

**“A Christmas Carol Revisited
“The Ghost of Christmas Present: Embracing the God Moment”**

Advent is a season of expectation and hope and promise. Advent invites us to wait and to prepare for the gift of the Christ Child who came long ago. Advent also invites us to prepare and wait for the final victory, the promise of the reign of justice and righteousness to come. This year, our sermon series is “A Christmas Carol Revisited.” This Charles Dickens’ classic tale is a wonderful way to look at our faith past, present and future AND to ponder how we are challenged to keep Christmas, a real Christmas in our hearts and spirits. We begin the journey into the Advent season with the admonition that “no one knows the hour or day” when the kingdom will come. In one sense, it is bad news, but like Ebenezer Scrooge, we need to face the darkness and the bad news before we can experience, hear and receive the good news. The second Sunday we remembered our past as a path to hope. This third Sunday in Advent we are focusing on the Ghost of Christmas Present... The third candle we will light is the candle of love. This week is the final week for preparations as the fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve are the same day. May this week invite us to look deeply at our own lives and spirits as we prepare for Christ to come. ---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“The Ghost of Christmas Present: Embracing the God Moment”**

Prayer for the Week

O Living Christ, we need your love today to shine in the dark corners of our world, where loneliness and hatred, war and suffering, greed and lust destroy. Come to us and shine in our lives, that we may more perfectly love you and reflect your love on earth. Amen. (Ruth C. Duck)

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, 12/18/17 Isaiah 61: 1-4

These verses are part of the series of “Servant Songs” in Isaiah. Each of these songs gave voice to the promises of God that would come when the Messiah, the Christ appeared. There had been words of hope and expectation before, but now, the promise was given that the “year of the LORD’s favor” would be made real. Israel longed for home, but their home had been devastated and destroyed. Finally Israel was promised homecoming. For Christians, these words remind us of the time when Jesus proclaimed them in Nazareth. When the time is right, the good news comes to those who need it the most, “the brokenhearted, captives, the prisoners and those who mourn.” In the midst of the craziness of 2017, these questions come to mind: *How will you prepare for the birth of Jesus this year? What do you long for and hope for in the deepest places of your heart and spirit?*

Tuesday, 12/19/17 Isaiah 61: 8-9

The prophet moves to proclaiming God’s demands and expectations: justice being first and foremost. God hates dishonesty and stealing. God promises that when his people are restored to their home, they will have what they need....a good wage, a covenant and blessing from God. All will “see” they are the blessed of God. In the Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol*, The Ghost of Christmas Present blesses people on Christmas day. The Ghost adds an additional “dose” to those who need it most, the poor, the lonely, the lost, and those who do not have many material blessings. Christmas Present is focused on the moment, as opposed to what occurred in the past or what may happen in the future. *In some ways, these verses go from present to future in what God expects and what God will do. Do people recognize that you are a child of God blessed and beloved? In what ways do your words and actions point to that relationship?*

Wednesday, 12/20/17 John 1: 6-8

The first chapter of the gospel of John is a beautiful poem on creation and how Christ was part of that creation from the beginning. John’s witness to Jesus was pointing to the light that shines in the darkness. Today is the shortest day of the year and the longest night. Like John, we are not the light, but we carry the light within us. The world can be a dark place even in the midst of long sun light days and short nights. The Ghost of Christmas Present invites Scrooge to take a different look at the world in which he lived. Rather than focus on the darkness and misery, find ways to celebrate the light and love offered at Christmas. Tonight is our “Blue Christmas” service in the Wilke Family Life Center at 7:00. If the darkness seems drearier this year because of grief, life changes or health concerns, please come to this service of worship that you might find healing, hope and light.

Thursday, 12/21/17 Isaiah 61: 10-11

Such joy and love is expressed in these two verses! Isaiah is rejoicing in God, for all that God has done. Using the imagery of a garden, Isaiah notes that God is planting and growing righteousness and praise. This is not just a temporary affect, this is what God will do long term, this is promise of Advent. When the Ghost of Christmas Present invites Ebenezer Scrooge to look, to pay attention to the world around him, the Ghost in affect is planting seeds of righteousness, joy and love. This experience will offer Scrooge an opportunity to see what Christmas offers and how he can participate in this season of love and joy. How do you experience a heart full of joy because of God? Can you list the blessings that bring you that joy? Tonight is Brett Valliant’s annual Christmas concert at 7:30, it is sure to bring joy to your heart and spirit.

Friday, 12/22/17 John 1: 9-14

On Sunday we will celebrate BOTH the fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas eve. It is a quick switch in terms of mood and season. While we don’t want to dwell too long on the bleak encounter with the Ghost of Christmas yet to come, we do need to acknowledge that without a change we are like those to whom the light came, but did not welcome the light and preferred the darkness. Scrooge has a changed heart and life and the Christ of Christmas invites us to welcome Emmanuel, the One who becomes flesh and dwells among us. *How will you prepare the next two days for the coming of Jesus? Is your heart and spirit ready to keep Christmas and keep it well?*