

Advent 2021 Adult Forum:
Waiting in Faith with the Wisdom of Henri Nouwen
From the St. David's Center for Spiritual Growth

Sundays 11/28, 12/5, and 12/12 after 9:15 service
In-person in the Chapel and Livestream

Did you know that each week in Advent has a theme? Each of our discussions will center on the wise words of Henri Nouwen on the theme of the week: hope, peace, and joy. (The theme for the fourth week is love in case you're wondering. There is no class on 12/19 so we can all enjoy the St. David's Pageant.)

During the Sundays of Advent, we will offer you a collection of seven quotes: one for each day of the week. You are invited to ponder, contemplate or pray with each quote to deepen the experience of this sacred time. Each week we will meet in a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere, to share our insights and understandings of hope, peace and joy!

Week 1: Hope

The First Sunday of Advent

Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that things—the weather, human relationship, the economy, the political situation, and so on—will get better. Hope is trust that God will fulfil God's promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands.

Monday, the First Week of Advent

We lived in a world where people don't know much about hope. We know about wishes. The whole Christmas period is full of wishes. I wish this, or I want that. It's very concrete: I want a toy or a car or a new job. These are all very specific requests. But hope is precisely to say, "I don't know how God is going to fulfil His promises, but I know that He will, and therefore I can live in the presence with the knowledge that He is with me." I can then know and trust that the deepest desires of my being will be fulfilled. This way keeps the future very open.

Tuesday, the First Week of Advent

When we live with hope we do not get tangled up with concerns for how our wishes will be fulfilled. So, too, our prayers are not directed toward the gift, but toward the one who gives it. Our prayers might still contain just as many desires, but ultimately it is not a question of having a wish come true but of expressing an unlimited faith in the giver of all good things. You wish that . . . but you hope for . . . In the prayer of hope, there are no guarantees asked, no conditions posed, and no proofs demanded. You expect everything from the other without binding the other in any way. Hope is

based on the premise that the other gives only what is good. Hope includes an openness where you wait for the promise to be delivered, even though you never know when, where, or how this might happen.

Wednesday, the First Week of Advent

If you live with hope, you can live very much in the present because you can nurture the footprints of God in your heart and life. You already have a sense of what is to come. And the whole of the spiritual life is saying that God is right with us, right now, so that we can wait for His coming, and this waiting is a waiting in hope. But because we wait with hope we know that what we are waiting for is already here. We have to nurture that. Here and now matters because God is a God of the present. And God is God of the present because He is God of Eternity.

Thursday, the First Week of Advent

How can someone ever trust in the existence of an unconditional divine love when most, if not all, of what he or she has experienced is the opposite of love—fear, hatred, violence, and abuse? They are not condemned to be victims! There remains within them, hidden as it may seem, the possibility to choose love. They are not condemned to be victims! There remains within them, hidden as it may seem, the possibility to choose love. All the great spiritual leaders in history were people of hope. Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Mary, Jesus, Rumi, Gandhi, and Dorothy Day all lived with a promise in their hearts that guided them toward the future without the need to know exactly what it would look like

Friday, the First Week of Advent

The story invites us to an encounter, a dialogue, a mutual sharing. As long as we have stories to tell to each other there is hope. As long as we can remind each other of the lives of men and women in whom the love of God becomes manifest, there is reason to move forward to new land in which new stories are hidden."

Saturday, the First Week of Advent

Are there people who keep telling each other the stories of hope and, together, go out to care for their fellow human beings, not pretending to solve all problems, but to bring a smile to a dying man and a little hope to a lonely child? It is so little, so unspectacular, yes, so hidden, this Eucharistic life, but it is like yeast, like a mustard seed, like a smile on a baby's face. It is what keeps faith, hope, and love alive in a world that is constantly on the brink of self-destruction.

Prayer for the week centered on Hope:

Hope means to keep living
amid desperation
and to keep humming
in the darkness
Hoping is knowing that there is love
it is trust in tomorrow

it is falling asleep
and waking again
when the sun rises.
In the midst of a gale at sea,
it is to discover land.
In the eyes of another
it is to see that you are understood.
....
As long as there is still hope
There will also be prayer.

Week 2: Peace

The Second Sunday of Advent

Claim Your Peace

I really wish you an ever deeper peace. I know that that peace quite often lives underneath the turmoil and anxieties of our heart and doesn't always mean inner harmony or emotional tranquility. That peace that God gives us quite often is beyond our thoughts and feelings, and we have to really trust that peace is there for us to claim even in the midst of our moments of despair.

Monday, the Second Week of Advent

Our True Home

How can we live in the midst of a world marked by fear, hatred, and violence, and not be destroyed by it? When Jesus prays to his Father for his disciples he responds to this question by saying, "I am not asking you to remove them from the world but to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world" (John 17:15–16).

To live in the world without belonging to the world summarizes the essence of the spiritual life. The spiritual life keeps us aware that our true house is not the house of fear, in which the powers of hatred and violence rule, but the house of love, where God resides.

Tuesday, the Second Week of Advent

Accept Your Identity as a Child of God

Your true identity is as a child of God. This is the identity you have to accept. Once you have claimed it and settled in it, you can live in a world that gives you much joy as well as pain. You can receive the praise as well as the blame that comes to you as an opportunity for strengthening your basic identity, because the identity that makes you free is anchored beyond all human praise and blame. You belong to God, and it is as a child of God that you are sent into the world.

Wednesday, the Second Week of Advent

A Prayer
O Lord,

Life passes by swiftly. Events that a few years ago kept me totally preoccupied have now become vague memories; conflicts that a few months ago seemed so crucial in my life now seem futile and hardly worth the energy; inner turmoil that robbed me of my sleep only a few weeks ago has now become a strange emotion of the past; books that filled me with amazement a few days ago now do not seem as important; thoughts that kept my mind captive only a few hours ago have now lost their power and have been replaced by others. . . . Why am I continuously trapped in this sense of urgency and emergency? Why do I not see that you are eternal, that your kingdom lasts forever, and that for you a thousand years are like one day? O Lord, let me enter into your presence and there taste the eternal, timeless, everlasting love with which you invite me to let go of my time-bound anxieties, fears, preoccupations, and worries. . . . Lord, teach me your ways and give me the courage to follow them. Amen.

Thursday, the Second Week of Advent

Living Beyond the Success-Failure Syndrome

I hope you stay close to Jesus in the midst of everything. Jesus is, as you know, much more than a story. He is a source of life and is truly able to touch you deeply so that you can go beyond the success-failure syndrome. I really believe that it is possible for you to develop a simple life of prayer that can give you that “holy indifference.” By that, I mean the place where you feel so truly safe and so well held that the ups and downs of your life aren’t able to distress you or excite you. I have personally found much help in spending a little time every day just repeating in my mind a sacred text such as the prayer of St. Francis, “Make me an instrument of your peace. . . .” When I let these words enter deeply into my consciousness, something new in me happens and I am moved beyond the places where exultation or depression dwell.

Friday, the Second Week of Advent

The Freedom of the Children of God

We are fearful people. We are afraid of conflict, war, an uncertain future, illness, and, most of all, death. This fear takes away our freedom and gives our society the power to manipulate us with threats and promises. When we can reach beyond our fears to the One who loves us with a love that was there before we were born and will be there after we die, then oppression, persecution, and even death will be unable to take our freedom. Once we have come to the deep inner knowledge—a knowledge more of the heart than of the mind—that we are born out of love and will die into love, that every part of our being is deeply rooted in love, and that this love is our true Father and Mother, then all forms of evil, illness, and death lose their final power over us and become painful but hopeful reminders of our true divine childhood. The apostle Paul expressed this experience of the complete freedom of the children of God when he wrote, “I am certain of this: neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nothing already in existence and nothing still to come, nor any power, nor the heights nor the depths, nor any created thing whatever, will be able to come between us and the love of God, known to us in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:38–39).

Saturday, the Second Week of Advent

Everything is Indeed Good

I just returned from a walk through the dark woods. It was cool and windy, but everything spoke of you. Everything: the clouds, the trees, the wet grass, the valley with its distant lights, the sound of

the wind. They all spoke of your resurrection; they all made me aware that everything is indeed good. In you all is created good, and by you all creation is renewed and brought to an even greater glory than it possessed at its beginning.

O Lord, I know now that it is in silence, in a quiet moment, in a forgotten corner that you will meet me, call me by name and speak to me a word of peace. It is in my stillest hour that you become the risen Lord to me.

Week 3: Joy

Sunday, the Third Week of Advent

Jesus always promises joy...Joy is a free leaping toward the unexpected, a lifting up of what is new, a reaching out to heaven in hope, a touching of the Kingdom, an expectant tiptoeing. (Peacework, 79-80)

Monday, the Third Week of Advent

The great conversion in our life is to recognize and believe that the many unexpected events are not just disturbing interruptions in our projects, but the way in which God molds our hearts and prepares us for his return. Our great temptations are boredom and bitterness. When our good plans are interrupted by poor weather, our well-organized careers by illness or bad luck, our peace of mind by inner turmoil, our hope for peace by a new war, our desire for a stable government by a constant changing of the guards, and our desire for immortality by real death, we are tempted to give in to a paralyzing boredom or to strike back in destructive bitterness. But when we believe that patience can make our expectations grow, then fate can be converted into a vocation, wounds into a call for deeper understanding, and sadness into a birthplace of joy

Tuesday, the Third Week of Advent

The beauty and preciousness of life is intimately linked with its fragility and mortality. We can experience that every day—when we take a flower in our hands, when we see a butterfly dance in the air, when we caress a little baby. Fragility and giftedness are both there, and our joy is connected with both.

Wednesday, the Third Week of Advent

Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. . . . Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.

Thursday, the Third Week of Advent

Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Whatever we may think of or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God's love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete. Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing—sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death—can take that love away.

Friday, the Third Week of Advent

The joy that Jesus offers his disciples is his own joy, which flows from his intimate communion with the One who sent him. It is a joy that does not separate happy days from sad days, successful moments from moments of failure, experiences of honor from experiences of dishonor, passion from resurrection. This joy is a divine gift that does not leave us during times of illness, poverty, oppression, or persecution. It is present even when the world laughs or tortures, robs or maims, fights or kills. It is truly ecstatic, always moving us away from the house of fear into the house of love, and always proclaiming that death no longer has the final say, though its noise remains loud and its devastation visible. The joy of Jesus lifts up life to be celebrated

Saturday, the Third Week of Advent

Celebration belongs to God's Kingdom. God not only offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing, but wants to lift up these gifts as a source of joy for all who witness them. In all three of the parables that Jesus tells to explain why he eats with sinners, God rejoices and invites others to rejoice with him. "Rejoice with me," the shepherd says, "I have found my sheep that was lost." "Rejoice with me," the woman says, "I have found the drachma I lost." "Rejoice with me," the father says, "this son of mine was lost and is found."

All these voices are the voices of God. God does not want to keep his joy to himself. He wants everyone to share in it. God's joy is the joy of his angels and his saints; it is the joy of all who belong to the Kingdom.