



Hope Opens the Door

A COMPASSIONATE ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
at Church of the Resurrection





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A Compassionate Advent

MATT WOODLEY

Have you ever had a door shut in your face? Have you ever had God suddenly open a door for you? Have you ever been afraid of what's behind that door? Doors—both literal and figurative—play an important role in our lives.

Our theme for this Advent is all about doors, specifically how “hope opens the door.” As Christians, it is our hope in the risen Christ that allows us to open the door of our hearts afresh to him and to others (especially to the poor and those who don't know Christ) during Advent.



This Advent devotional is designed to help you think and pray about the how God is calling you to open the doors of your life. Each week there is a devotional based on the Gospel reading for each Sunday in Advent. Since we are also opening the door of our hearts to others, each week's devotion also has a story of a refugee family from our own community.

One practical way to open the door is to join us as we partner with World Relief to provide Good Neighbor Kits to new refugee families in our community. These “kits” provide almost everything a family needs to set up their first apartment when they arrive. We are also establishing a Good Neighbor Team to walk with these refugee families after they arrive. Visit churchrez.org/good-neighbor for details.

May you and your family have a blessed Advent, an Advent experience of opening some new and exciting doors to Christ and others.



First Sunday of Advent

THOSE AMAZING DOORKEEPERS



Scripture

Mark 13:24-37



Reflection

In 1452, the Italian artist Lorenzo Ghiberti unveiled some of the most beautiful doors the world has ever seen. The huge, gold-plated double doors with ten panels depict dramatic biblical scenes. It took Ghiberti 27 years to complete what became known as the Porta del Paradiso, or the Gates of Paradise.

In the Gospel reading for this week (Mark 13:24-37), Jesus tells us that all of his followers have a very important job—we are doorkeepers. Every Christian has a door, that is, a sphere of influence, a network of people that we can help grow closer to Christ or help come to know Christ for the first time. Perhaps your sphere of influence doesn't feel very exciting or look like "the Gates of Paradise," but in Jesus' day doorkeepers had an incredible calling and privilege. They were responsible for guarding the door and taking care of people behind the door.

So no matter what you think about your door, this Advent you have a beautiful opportunity to serve Christ. Of course your door includes your spouse, your family, and your close friends. But we also have the opportunity to befriend and love those who don't know Christ, the poor, the vulnerable, or the marginalized.

During this Advent season, we're focusing on the opportunity to show Christ's love to the refugee families in our own community. Our theme is "Hope opens the door." In other words, because we have hope in the One who has lavished us with his grace, in hope we can open the door to others, giving them a glimpse of God's glorious grace in Christ. In Mark 13, Jesus reminded his disciples four times to stay alert to this task. So during this Advent, Jesus is saying to us, "Keep your eyes open to me and the chance to serve others in my name."



Questions for Reflection

1. What is included in your role as a doorkeeper? Who would you like to open the door to this Advent?
2. Check over the registry of supplies on our website for a refugee family Good Neighbor Kit. What would you or your family like to provide?

Stories of Refugees

GRISELDA PAULINO

I came to this county from Mexico when I was five with my mom and my uncle. We lived in Warrenville and then moved to the Parkside Apartments about seven years ago. I didn't know that I was undocumented until I was in high school and I was signed up to take driver's education my sophomore year.

I showed my mom my schedule and she had to tell me that I could not get my license. I felt left out because all of my friends were getting their driver's licenses. I found out about DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) from Matt Soerens and Betsy Hinsch.



Betsy encouraged me to get all my documents together and apply. I went to World Relief Immigrant Legal Services and they helped me fill out all the paperwork. After I sent my application away, I was really nervous because I didn't know how long it would take. Finally, I got a letter back saying I was accepted. I was able to get a Social Security Number. Mark Hinsch taught me how to drive and I got my license.

I finally felt like I was normal, doing the same things as my friends. This summer, I got a job working full time at Enchanted Castle. I am hoping to save enough money to go to cosmetology school next fall.



Second Sunday of Advent

REPENTANCE—THE BEAUTIFUL INVITATION



Scripture

Mark 1:1-18



Reflection

When the contemporary writer Kathleen Norris started her journey back to the Christian faith, she had to learn what she called “scary” words from the Bible and Christian theology. Norris said that these “scary” words “carried an enormous weight of baggage from my own childhood and from my family history.” As you might imagine, the word repent, a key word in this week’s Gospel reading, made her list.

I often meet people who, like Norris, feel the “baggage” of John the Baptist’s call to repent. But the call to repent in Mark 1 doesn’t just mean “clean up your act”; it primarily means: “come to the God who is coming to you.” Both passages from this Sunday’s readings, Isaiah 40 and Mark 1, declare the hope of returning to the God who passionately seeks us.

John the Baptist also asks us to rightly order our lives, specifically in how we relate to God and how we treat others. Every week at Church of the Resurrection we pray, “We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.” It’s a simple prayer with a beautiful invitation. We ask Christ to search and change our hearts, filling us with his love for our neighbors.

Sometimes our neighbors are hidden from us, unless we look carefully. For instance, every year World Relief resettles 550 refugees through their DuPage-Aurora office. These refugees represent the nations at our doorstep. What would it mean to turn our weekly prayer of confession into an opportunity to share Christ’s love with them?



Questions for Reflection

1. Think of someone who is hard to love, or perhaps someone you’ve been neglecting. How can you open the door of your heart and share Christ’s love this Advent?
2. Who are the neighbors that you often do not see? What would it look like to love them as you love yourself?

Stories of Refugees

A NAI AND HIS FAMILY

I came to the United States February 28, 2009 with my wife and four kids. When we arrived at the airport, there was a group of seven volunteers with World Relief, all from the same church, waiting to meet us with a sign in our language.

For the first few weeks we were here, our volunteers came over every day. They taught us how to use the stove and the bathroom. They took us to the store and to public aid.



After a few months, things got easier, but our volunteers still came over to visit. One lady comes over weekly to help my wife learn English and another lady taught me how to drive.

Now we have been here for five years, and our volunteers still come over for our kids' birthday parties and we go to their house for Thanksgiving and Christmas. They share their garden with us. One older couple says they are our kids' American grandparents. Our volunteers have become our friends.



Third Sunday of Advent

YOU ARE NOT THE SOURCE OF MERCY



Scripture

John 1:6–8, 19–28



Reflection

How did the birth of Jesus change the world? Historian Rodney Stark argues that Christ's birth unleashed a movement of unparalleled mercy. Stark writes, "In the midst of the squalor, misery, illness, and anonymity of ancient cities, Christianity provided an island of mercy and security ... It started with Jesus ... In contrast [to Jesus], in the pagan world, and especially among the philosophers, mercy was regarded as a character defect." Stark notes that for many intellectuals of Jesus' day mercy was "contrary to justice" because it involved providing unearned help or relief. So according to one philosopher, we must "curb the impulse [to show mercy]" because showing mercy is "a defect of character unworthy of the wise and excusable only in those who have not yet grown up." This was the moral climate in which Christianity taught that a merciful God requires humans to be merciful. But notice Dr. Stark's words—this movement of mercy started with Jesus. It's the same for us today. We are not the source of mercy. Jesus is.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading (John 1:6–8, 19–28) we see that John the Baptist understood this truth. John clearly grasped who he was not: he was not the Messiah; he was not a prophet; he was not the world's true light.

John understood that we are merely vessels and Christ's mercy must flow through us. We are not the light; we merely point to the Light of the World. It is not our first job to save the world by heroically serving the poor or saving the lost. As Jesus will say later in this Gospel, our first role is to stay connected to the vine—Jesus himself. As we are filled with his life and goodness, only then can we fulfill our role as mercy-bearers, not mercy-makers.



Questions for Reflection

1. How can you or your family or friends take some time during this season to reconnect with Jesus, the True Vine?
2. Who needs the mercy of Jesus during this season? How can you become a vessel of Christ's mercy to that person or persons?

Stories of Refugees

PARKSIDE GIRLS CLUB

Told by Diana Soerens

In 2008, we started inviting all the Parkside neighborhood kids over on Sunday nights for a meal, Bible stories, and games. Church of the Resurrection has always played an important role, helping to provide materials and volunteers for the program.

Since the fall of 2011, the older group of Parkside girls have been meeting together for prayer and Bible study. We have studied a lot of different topics over the last three years.



When I asked what units were most memorable, most girls remember the study we did on women of the Bible. Taw Meh most enjoyed our study on Colossians and Lee Meh says everything she knows about God she learned in Bible study. Lay Wah was particularly impacted by God's concern for the poor through our study of the Sermon on the Mount. Our group is not just limited to Sunday night Bible study time.

We have done lots of fun activities over the years too. The girls love our annual trip to the beach. When I asked what they most enjoyed about Bible study overall, Merry Thue summed it up well, "It is a time we can enjoy with our friends and a place we have freedom to express ourselves."



Fourth Sunday of Advent

THERE ARE NO LITTLE PEOPLE



Scripture

Luke 1:26–38



Reflection

A community of “rag-pickers” from a Paraguayan slum recently formed an amazing orchestra that plays instruments created from recycled trash. The students have learned to play “instruments” plucked out of a local landfill: a cello made out of an oil can and old cooking tools, a flute made from tin cans, bottle caps that serve as the keys for a saxophone, and a violin made from a battered aluminum salad bowl and strings tuned with forks. One of the band’s instructors said, “People realize that we shouldn’t throw away trash carelessly. Well, we shouldn’t throw away people either.”

“We shouldn’t throw away people either.” That’s a beautiful definition for what Christians call “the sanctity of life,” the biblical truth that even the weakest, poorest, most vulnerable, or seemingly most “worthless” human being is created in the image of our good and glorious God. Without the bedrock reality of our good and glorious God and his moral truth, the sanctity of life is a wishful dream. But in and through Christ, as one theologian was fond of saying, “There are no little people.”

Notice the beautiful story from today’s Gospel reading (Luke 1:26–38) about Mary’s call to give birth to the Son of God: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.” In the world’s eyes, Mary and Joseph are insignificant people from the boondocks. They are utterly powerless, and yet God surprises the world by choosing that which we deem weak and insignificant. God still operates that way. After all, he chose you and me. And he calls us to lavish mercy on those who whom the world often overlooks—the poor, the vulnerable, and the powerless.



Questions for Reflection

1. Who are the “insignificant” people of our world who often get overlooked or even trampled by the privileged and elite?
2. What is one thing you can do this week (or perhaps in the coming year) to demonstrate the Christian belief that “there are no little people”?

Stories of Refugees

MARIE JOSEE FURAH

When we arrived here in the United States, Church of the Resurrection received us as brothers and sisters in Christ, via Matt and Diana Soerens, as well as all the members of the Parkside community, who have since become our best friends.

This church has helped us spiritually, emotionally, and physically in a way that is impossible to mention in this short testimony.



As one example, I remember when my daughter was starting kindergarten. She had speech delay and other learning disabilities. The school wanted to put her in the ESL program assuming that her speech delay had to do with not knowing English. Diana advocated at the school for her to make sure she received the proper screenings to be placed in special education. Today, she is in 4th grade and has made so much progress at school.

We thank our good and gracious God for this church and for her members, who have become for us a new family.



Good Neighbors

Join us as we open our doors to our neighbors this Advent and Christmas!

GOOD NEIGHBOR KIT

We're partnering with World Relief to purchase household items that furnish a newly arrived refugee family's apartment.

churchrez.org/good-neighbor

GOOD NEIGHBOR TEAM

Walk alongside refugee families to help them acclimate to a new country and life. Team members will be trained by World Relief to provide practical assistance to a new refugee family.

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INVITATION

Invite people in your life to Christmas at Resurrection.

12/14 Christmas Festival, 5pm

12/24 Christmas Eve Candlelight, 5pm

churchrez.org/christmas

