



REFERENCES

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- [Malachi 3:1-4](#)
 - [Philippians 1:3-11](#)
 - [Luke 1:68-79](#)
 - [Luke 3:1-6](#)
 - This second Sunday of Advent, we are reminded that going home is never as easy as it sounds. We are often afraid to go home, afraid of home. Maybe we've experienced pain there; maybe we have felt unfairly judged, neglected, or unloved. Despite our desire to have home be positive for everyone, there are many who would be afraid of going home. So, as we worship, we can acknowledge that hesitancy. We can confess the times when we have not provided the sense of home that we wanted to, that we haven't been as hospitable as we could be. We can offer invitations to reconciliation, even in the most complicated of relationships. The call to come home means overcoming our fears that it won't work the way we hope, and it means committing to be an example of the kin-dom in our life together.
 - For many, the second Sunday of Advent is when we light the candle of peace. This is a time of coming together, of building a community of faith that is open to all. This is why we see Christmas movies telling a story of restoration, of broken relationships that are healed. Maybe there is a drama troupe in the church who can tell a story of reconciliation; maybe there could be a liturgical dance depicting a healing, a gathering up. Perhaps we need to provide prayer stations where families or individuals can come and light a candle for someone estranged, an invitation to return, despite their fears, into the loving embrace of a repentant family.
 - Let's also be aware that when we speak of family, it is not just the individual families that we want to be working on their sense of home.

We are also talking about the whole community, the church, and the surrounding neighborhoods. There is division; there is unwelcome. Who is being left out? Who is not being welcomed, whether intentionally or not? Who is not here, and what would it take for them to feel welcomed, included, invited?

- Prayers of confession can be opportunities to open doors that have been closed too long. Anointing can be a commissioning to the task of reconciliation. John the Baptist's call isn't just a personal call to live a better life; it is an invitation to the whole community to be a sign of the kin-dom. Maybe we could send the congregation out with a mission to invite their neighbors, invite the community to join them for a special event this season, Christmas eve, or a children's pageant or a cantata. What special events are we doing for the wider community and not just for ourselves this Advent season? The truth is, some of your neighbors might just be too afraid to come unless you invite and promise to be with them throughout the whole event. Make a promise to meet them, introduce them, escort them through the evening. The fear of home is real.
- Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, Director of Preaching Ministries, served churches in Indiana and Arkansas and the British Methodist Church. His PhD is from University of Edinburgh in preaching and media. He has taught preaching in seminary and conference settings for more than 20 years.



WEEK 2: PREPARING YOUR HOME

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years (Mal 3:1-4).

As the holiday season heats up, many of us long for an extra pair of hands for help with the work that comes with the holiday! If not help with the actual work, how about some help prioritizing what matters? What must be done, and what can be allowed to slip away? Someone with a refiner's fire that can purify our offerings and make the activities sparkle with renewed purpose.

I led an Advent Bible study for women in a church a few years ago where about half of the group expressed dread and exhaustion over the thought of decorating for the holidays. There were a number who openly wept in anticipation of the pressure and work ahead of them. Our discussion evolved into figuring out what they could omit from their holiday decorating that would relieve pressure and what they could expand upon that would give them the most pleasure and be life-giving. Each person talked about a Christmas decoration that meant the most—that one piece that if it were not out just wouldn't feel like Christmas.

One woman whose grandparents came to the U.S. from Germany spoke of antique, brass clips that they used on their tree that held real candles with flames. For her, Christmas would not be Christmas without a tree lit with real candles. Someone else talked about her collection of nativity sets from all around the world, made of all different materials.

For me, I remember a ceramic lightbox that my mother painted. There was a scene of a village in winter with a horse and sleigh. I pulled this box out of my decorations for Christmas 2020, a couple of months after my mother died. I placed it on my bedside table so I could enjoy it throughout the season. When it came time to put the decorations away, I kept that one out. It has sat on my bedside table all year.

Throughout Advent, scripture passages from the prophets talk about making the path home an easy one.[1] While going home may not be possible, we can still connect to our memories of home. Connecting with the past and cherishing those memories can help spark interest in renewing relationships and making new memories. Our project this week employs narrative storytelling to generate memories, using a familiar object to spark the narrative.

Christmas Decoration Project – Pull out your Christmas decorations and decorate your tree and your home. Choose one to three decorations and record yourself as you tell their story... Who made them? Where did they come from? Why are they special?

Weekly discussion questions:

- 1) Is decorating for Christmas something you anticipate with joy, or is it something you dread? Do you see it as an obligation of labor or a labor of love?
- 2) Why did you choose the decorations you are presenting? What memories do they evoke for you?
- 3) As you think of the story behind these special decorations, how does it alter your feelings about decorating your home?
- 4) How has this project affected you? Your relationship with someone else? Your relationship with God? [2]

[1] David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, ed. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, volume 1*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 29.

[2] Distribute a playlist, CDs, or recordings of the favorite Christmas hits—carols and songs that you gathered from the first week so the group can participate in next week's project.