



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

**Wednesday Small Group (via ZOOM!)
Session on Advent: Waiting Patiently for What?**

Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Hayward, CA, 16 December 2020, 3:00 PM

CHALICE LIGHTING

0.5 min

It is now, at Advent, that I am given the chance to suspend all expectation...and instead to revel in the mystery.

Jerusalem Jackson Greer

OPENING WORDS

1 min

During Advent, we have to sit in our own anxiety and funkiness long enough to know what a Promised Land would be like, or, to put it another way, what it means to be saved--which, if we are to believe Jesus or Gandhi, specifically means to see everyone on earth as family.

Anne Lamott

SONG: ADVENT PROSE (PLAINSONG) Performed by Giltspur Singers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_d1tzHk3PI8

4 min

MEDITATION / CENTERING

2 min

Everywhere the air had become a vibrant yellow drum. A heavy sunlight freighted the foliage of the trees. Each leaf was a shutter about to swing back and reveal a miniature sun, one window in the immense advent calendar of nature.

J.G. Ballard

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in tonight's session. You may, if you wish, meditate on the immediate future, your plans for the holiday season, the New Year [2021], the coming of the new administration and how it will affect your attitudes and views of your life. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS)

40 min

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met. How are you managing in the face of COVID-19 surges and the new SIP orders? Has anything occurred that has caused you to pause and take stock of where you are in relation to where you planned to be?

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

5 min

Definition of Advent (from Oxford languages): (1) The arrival of an important person, thing, or event; and (2) The first season of the Christian church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays.

From Wikipedia: The name was adopted from Latin *adventus* "coming; arrival", translating Greek *parousia*. The season of Advent in the Christian calendar anticipates the "coming of Christ" from three different perspectives: (1) the physical nativity in Bethlehem, (2) the reception of Christ in the heart of the believer, and (2) the eschatological Second Coming.

Practices associated with Advent in the Western Christian tradition include keeping an Advent calendar, lighting an Advent wreath, praying a daily devotional, erecting a Christmas tree, lighting a Christingle [an object used to celebrate Jesus Christ as the "light of the world"}, as well as preparations for Christmas, such as setting up Christmas decorations. The equivalent of Advent in the eastern Christian traditions is called the Nativity Fast and lasts for 40 days, but it does not begin the liturgical year.

MUSIC: FROM HANDEL'S MESSIAH "FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN" Performed by The Choir of Kings College, Cambridge and the Brandenburg Consort 4 min

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFBIJgkj_-g

As UUs, we seem to have inherited some of the Christian customs, traditions, and attitudes surrounding Advent, but don't necessarily believe in any of the three Christian events. So, what if anything are we waiting for? Is this person, thing, or event waiting for us, or are we waiting for it? And how are we waiting--with patience, expectation, or anticipation? Is fear involved?

QUOTES ABOUT ADVENT, WAITING, AND PATIENCE 10 min

The Advent season is a season of waiting, but our whole life is an Advent season, that is, a season of waiting for the last Advent, for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

But the important thing about learning to wait, I feel sure, is to know what you are waiting for.

Anna Neagle

The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment.

Frederick Buechner

For outlandish creatures like us, on our way to a heart, a brain, and courage, Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning - not home but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.

Frederick Buechner

I believe that a trusting attitude and a patient attitude go hand in hand. You see, when you let go and learn to trust God, it releases joy in your life. And when you trust God, you're able to be more patient. Patience is not just about waiting for something ... it's about how you wait, or your attitude while waiting.

Joyce Meyer

Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it.

Terry Pratchett

The world is full of magical things patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper.

Bertrand Russell

At the advent of danger there are always two voices that speak with equal force in the human heart: one very reasonably invites a man to consider the nature of the peril and the means of escaping it; the other, with a still greater show of reason, argues that it is too depressing and painful to think of the danger since it is not in

man's power to foresee everything and avert the general march of events, and it is better therefore to shut one's eyes to the disagreeable until it actually comes, and to think instead of what is pleasant. When a man is alone he generally listens to the first voice; in the company of his fellow-men, to the second.

Leo Tolstoy

I believe deeply that God does his best work in our lives during times of great heartbreak and loss, and I believe that much of that rich work is done by the hands of people who love us, who dive into the wreckage with us and show us who God is, over and over and over. There are years when the Christmas spirit is hard to come by, and it's in those seasons when I'm so thankful for Advent. Consider it a less flashy but still very beautiful way of being present to this season. Give up for a while your false and failing attempts at merriment, and thank God for thin places, and for Advent, for a season that understands longing and loneliness and long nights. Let yourself fall open to Advent, to anticipation, to the belief that what is empty will be filled, what is broken will be repaired, and what is lost can always be found, no matter how many times it's been lost.

Shaina Niequist

God travels wonderful ways with human beings, but he does not comply with the views and opinions of people. God does not go the way that people want to prescribe for him; rather, his way is beyond all comprehension, free and self-determined beyond all proof. Where reason is indignant, where our nature rebels, where our piety anxiously keeps us away: that is precisely where God loves to be. There he confounds the reason of the reasonable; there he aggravates our nature, our piety—that is where he wants to be, and no one can keep him from it. Only the humble believe him and rejoice that God is so free and so marvelous that he does wonders where people despair, that he takes what is little and lowly and makes it marvelous. And that is the wonder of all wonders, that God loves the lowly ... God is not ashamed of the lowliness of human beings. God marches right in. He chooses people as his instruments and performs his wonders where one would least expect them. God is near to lowliness; he loves the lost, the neglected, the unseemly, the excluded, the weak and broken.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The man who no longer expects miraculous changes either from a revolution or from an economic plan is not obliged to resign himself to the unjustifiable. It is because he likes individual human beings, participates in communities, and respects the truth, that he refuses to surrender his soul to an abstract ideal of humanity, a tyrannical party, and an absurd scholasticism. . . . If tolerance is born of doubt, let us teach everyone to doubt all the models and utopias, to challenge all the prophets of redemption and the heralds of catastrophe. If they can abolish fanaticism, let us pray for the advent of the sceptics.

Raymond Aron

Look into your own existence. Count the significant events, the technological changes, and the inventions that have taken place in our environment since you were born and compare them to what was expected before their advent. How many of them came on a schedule? Look into your own personal life, to your choice of profession, say, or meeting your mate, your exile from your country of origin, the betrayals you faced, your sudden enrichment or impoverishment. How often did these things occur according to plan?

Nassim Nicholas Taleb

Those who stand at the threshold of life always waiting for the right time to change are like the man who stands at the bank of a river waiting for the water to pass so he can cross on dry land.

Joseph B. Wirthlin

The sea does not reward those who are too anxious, too greedy, or too impatient. One should lie empty, open, choiceless as a beach--waiting for a gift from the sea.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

I have always been delighted at the prospect of a new day, a fresh try, one more start, with perhaps a bit of magic waiting somewhere behind the morning.

J. B. Priestley

Take a leap of faith and begin this wondrous new year by believing. Believe in yourself. And believe that there is a loving Source--a Sower of Dreams--just waiting to be asked to help you make your dreams come true.

Sarah Ban Breathnach

We spend our lives, all of us, waiting for the great day, the great battle, or the deed of power. But that external consummation is not given to many: nor is it necessary. So long as our being is tensed, directed with passion, towards that which is the spirit of all things, then that spirit will emerge from our own hidden, nameless effort.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

New Year's Day. A fresh start. A new chapter in life waiting to be written. New questions to be asked, embraced, and loved. Answers to be discovered and then lived in this transformative year of delight and self-discovery. Today carve out a quiet interlude for yourself in which to dream, pen in hand. Only dreams give birth to change.

Sarah Ban Breathnach

But if we learn to think of it as anticipation, as learning, as growing, if we think of the time we spend waiting for the big things of life as an opportunity instead of a passing of time, what wonderful horizons open out!

Anna Neagle

We shall never have more time. We have, and always had, all the time there is. No object is served in waiting until next week or even until tomorrow. Keep going ... Concentrate on something useful.

Arnold Bennett

Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot,' billed as 'the laugh sensation of two continents,' made its American debut at the Coconut Grove Playhouse, in Miami, Florida, in 1956. My father, Bert Lahr, was playing Estragon, one of the two bowler-hatted tramps who pass the time in a lunar landscape as they wait in vain for the arrival of a Mr. Godot.

John Lahr

Godot is whatever it is in life that you are waiting for: I'm waiting to win the lottery. I'm waiting to fall in love'. For me, as a child, it was Christmas. At least that eventually came.

Ian Mckellen

When I tried to do "Waiting for Godot," it was such a controversy. I was tired of political theatre. All I wanted to do was 'Godot.' You know what happened? We were told we had messed up and politicised a classic that has nothing to do with S.A. [South Africa].

John Kani

My whole life is waiting for the questions to which I have prepared answers.

Tom Stoppard

A man who is a master of patience is master of everything else. *George Savile*

Sometimes things aren't clear right away. That's where you need to be patient and persevere and see where things lead.

Mary Pierce

I am patient with stupidity but not with those who are proud of it. *Edith Sitwell*

I believe that a trusting attitude and a patient attitude go hand in hand. You see, when you let go and learn to trust God, it releases joy in your life. And when you trust God, you're able to be more patient. Patience is not just about waiting for something ... it's about how you wait, or your attitude while waiting.

Joyce Meyer

The practice of patience toward one another, the overlooking of one another's defects, and the bearing of one another's burdens is the most elementary condition of all human and social activity in the family, in the professions, and in society.

Lawrence G. Lovasik

I have no patience for anyone who thinks they've figured things out, no patience for people who think they're right at the expense of everyone else. The world is too connected and too complicated to conform to any of our rigid ideas of what it should be like.

Moby

People are stubborn about what they perceive to be the right thing or the wrong thing, and it takes a long time to filter this human condition. There's a waiting period until people catch up. But if you have patience--which it takes when someone thinks differently from you--everybody always catches up. That patience is a wonderful virtue.

Johnny Mathis

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION 1 min

Read the questions for reflection, one by one.

BREAK 5 min

MUSIC: RING OUT SOLSTICE BELLS—JETHRO TULL 4 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbBCCqPtEV8>

GROUP REFLECTION 50 min

Two rounds. Or, we can respectfully discuss the issues as they come up, with each participant having their "first round" say, followed by discussion of what was said, then proceeding to the next participant.

The season of Advent in the Christian calendar anticipates the "coming of Christ" from three different perspectives: (1) the physical nativity in Bethlehem, (2) the reception of Christ in the heart of the believer, and (3) the eschatological Second Coming.

- ◆ Do your holiday celebrations emphasize one or more of these perspectives? How? Has this pattern changed over the course of your life?
- ◆ What are you waiting for now (this time of year)? Is it a person, a thing, or an event?
- ◆ Which end-of-the-calendar-year holidays do you celebrate—Dewali, Hanukkah, Solstice, Christmas, Kwanzaa?--Do any of your celebrations involve waiting?
- ◆ What are you doing while you wait? Do you accept agency for ensuring that what you desire will actually arrive? How will your behavior change once it has?
- ◆ Has the year 2020 been different for you than previous years, with respect to how you mark the holiday season? How?
- ◆ Do you believe there will ever be a time of a new heaven and a new earth? How about a new heaven on earth? What will it be like? What steps can be taken to prepare for it, either during an Advent season, or all the time?

- ◆ Did any of the readings catch you up? Which, and why?

SESSION FEEDBACK AND FUTURE PLANS

5 min

- ◆ How did the session go for you?
- ◆ Do we need to make any format changes to make it more useful to you?
- ◆ Should we revisit / modify our covenant?

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

5 min

Read this poem as you would a reading in the round: First person reads a phrase, a sentence, or a short paragraph, up to a good stopping place—then the next person takes over and does the same.

**Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem
by Maya Angelou**

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,

Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.

At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.

We listen carefully as it gathers strength.

We hear a sweetness.

The word is Peace.

It is loud now. It is louder.

Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.

It is what we have hungered for.

Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.

A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.

Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.

We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.

We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.

Peace.

Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.

We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,

Implore you, to stay a while with us.

So we may learn by your shimmering light

How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a language

To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ

Into the great religions of the world.

We jubilate the precious advent of trust.

We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.

All the earth's tribes loosen their voices

To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,

Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves

And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.

Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.