminishing Easter gatherings too much, how does one give honor to Easter, which is central to the Christian faith?
- What can you do in your life to adopt an awareness of the Christian calendar, to mark time by events that point towards Christ, encourage you to grow in faith, and open doors for you to experience God’s relentless love?

Prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

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. (St. Francis of Assisi)

**This week’s devotional was written by Pastor Nancy Liston
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