

Dear Floris UMC and Restoration Church,

I am so pleased you have decided to participate in our annual church-wide Advent study. This study, Reflecting the Sacred, corresponds with the weekly sermons during Advent. If you are not a part of an Advent study group, please prayerfully consider joining one so that you can meet with others in the church and discuss the richness of the season of Advent together.

We often feel the tension between the sacred and the secular; think Santa Claus and baby Jesus. This year, you are invited to a spiritual journey of seeing all things sacred. What could our experience of Advent and Christmas be like if we lived it imagining that God is at work perfecting all our moments, calling us into a deeper sense of sacred space? Our Advent study this year is meant to guide us into an awareness of the sacred breaking forth into this holy season.

I hope you will join an Advent group study. It is as easy as 1,2,3!

1. Sign up for a group at FlorisUMC.org/Advent-Study or RestorationReston.org/Advent-Study.
2. Use this daily journal to guide you through the Advent season.
 - Spend time each day on the questions in the Daily Reflections section.
 - Attend worship each week, November 26, December 3, December 10 and December 17. Bring your journal to worship with you so that you can take notes.
 - Answer the questions in the Sermon Reflections section.
3. Meet with your Advent group weekly.

Please contact Bill Gray, Director of Grow Ministries at bgray@florisumc.org or Carol Edwards, Adult Ministries Coordinator at cedwards@florisumc.org if you have any questions.

In Christ,
Rev. Gina Anderson-Cloud
Lead Pastor

Week 1 – Sacred Time

We begin our Advent journey by emphasizing the gift of being awake to the "now"... the gift of sacred time with God, with each other, and with those in need of hope.

"I have never been separate from God, nor can I be except in my mind." (page 44 *The Universal Christ*)

Daily Reflections

*"Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."
- Matthew 24:36-44*

1. How can I stay present with others this week and shine as a beacon of hope?
2. Spend some time in nature this week. How do I quiet my body and pay attention to the beauty, the complexity, and the sacredness of God's beauty?
3. When life sends me a curve ball, how might it bring about a new sense of hope to my life?
4. . How has my understanding and experience of God changed over the course of my life? This has brought significance to me in these ways.
5. How might I create courage and confidence today in my attitude, my choices, and my responses to others?

Sermon Reflections

...you know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep...the night is far gone, the day is near." - Romans 13:11-14

1. Even when the busyness of the season overcomes me, I will set aside time for connection with God this week by doing these things.
2. How can I be a person of hope by being awake to the now?

Sermon Notes:

Week 2 – Sacred People

When we look through the lens of the sacred, we prepare our spaces to recognize the holy in all people.

“You must come to know the Word becoming flesh in the very cells of your body and see it in the cells of all bodies, which each carry the same divine DNA of their Creator.” (page xiii. Every Thing is Sacred)

Daily Reflections

“May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus...” – Romans 15:4-13

1. Where do I see sacred in other people this week, even people who I find difficult to love?
2. This week, how can I try and include the people I tend to exclude?
3. I tend to create a God in my image, but I’m created in God’s image. What words would I use to describe my image of God?
4. Reflect on the statement, “Christ is in all things.” What does that mean to me? How might I live differently?
5. What identities have you constructed that protect you from showing areas of vulnerability or fear to yourself or others? Reflect for a moment on the energy you expend in order to maintain these identities.

Sermon Reflections

“This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” – Matthew 3:1-12

1. When we look through the lens of the sacred, how do I begin to recognize the holy in all people?
2. . Our world is crying out for harmony and being able to see Christ reflected in each other. What might it look like if I looked through the lens of love?

Sermon Notes:

Wee 3 – Sacred Knowing

Let us seek out quiet to hear the voice that brings peace by gently saying, do not be afraid.

“We do not need to be afraid of the depth and breadth of our own lives...We are given permission to become intimate with our own experiences, learn from them, and allow ourselves to descend to the depth of things, even our mistakes.” (page 111. The Universal Christ)

Daily Reflections

“Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.” – Isaiah 7:10-16

1. When I listen for God in my heart instead of my head, what do I know in my heart as God’s calling over my life? What would that look like for you?
2. This week I will fully connect to my physical body by walking, dancing, swimming, meditating, etc. Continue in this embodied exercise until you experience a sense of appreciation for the life that inhabits your body.
3. In what ways have your experiences of faith and spirituality encouraged you and discouraged you to explore your interior life?
4. In what areas of my life do I tend toward either/or thinking? Journal about your experience of what is good or not so good about your thinking.
5. If I take a both/and approach instead of an either/or approach, how does this change my view of how I feel?

Sermon Reflections

“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit...” - Matthew 1:18-25

1. Many of us look for signs to help us know what to do, or we wish we could have our own personal angel visit us to let us know the “right” next steps. What would that look like for you?
2. Knowing that Christ is within us constantly, how does Christ show me wisdom and help me find peace?

Sermon Notes:

Week 4 – Sacred Space

The pregnancy of Mary is connected to the promise of justice and joy in the Advent story.

Daily Reflections

“...everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” – Isaiah 35:1-10

1. What am I being called to create in order to further goodness in the world?
2. How do the spaces I inhabit – at home, work, and in my community – reflect God’s justice and joy?
3. Spend time with a piece of artwork in an art gallery or a church where you can appreciate a painting or a statue, in a place of nurturing like a school, or with your children or family and friends.
 - a. In this space, I experience the giving, nurturing, forgiving grace of God by
 - b. In this space, I felt drawn to give to, nurture, and forgive others by
4. What messages have I picked up from my culture and upbringing about this significance of justice?
5. Reflect on the qualities and characteristics of Mary. How do I see these in God?

Sermon Reflections

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for the Holy One has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed...” – Luke 1:46b-55

1. What does it mean to me to live in a spirit of joy and freedom in all things?

Sermon Notes: