

Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10224010407002070&set=a.1609771978267>

Clearly the people shown here get along well. Do you always get along perfectly with friends and family?

<Let them respond>

What happens if you have a falling out?

<Let them respond>

Why might you be hesitant to reconcile?

<Let them respond>

Are you ever hesitant about going to family or social gatherings because you might run into someone you are at odds with? <Let them respond>

What would it take to convince you that it would be {not just OK, but} really great to work things out with the person? <Let them respond>

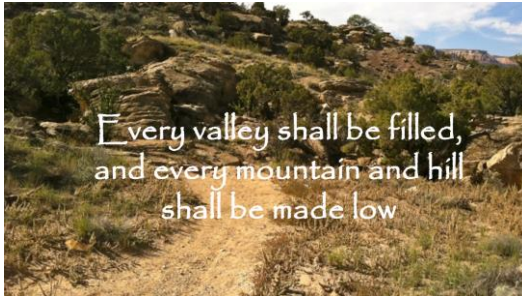
How do you think God feels about you facing God?

<Let them respond>

As we look forward to Christmas this year, let us always remember that God sent Jesus to show us beyond any doubt that not only is it worth our effort to reconcile with God, but that God enables us to be to be pure and blameless before our Lord.

Gospel lesson

We turn to Luke this week, with a prophet proclaiming Jesus to come.



background picture from <https://thegooddisciple.org/tag/Luke-31-6/>

Luke 3:1-6

(NRSV)

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene,

²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,

⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be

made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" UMH #384>

Message: The Fear of Home



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-home-for-christmas/second-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Builder of our eternal home,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may not fear dwelling in your family and sharing your love. Amen.

We pick up the Advent worship series "Come Home for Christmas" today with "The Fear of Home."



picture from

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In summary:

“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. 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.”



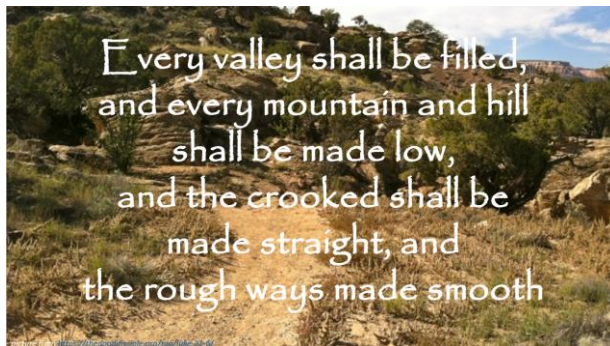
picture from personal photo

When my sister called to confirm she and her husband would be coming for Thanksgiving, I was delighted – and anxious! They keep a much tidier house than we do, and I had a fair bit of work to do in order to get it ready enough for them to feel like they were camping compared to their house. I was simultaneously very happy and very worried at the prospect of their visit.

During Advent, we are preparing for the coming of Christ: not just as an infant, but the final coming of our wondrous Savior and King! Do you feel ready to

face Jesus and be judged? I kind of experience the same feelings as when anticipating my sister's visit, but to the Nth degree higher - scary awesome!

And when we look at today's scripture, we see we have reason to feel that way. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he emphasizes how important it is to be pure and blameless when Christ comes. And yet, the Old Testament reading is all about our not being adequate, so we must face a refiner's fire and intense scrubbing.



background picture from <https://thegooddisciple.org/tag/Luke-31-6/>

Luke quotes the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed that valleys and hills would be leveled out, crooked and rough paths would be straightened and smoothed. That is a lot of work even when taken as literal for the landscape! But when Jesus taught about the kingdom, it was not merely the physical world around us, but our souls that make up His kingdom.

I can tell you, my spiritual being has plenty of ups and downs; because I am sidetracked so easily, I get to some of the things the Holy Spirit guides me to in a very roundabout ("scenic route"?) way. My spiritual terrain is far too often more challenging than

comfortable compared to what I want to provide Jesus - and I have been told that I am not alone in this.

We are all sinners. We all need to repent as the prophet proclaimed, to clean up our souls and lives for the Lord to dwell within us. Yet how often do we understand what that takes?

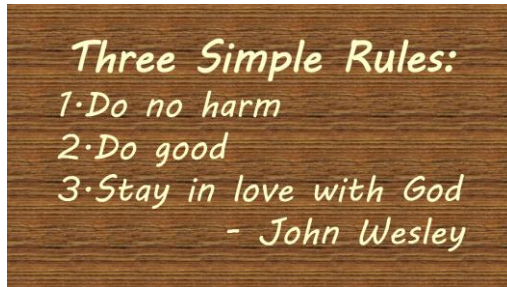


<https://www.agnusday.org/comics/134/luke-31-6-2006>

We get blinded by material world concerns. We cannot fix all the messes we have made; often we do not even realize the far-reaching consequences of our actions. We know just enough to realize we are not perfect before God, so it is natural to fear facing Christ.

But there is good news for us in the scriptures: God will clean us up and set us straight! The responsive reading from Luke talks about our merciful God, who promised us from waaaay back to rescue us. Malachi says that God will refine us to righteousness.

Still we wonder, just how much will the refiner's fire hurt? The psalmist talks about God's tender mercy, and we know Christ died for us. Paul expounds to the Philippians how following Jesus Christ leads us to being pure and blameless. So how painful is it to follow Jesus?



picture from my own creation

John Wesley came up with three rules for Christian living. The first of these was "Do no harm." We need to put aside our actions and habits that cause harm to others. This is much easier said than done, as often it means swallowing our egos – and we all know that habits are hard to break. But changing our behaviors and attitudes is a necessary part of the refining process toward righteousness before God.

John Wesley's second rule was, "Do good." Often it is helpful in breaking bad habits to replace them with good habits instead. Dieters often replace junk food with healthier vegetables for snacking. What are we feeding our spirits that is unhealthy, and what can we replace it with?

Do we listen to sensationalized judging of others or do we seek to understand alternative viewpoints? Do

we spend time each day watching fiction on TV or do we read our Bibles to stay focused on God's will?

And that brings me to Wesley's third rule, essentially "Stay in love with God." Daily prayer, bible readings, attending church, talking about Jesus with others - all of these are ways to reinforce our faith and to keep us focused on our amazing God.



background from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-home-for-christmas/second-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

So in this season of Advent, I encourage you to give your fear of unwanted encounters to Jesus. In anticipation of His coming, get ready by replacing a bad habit you have with a healthier spiritual one.

- † Knock the chip off your shoulder and show love to someone who has upset you.
- † Stop judging and just help those who need it, in as healthy a manner as possible.
- † Give up sensationalized tripe and dig into studying your Bible, so that you can then live the way Jesus taught all of us to live.

Give up self-centered fears; instead, work on behalf of others, so that you can accept the abundant love God gives us for our great homecoming.

<Confession and Pardon>

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you
with our whole heart.

We have failed to be an obedient church.

We have not done your will, we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray.

Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!
Glory to God. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of mercy and grace, we pray that the gifts we
offer this morning might be used to bring some
compassion to the chaos that is our world.

We give these gifts in love, hoping they will heal some of the hurting; and as they do, make the crooked road straight for the coming of the Christ.

May the hills that separate us from sisters and brothers be made flat and may the valleys of our isolation be raised up, so we will be ready to welcome the Christ as one.

- Help us, Lord, with healing touch and comfort for:
 - Pat & Chuck Hathaway - her homecoming, both Covid
 - Carl Ferris - stents, tests, possible pacemaker
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -
- Thanks for
 - -
 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray in Your holy name, Amen.

<THE GREAT THANKSGIVING Communion - UNCOVER elements>

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

- † You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
- † When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.
- † You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets, who looked for that day
when justice shall roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,
when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

<slide change>

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ,
whom you sent in the fullness of time to be a light
to the nations.

† You scatter the proud in the imagination of their
hearts and have mercy on those who fear you from
generation to generation.

† You put down the mighty from their thrones and
exalt those of low degree.

† You fill the hungry with good things, and the rich
you send empty away.

Your own Son came among us as a servant, to be
Emmanuel, your presence with us.

He humbled himself in obedience to your will and
freely accepted death on a cross.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and
resurrection you gave birth to your Church,
delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made
with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

<hold hands out over bread/elements>

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he
took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

<hold hands out over juice/elements>

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,

<slide change>

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

<hold hands out over elements>

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on on these gifts of bread and juice.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until

Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

<Breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup>

<Serving of the elements>

<Hymn "Like a Child" TFWS #2092>

<Benediction>



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As you gather with loved ones this Christmas season, give your fears to God, celebrate the joy of your relationships, and cherish blessings (new and rediscovered).

Welcome Christ into your home,
rest in the grace of the Holy Spirit, and
let the light of God's love shine through you.
Amen.