

**ADVENT 2020**

# **ADVENT IN DURHAM**

**WAITING FOR CHRIST WITH OUR NEIGHBORS**



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# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## INTRODUCTION

BY REV. REYNOLDS CHAPMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DURHAMCARES

When we talk about someone's arrival—whether a visit from a relative or a celebrity tour—we expect that person to come to a place. We prepare by cleaning our home, fixing a meal, or, for larger-scale arrivals, creating traffic flow plans, flower arrangements, and seating charts. Our preparations are unique to the place where the guest is arriving.

Advent is a season to celebrate the coming of Christ in our midst. But often when we reflect on Advent, we talk about Christ's coming in the abstract. We consider how Jesus came for all people and places, and our prayer books and devotionals reflect this broad message of the incarnation. Indeed, Christ came for the whole world, but in our effort to convey his universal coming, we overlook its particularities. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to a Jewish woman named Mary, and he was raised in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee during the Roman Empire. None of these details are incidental.

Christ's reign is still coming, and Jesus will one day come again. But his reign doesn't become vague and geographically amorphous when it goes beyond the concreteness of Nazareth. Jesus comes to our particular time and place now. To put it plainly: Advent is a time of Christ's coming to Durham. It's not just an expectation; it's a longing, stirring us to lament the brokenness in our city and hope for Christ's new reality of peace and justice to come to our neighborhoods, our families, our local government, our businesses, and our landscape.

We hope this devotional will ground you in Durham during this Advent season. And as you deepen your roots, may you encounter the God who is in the details, who cares about the smallest pebble in the Eno River. The reflections are written by saints who have lived in Durham and have loved our city with their hearts and their lives. Thank you for taking time to listen to the stories around you. May you be transformed by their witness as they invite you to discover how Christ has come, is coming, and will come again in our midst.

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# VIGILANT HOPE

BY REV. BREANA VAN VELZEN

*Mark 13:24-37*

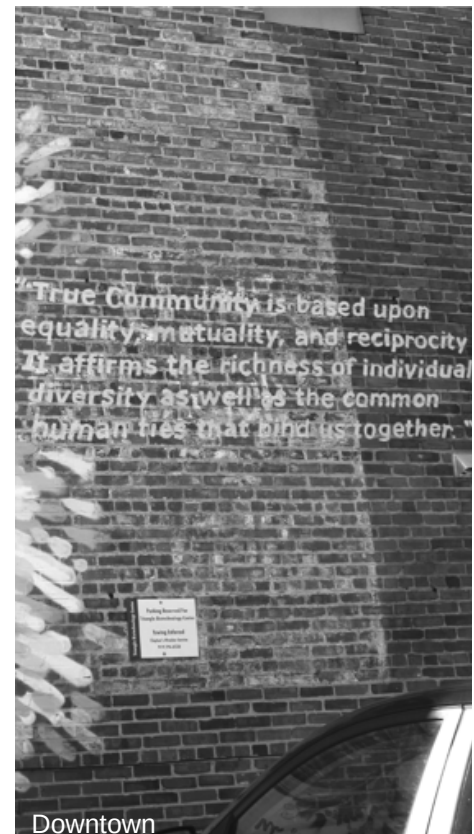
As a community minister, part of my work is deeply knowing Durham's stories—its blues, jazz riffs, folk melodies, and gospel tradition, these community rhythms in group meetings and in coffee shops, or at cookouts with neighbors. I feel the syncopation when my feet touch the pavement of a place where enslaved people once stood, and where our near ancestors marched for freedom. In the midst of this symphonic cacophony, at the corner of Carroll and Yancey, just over a block away from my office, near Pauli Murray's house and First Calvary Baptist Church, remains the unassuming vestige of a chimney—seemingly forgotten in time and development. I pray at that corner—I repent, I lament, I offer praise, and I re-center my discipline of hope.

That remnant once housed a hush harbor where Black Christians met in secret to worship. In the historically white cemetery nearby, Maplewood, rest Julian Carr, Confederate soldiers, and other prominent people—often white supremacists—who harmed the Black Durhamites. Though those white supremacists may be dead now, many of their ideas are still living. But First Calvary—the hush harbor 130 years later—is still standing proudly right next to that cemetery. This story puts me in a praise break every time I think about it.

Today, the sun is darkened. We are in hard times. But Scripture tells us to look for the new growth on the fig tree, to remember that the Son of Man is coming in great power and glory. We do not know when God is coming, but we do know that God is coming, and we are to actively look. Live in hope. Even as we wait, our God and our ancestral heritages are all around us. We can join the rhythms of this city, waiting on bated breath for our Lord, and remember that through the pain, the suffering, the isolation, God is with us and there is a way through. Let us be vigilant in our hope.



Downtown



Downtown



**OH THAT  
YOU WOULD  
REND THE  
HEAVENS  
AND COME  
DOWN!  
~Isaiah 64:1**



East Durham

## **GOD COMES DOWN**

**BY MINDY ERDMANN**

This prayer found in Isaiah pleads with the Lord to come down, to make the mountains tremble and the nations quake. This prayer resonates with me today. All that 2020 has brought makes me want Jesus to come and set everything right—right now.

Watching and waiting for God to come down is different from anticipating going up to heaven someday. We often think of heaven as some other place that we will enter in some future time. Looking forward to heaven often means disconnecting from the pain and brokenness of our world. But praying for God to come down—watching and waiting for Jesus to come back to this world—keeps us grounded in the here and now.

Praying for God to come down helps me love the people and places that God loves more, even in their brokenness.

When I picture Jesus present with the veteran in the orange vest on the corner asking for money, I see that man differently. When I think about which parts of Durham Jesus would frequent if he were here in the flesh, I wonder how those places might be transformed by his presence. What kind of crowd might Jesus gather at the corner of Foster and Geer Streets, or in East Durham, or standing next to Major the Bull? When I imagine Jesus walking into my living room while my two rowdy boys are wrestling on the rug, peace washes over me and I catch a glimpse of restoration and renewal in the midst of the chaos.

In this Advent season let us not hope that God would take us away from all the brokenness of this world. Let us hope instead that God would come down to bring healing, peace and restoration to our homes, our city and this world that God loves.



Duke Homestead

# THROUGH THE STORM

BY REV. DR. KEITH DANIEL

*Mark 13:24-37*

I'm writing this reflection while sitting outside on a dark, cloudy and windy morning. There's yet another tropical storm raging through the Gulf Coast. The tropical storm is named Zeta and as of this morning there are over 2 million power outages. I'll admit I've been looking up in the sky quite often this year wondering if I might see Jesus cracking the clouds with all power in his hands. I've honestly wondered about God taking me to God's heavenly home given its description (cf. Rev 22:1-7) and what we're experiencing on planet earth this year.

However, I want to live to see at least another full generation and possibly hold my grandchild(ren). Today's text offers us much to ponder in terms of the earth's power. We see the sun, moon, stars, winds and even the unseen heavens are destined to pass away. Yet, we are encouraged to watch and keep awake! "For then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory."

I am grateful beyond measure to be the 3rd or 4th generation of my family living in NC and Durham in particular. I could be accused of having rose-colored lenses when it comes to seeing more beauty in our city than I see the bad. I accept the accusation and keep on watching for the One who is the Alpha and the Omega and truly has all power in hand. I choose to see the Lilly of the Valley, The Bright and Morning Star, The Prince of Peace and in my heart and mind it's the only way I want to survive these raging storms of life of this year and the years to come. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.



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# REJOICE

BY REV. ANGELA TAYLOR



Hayti Heritage Center

I remember Hayti, a community in 1960s Durham where the only time I crossed the railroad tracks was for my grandmother's sewing supplies. We had all the necessary institutions for our spiritual, physical, mental, and social well-being. We were self-sufficient. Then...a highway came through and destroyed our community and now we look back and mourn. And the hits just keep coming—new residences are being built in beloved Hayti that the current residents can't afford.

Isaiah 35:1-10 talks about a wilderness and a dry land that shall be glad once again, hearts that shall once again rejoice, triumphant in the God who causes us to walk in the way of holiness.

The parched land shall be a pool (v.7), a river that makes glad the city of our God (Psalm 46:4). I'm praying for Fayette Place, a low-income housing development that will be hope for the community. Hayti may never return to its former glory, but it does not need to rest in the brokenness in which it currently lies. As we wait for the coming of a babe, the Savior of the whole world, "stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us" (Book of Common Prayer) where the wilderness and the dry land shall once again be glad. May we remember what once was and expect what is to come. Hayti once again shall rejoice at the building of Fayette Place.

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# THE UNDERDOG

BY ROB BELCHER

*Rob Belcher is the leader of Chance2Change, a nonprofit organization that focuses on producing real answers for issues and conflicts in our community today. This organization assists with poverty, school enrollment, mental health, violence intervention, job placement & community outreach for kids.*

I am rob Belcher and my reflections are all over the place to be honest...I am a very passionate young man that wants to see people win mostly because of how much I have lost.. its like I've always been a fan of the under dog...and I've always been the under dog...so at some point in my life I made a decision to never let anyone have the experiences that I did. I started my organization after working for a prior organization in Durham that did almost the same thing, but me being me I wanted to do things right and I didn't want any skeletons in my closet, so this kept me at odds with my coworkers who didn't share the same passion as me wholeheartedly. I really want to see Durham change but to be honest it's mostly financial. I need funds to help the people who are out here committing these crimes. I need help to help the people that actually want help!!





# LANGUAGE OF PEACE

BY ROB SHIELDS

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of the commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

-Ephesians 2:13-17

Charles Marsh, co-author of the book *Welcoming Justice* he wrote with Dr. John Perkins, tells the story of his encounter with the late Civil Rights leader Victoria Gray Adams, a contemporary of Fannie Lou Hamer and field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Shortly before she passed away in 2006, Mrs. Adams was in conversation with Marsh and a group of young Jesus followers who desired to live out the principles of justice and love laid out in scripture. Yearning to glean from her wisdom, the group asked 'what is the mission of the Civil Rights Movement today?' Without hesitating she responded "It is learning to speak the language of peace".

2020 has not been a peaceful year. Hostility seems to have been waiting around every corner and in every news cycle. Communities have been fractured. Relationships have been strained. Systems have yet again failed the most marginalized and vulnerable among us. And yet, it is against such a dark backdrop that the truth of Ephesians 2 shines more brightly than ever into my soul: "he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." In a world torn apart by violence and hostility, Jesus came to make peace. Those words were true 2,000 years ago, and they remain just as true today. And that truth gives me hope, especially when I see Jesus followers here in Durham speaking the language of peace today--loving their neighbors in both word and in deed--speaking language infused with a hope "to those who are far off and those who are near." Peace implies a relationship restored, and relationships require proximity.

Advent season provides us an opportunity to reflect and remember--remember how Christ entered our world and got proximate to us in our pain and brokenness, taking that pain on himself so that we could be restored and be at peace with God and at peace with one another. This Advent season, may we lean into this story of pain and peace in our own lives, and look for ways to lean into the pain and brokenness in the lives of our neighbors so we can discover how God is at work all around us, shining light into darkness still. This Christmas, may we learn to speak the language of peace that embodies the sacrifice of the ultimate Peacemaker.



# SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT



## THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW

BY REV. CHRIS SCHUTTE

Advent is a season of longing. We find ourselves, in the words of the well-known hymn, “in captive Israel,” feeling the weight of injustice and division that keeps us from knowing the fullness and flourishing of life as God intended. In Durham, historic practices of segregation and redlining, and now gentrification, have led to housing insecurity for many. Our local schools are often segregated and perpetually under-resourced. The health and economic consequences of COVID-19 have disproportionately hurt Durham’s most vulnerable residents. One unfortunate result of these inequities is increasing violence in our city. As Quaker teacher and author Parker Palmer notes, “violence is what happens when we don’t know what to do with our suffering.”



And yet, Advent is also a season of hope. The hymn ends with the exhortation, “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel has come to thee O Israel.” In Durham, I see Emmanuel, God-with-us, at work bringing “steadfast love and faithfulness” together through the joy-filled worship, faithful prayer, and courageous actions of brothers and sisters in Christ as they sit with the pain of our present, cast a vision for the future in which “righteousness and peace will kiss each other,” and then, in what Martin Luther King Jr. described as the “fierce urgency of now,” walk the narrow path that leads to life—a fearless, joyful, and hopeful life lived toward justice, peace, and renewal.





# OUR RESTING PLACE

BY GREG LITTLE

The Trinity is our home - the resting-place in Whom we are welcomed to freely discover and to be ourselves. Advent ushers us into the story of God's incarnational hospitality. In Jesus' coming, we encounter a God who hosts us in the heart of divine love and makes home with us.

I live in a community of nine folks called to home-make together in Durham. Some of us live with developmental disabilities. Some of us are Black and some are white. Our ages range from ten months to 69 years.

Our way of making a home together includes the million little tasks that sustain and nurture our common life. Especially in this season of staying-at-home, there's an awful lot of doing dishes, chopping vegetables, listening to one another, teaching children (and absorbing their screams), changing AC filters, and placing flowers in a vase on the table. Home-making is our shared labor.

Bonnie has a running grocery list at all times, anticipating next week's needs before they arrive. Tony's garden-tending is slow and deliberate, filled with sweet wishes to each growing thing. Ms T is a dishwashing guru. Janice reorganizes and decorates to match the seasons. In all of this small, ordinary work we tend to the shared life given us by God, nurturing it, and making room for it to grow. We cultivate home, opening channels for God's presence to so fill our common life with love that we may be poised to welcome others to a place of restful peace.

And this is Advent's invitation to each of us.

Many of us feel more isolated than ever right now – saddened by the disruptive limits social distancing places on our giving and receiving of hospitality. And yet, Jesus has come...Jesus is coming now...Jesus will come again. I pray for Durham to be a city of homes watchful for the creative, often disruptive presence of Jesus. This Advent, may we recognize our home in God and may we prepare our homes to be havens of hopeful human connection, alert to the stirring vitality of God's life in our midst and casting a vision for a new way of togetherness that makes room for mutual gift-giving and gift-receiving.



# AN APOCALYPTIC ADVENT

BY BISHOP WILL WILLIMON

Advent is always an apocalyptic season for the church. Apocalyptic: “Unveil,” “reveal,” and also “end,” or “begin.” Biblical books like Daniel, Ezekiel, and most memorably, The Revelation to John, are sometimes called “apocalyptic.” Horned beasts, night visions, dry, dead bones taking on flesh is weird talk, even for Scripture. Weird apocalyptic’s aim is not to obscure and keep secret but to unveil and reveal. When God at last turns toward us, what God’s up to is so beyond the scope of our expectation, only odd, metaphorical, unmanageable speech will do.

Apocalyptic purposes to keep Christians maladjusted to the present. Don’t be fooled by the seeming solidity of the contemporary. God has more things up God’s sleeve than you can imagine. Maybe that’s why it can be tough to be a preacher during Advent. In the congregations I’ve served, established, powerful, successful people get nervous when Jesus talks apocalyptic. Dis-ease with apocalyptic talk is a sign of how accommodated many of us have become to the status quo. This world is as good as it gets; work it to your advantage and privilege. Hold on to what you’ve got. Stop your whining and cease your dreaming. Keep disruptive visions to yourself.

Yet whenever people dare to think, “We are slaves, slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors,” the soothing reassurances of mainline liberal preaching wilt (Nehemiah 9:6). Whenever someone takes seriously, “Don’t be conformed to this world! Be transformed by the blowing of your mind!” (Romans 12:2). Nothing less will do than eerie visions of a new heaven and earth. The nightmarish apparitions of Daniel said little to me. Then came to town COVID-19, the body counts on each night’s news, impotent old men raging in high places, and people cowering behind locked doors for fear. The penny dropped. Apocalyptic says that God’s creativity doesn’t end at Genesis; dismantling and disruption presage New Creation.

God will get what God wants: bad news for those of us too tightly wedded to and profiting from the present, good news for those in need of a different future in the worst way. If things are set right between us and God, God will have to do it. The solution will be cosmic, not merely personal. Should God turn toward us, there are sure to be jolts and bumps along the way. Something must die in order for anything to be born. The Old Testament saves apocalyptic until the end. In the New Testament, from the get-go, from Mary’s song, it’s new heaven and new earth, world turned upside down, the rise and fall of many (Luke 1:46-51). Bad news for the rich, good news for the poor and dispossessed.

Apocalyptic refuses to use God as stabilizer or cement of social conformity or reduce the gospel to common sense. Mainline, liberal Christianity has always been nervous about Jesus’ apocalyptic talk.

Those of us at the top find the gospel easier when it’s reduced to good advice for human betterment or toned down to sooth the anxious consciences of we who benefit from things as they are. But to those on the bottom and at the margins who are paralyzed and hopeless from fear that this is it, that this is as good as it gets, it’s called good news.

A major reason why I support DurhamCares, and one reason why Reynolds Chapman makes me uncomfortable, is that DurhamCares is a wonderfully, disturbingly apocalyptic organization. DurhamCares has ways of unveiling that God didn’t set up Durham’s economy, policing, and governance: we did. Durham Cares is also an apocalyptic sign that God is busy ending/beginning, dismantling, recreating, disrupting in order to get what God wants out of Durham.

So the Advent, apocalyptic question put to us is: Will we get on board with God’s apocalyptic work or not?



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# SERVING PLACE AND PEOPLE

BY REBECCA STEVENSON

In 2006, when my husband rented an office in Durham's Snow Building, that building's seven stories were otherwise empty. The streets at midday were likewise unoccupied. This was before DPAC opened and shortly after the American Tobacco campus was revived. Feared by many as crime-ridden, the beautiful spaces and buildings of downtown Durham were mostly avoided. The transformation of our city over the last decade-plus has been a joy to witness. Anyone new (or old) to the city knows it for its busy-ness and productivity, for the creative energy that pours from storefronts, restaurants, and apartment buildings. The real estate that was once shunned is now a hot commodity as buyers look for homes as close to downtown as possible. This has brought revitalization to buildings well beyond the downtown area even as new construction abounds. All of this is good, of course. It means more jobs and expanding economic benefits overall for our city. Yet there is a downside. As property values increase, so does cost of living, sending lower-income residents looking for new places to live. When they go, they take with them inimitable elements of history and culture that have been hallmarks of Durham life.

How can we bring about the redemption of a city while best supporting her varied population? How can we serve both place and people?

This is one reason why I love Isaiah's words in his 40th chapter: "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (vv 4-5).

While it is our responsibility to do what is right and just, we are uneven in our efforts. But in Christ, true and absolute justice will be served. Only He knows how to truly love place and person in the best ways. With his birth, the kingdom of heaven began on earth, and we continue to strive to effect it. But when he returns, "the uneven ground shall become level." All his people will have sure and secure footing before the God of the universe, to the glory of his Name.



*"The Word became flesh  
and moved into the  
neighborhood."  
~John 1:14, The Message*

# A WITNESS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

BY REV. GOODWYN BELL

"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood..." (John 1:14, The Message). Advent prepares us to celebrate the mystery described here: the incarnation. The Creator of heaven and earth, whose holy name could not be uttered nor His image captured in stone, passed through the bloody birth canal into human life—and even death. In order to communicate the full extent of His grace and truth, God moved into the neighborhood. Blacknall Presbyterian exists because someone came to our neighborhood. In the 1890s the Blacknall brothers came from downtown to Old West Durham. The men were elders at First Presbyterian on Main Street, but each Sunday afternoon they took the train to Erwin Mill Village, where they conducted a Sunday School. Their mission became Blacknall Presbyterian, which established a permanent home between Erwin Mill and Duke's East Campus. Neighborhoods change. In the 1960s, there were more University students than textile workers moving to Old West Durham. The pastor at Blacknall challenged his church to extend hospitality to the transient and highly educated group that was taking over their stomping grounds. Since I moved to Durham a decade ago, I have seen the neighborhood change again. In 2010 Walltown was still recognizable as a historically black neighborhood. Michelle, a single-mother with her three children and Assam, a taxi-driver could live down the block from us Duke graduate students. But few working-class individuals, and even students, can afford to live in Walltown now. The church still stands between Erwin Mill (now an apartment building) and Duke's East campus. Like the original witness, John the Baptist, our church exists to point to the true light, who has come and is coming again into this world. In 2020, witness requires us not only to welcome our new neighbors but also to notice who is no longer here.



Lakewood



East Durham



East Durham



Forest Hills





Hayti

## ALL THINGS NEW

BY REV. BRUCE PUCKETT

*Isaiah 40:1-11*

He would have turned 11 this past October. My wife and I remembered his birthday without him just as we remembered the day he died in August. A child gone too soon. Zy'on Person. A beloved son, brother, friend, child of God shot in his aunt's car as the family drove to get ice cream. Zy'on was not "our" child, but he was our child, one of us—the us who makes up the community of Durham and the greater Triangle. And we loved him.

The Prophet Isaiah proclaims a message he heard from the Lord saying, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God." After being told to "cry out," Isaiah says, "What shall I say." When lives are being taken, when the reality that people are like grass that withers and flowers that fade, what should we cry out? How can we comfort the people?

**"HOW CAN WE  
COMFORT THE  
PEOPLE?"**

In this time of pandemics of all kinds—the pandemics of racism, of gun violence, of mass incarceration, of child poverty, of inadequate healthcare, of Covid19, of... Advent is such a critical season. I find myself joining people throughout our community and the world longing for and awaiting a savior who will bring comfort and healing, and will make all things new. In this time of pandemics of all kinds, we await a redeemer and rescuer who, as Isaiah prophesies, will feed, gather, carry, and lead his flock like a shepherd. We await and long for the coming again of Christ—the only one who can and will make all things new.

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# TRUST THE PROCESS

BY REV. TAMARIO HOWZE

*Mark 1:1-8*

About five years ago, I received clear instructions to return home. Returning home consisted of leaving job security and financial stability. Returning home consisted of accumulating debts by attending Duke Divinity school. Returning home consisted of advocating for the downtrodden and preaching the gospel in places like the one Ezekiel referenced in chapter 37 of the bible. Returning home consisted of sleepless nights, failed expectations, setbacks and disappointments and a path that I do not fully understand. Returning home consisted of constant reminders of the broken systems that has plagued the city of Durham; daily shootings, food insecurity, not enough affordable housing, racism, and an education system that needs to be reevaluated. I returned home but was redirected to other cities around my home town of Durham that left with an intriguing question and that is, "If God wanted me to return home, why has most of my work and time been invested in other places than the place where I was called?"

Here is where Mark 1:1-8 gave me some understanding as I wrestled with being uncomfortable within the "unknowns" of God's direction. Mark 1:1-8 is an inspiring text because it reminds me that no matter the obstacle, no matter the path, God sends people to prepare the way for the one who is able. Mark 1:1-8 is inspiring because the simple direction is to prepare the way, which sometimes involves a wilderness experience. Often believers try and create the process in fulfilling God's plan without trusting the process that has already been created. Now, scripture says I will send a messenger to prepare the way for me, however, the reality is God gave his messenger the vision of the path that has been prepared. God orders our steps, and our ordered steps encourage others to believe in the same God that has directed our steps. Therefore, if God has redirected your path, then maybe it was because there was someone who he needed to get to through you. Or perhaps, God is equipping you to be more prepared when you finally go where he has ultimately called you. God knows all and considering he knows all; he knows just what you need to accomplish his will.

In conclusion, I rejoice in my journey because this journey has helped others and me get prepared for where God ultimately wants me to be: in Durham NC. The season where he wants me to be in Durham has not arrived and maybe the season where he wants you to be has not arrived either. Trust the process.





# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## REPLACEMENT OR RENEWAL?

BY REV. CHRIS BRESLIN



You can tell a lot about a person by their favorite bible passage. The ones they come back to, the ones that they memorized as a kid or early in their faith, the ones that have formed them. Luke 4 hints that Isaiah 61 may have been this sort of influential passage for Christ. Jesus unrolls the scroll to read:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*  
-Luke 4:18-19

Jesus' imagination is formed by this vision for the poor, the prisoners, the invisible. He comes to us, the Spirit-anointed one, born from the Spirit-shadowed Mary, brought by the Spirit to and through wilderness-testing, to be and bring Good News.

Walking through Durham's neighborhoods you hear hammers and saws, you see roofers and carpenters. Some of this 'renewal' restores. Some replaces. Later in the same chapter which Jesus opens, Isaiah continues to detail this sort of renewal which cuts against and judges the imagination for renovation we often see in our neighborhoods.

*Instead of shame, their portion will be double;  
instead of disgrace, they will rejoice over their share.  
They will possess a double portion in their land;  
everlasting joy will be theirs. -Isaiah 61:7*

How might we follow Jesus into this imaginative paradigm shift as we seek to shift our imaginations for renewal in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods where we live and minister? Jesus' birth represents the most profound act of God's restoration. Rather than removal and replacement, Jesus' advent provides the surprising possibility for prosperity in the exact places which seem hopeless and desperate. Instead of compounding shame and disgrace, Jesus' birth marks "joy to the world," gladness that can be seen on the familiar faces of our actual neighbors who are beloved in Christ.

# THE KINGDOM IS AMONG YOU

BY BRANDON J. WILLIAMS

Luke 17:20-21: "Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

Advent is a paradoxical season in the Christian tradition. While we remember the anticipation of the birth of Jesus as a way to strengthen our own practice of waiting for Jesus' eschatological return, I'm reminded of Jesus' seemingly contradictory pronouncement that "the wait is over."

"Quit looking for signs, wonders, and supernatural phenomena," Jesus says in response to the Pharisees question about the coming kingdom of God, "and start looking at yourselves."

In more recent times, the late June Jordan, who—through poetry, activism, writing, and teaching—proclaimed a vision of liberation for all people, said it a different way when she penned the mantra: "we are the ones we have been waiting for." Jordan was writing to honor the 40,000 women and children who marched in protest against apartheid's pass laws in Pretoria, South Africa, on August 9, 1956.

*Wait for what? Wait for who?*

Black communities in Durham have embodied this wisdom since the inception of the city. Take Walltown, where I live, a neighborhood that was founded in 1906 by George Wall, a formerly enslaved man who moved to Durham to work for Trinity College (eventually Duke University). For generations, the neighborhood has been home to Black working-class families who, in the face of structural racism, have embodied a spirit of self-determination and resilience. When residents wanted a community center in the 1950s, they petitioned the city but only received rights to the land—not the resources to build. So under the leadership of a "Bronze Mayor" and neighborhood council, residents built it with their own time, labor and materials.

In the 1970s, when Northgate Mall, under the ownership of the Rand family, sought to encroach upon residential space, Walltown residents organized to keep their land. Now that the mall is in another state of transition, this time spearheaded by Northwood Investors and Duke University Health System, Walltown has organized again to declare that equitable development must begin and end by engaging the residents most proximate to the issue. Knowing firsthand the harm that gentrification is causing our community, a small group of us have led efforts to conduct surveys, focus groups, and a design charrette with the intention of casting a community-centered vision for the redevelopment of the mall. The City and County of Durham did not ask us to do this. Nor did the developers come knocking on our doors for input. We saw the need, recognized the fault in our systems, and, as Gandhi encouraged, became the change we seek.

So this Advent, in the spirit of neighborhoods like Walltown, ask yourself, "what—better yet, who—am I waiting for?" Then, let the comforting conviction of Jesus and June Jordan wash over your soul as you hear them say, "the kingdom of God is among us...we are the ones we have been waiting for...beloved, the wait is over."

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# LAS POSADAS

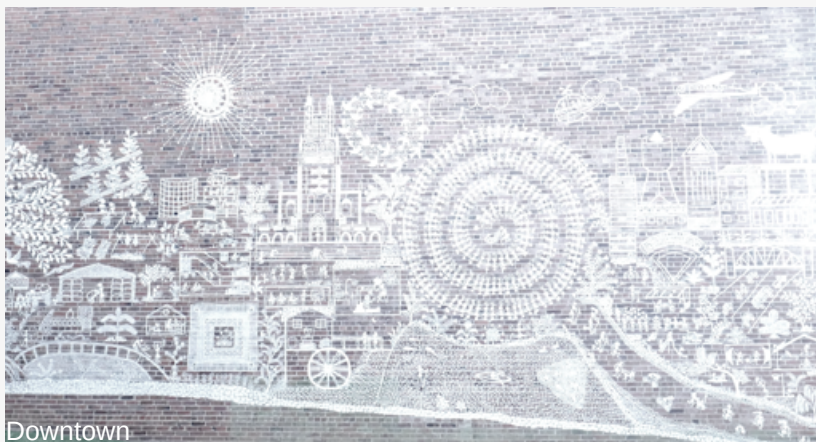
BY REV. DR. EDGARDO COLÓN-EMERIC

*Luke 2:1-7*

“There was no place for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7). Joseph and Mary’s journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem inspires many Advent traditions. Among these is *Las Posadas* (The Inns). I first encountered this 16th century Mexican celebration in late 20th century Durham when I pastored a Hispanic congregation. Typically, we celebrated *Las Posadas* on evenings between December 1 and 24. We gathered at parishioners’ homes in two groups, one outside, one inside. The outsiders, representing Joseph and Mary, sang: “In the name of heaven, we ask for *posada* (shelter).” .

The insiders, representing the innkeepers, sang their refusal listing a variety of reasons: the lateness of the hour, fear of the outsiders’ appearance, doubts about their story, and the like. Eventually, the insiders recognized the outsiders and welcomed them singing “*Entren santos peregrinos* (Enter holy pilgrims).” Then, all of us packed indoors for more songs and prayers, followed by tamales and piñatas

In *Las Posadas*, I saw the experience of our congregation in Durham as part of a bigger story. Our experience with closed doors and misrecognition belongs to the story of God’s pilgrim people and of Jesus, who “came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (Jn 1:11). This story ends with open doors. *Las Posadas* is more than a Mexican tradition; it is a sign of God’s power to inspire acts of creative generosity that make life in Durham, even in 2020, not just bearable but fiesta.







East Durham



Downtown



East Durham

# THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR

BY REV. SHERITTA WILLIAMS

*Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11*

Durham 2020 brings us to a place in our city where many are desperately waiting. We are waiting for justice and praying for change. Conditions for the “other,” those living on the margins of society, are appalling here in Durham. The despair of evictions, carbon monoxide leaks in low-income housing, gentrification that is disproportionately affecting traditionally Black neighborhoods, high crime rates, food insecurities, and COVID-19 have ravished our communities this year. Collectively, we sit in our lament for the conditions of our city. We pray and cry out to God for deliverance from the principalities, which breaks the souls of many who have become bound. Isaiah 61 gives us hope that God has not forgotten about us.

During this Advent season of waiting for the Messiah, we can take solace in knowing our pain, our tears, our sufferings are on the heart of God. Even while destruction and despair are all around us—we have a promise of freedom, deliverance, restoration, comfort, joy, and praise. Though we cannot see the liberation, we know that by the power of the Spirit, we will be snatched out of darkness and placed into the marvelous light of God’s love. This text reminds us that waiting for deliverance is a sign that we are hopeful. The incarnation of Christ signifies that Jesus is our comfort in the time of distress. Jesus comes to replace our mourning with joy, and His presence in our lives and circumstances ushers us into a place of praise!

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# PSALM 28

BY REV. DR. MICHAEL PAGE



Hayti



Downtown

A New Day is coming and this is a Psalm of Praise anticipating the coming of God to rule his people. What a joyful and glorious time this will be as we have been singing an old song and now is time to sing a new song with enthusiasm, excitement and the longing for eternal life. The time is before us to change our directions and begin to focus on a new day. We have seen an unusual year and now we are blessed to sing a new song.

Singing a new song requires each of us to change our posture, focus on a new chapter and humble ourselves totally before the Lord. It will be an exciting chapter as we embrace the new change God has promised each of us that love him and honor him. What will this new song offer? What will be different and will our tune change? Will we be singing on one accord? This depends on you and me as we yearn for the day Jesus will come again to judge the world.

Scripture reminds us in the meantime to Shout to the Lord all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy! (verse 4). There is absolutely no reason for us to be solemn and silent; we are approaching a new year with new opportunities and our goal now is to embrace this golden moment with a new attitude. Sing today a new song for we adore Christ the King and his promise to Save and to Return Again.



# STAND

BY LAFAYETTE PERRY

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**"AFTER YOU'VE  
DONE ALL YOU  
CAN...JUST STAND."**

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For the last year so much HAS been going on, from my daughter being sick to my job closing down. And here a year after my house is finished I am still waiting to move in. Then came Covid-19 and shut everything down. But I am still full of hope that things will get better soon; in my waiting I sometimes hear and feel a voice said to me: "After You've done all you can. Just stand." Dear God, forgive me for sometimes coming to you for help only after I have exhausted all efforts to handle the problem on my own. Please fill me with your peace that surpasses all understanding in the situation I am facing. Grant me spiritual healing and help me see you working in and through me. Thank you for always being available and on call. In Jesus name, Amen.

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# STRENGTHENED BY GOD

BY REV. DR. KATIE CROWE

*Romans 16:25-27*

To the God who is able to strengthen, bring about revelation and align hearts to a whole new way of being: to this God be the glory, Paul writes. This God may be encountered in Durham time and again in the willingness of those who call this city home to come together, to stay together, and to choose pressing into relationship and community instead of pushing apart when difficult truths have to be confronted and addressed.

The tenacity of our city's hope gathers strangers for vigils over gun violence and draws them to organize for affordable housing and justice reform. It prompts them to insist on civic processes that divest of habits of racial inequity and to push back against market forces until our changing landscape prioritizes people over the bottom line.

**"BE STRENGTHENED AS YOU RETURN TO THE LOVE OF GOD"**

Strengthened by this God, each time we come together in love for one another and in love with a vision of a thriving Durham in the most wholistic sense, a revelation is brought about. Hearts are aligned to a whole new way of being, and God is glorified by the deepening of beloved community in our midst.

May you assume Advent's posture of attentive receptivity as you move through these days. Be strengthened as you return to the love of God so that you may be ready when a revelation is brought about for that whole new way that you yourself are called to be. A way that aligns all hearts as one. To God be the glory.



# FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## THE MAGNIFICAT

BY REV. STEPHANIE YANCY

When Mary learned that her baby was on the way she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also pregnant. The child Mary carried in her womb was not the child of Joseph, to whom she was betrothed. Mary could have been ashamed or afraid. Instead, when she met Elizabeth, Mary sang a defiant song of joy that today we call the Magnificat. (Luke 1:46-55). Harking back to what God had done for Israel in the past, Mary says the one who is coming will continue the holy work of scattering the proud and casting down the mighty. With the coming of Jesus the hungry will have more than enough to eat and the rich will be sent away empty.

Mary's Advent message of hope is especially welcome as I reflect on places where healing and reconciliation are needed in Durham today. As we enter the final month of 2020 the pandemic is still raging. While the coronavirus itself does not discriminate, in Durham and across the country the virus has shone a spotlight on the moral crisis of abject poverty in the midst of vast wealth, a crisis that affects every one of us.

The historically marginalized, including black and brown and poor people, are experiencing disproportionate levels of suffering and death due to COVID-19. Before it got pushed off the front page by the pandemic, the unacceptable conditions at Durham's housing developments were in the news. Children and families are food insecure. Medical insurance is unaffordable for many. Others of us watch our 401k's grow fat while our neighbors do without the basic necessities of life. It would be easy to blame others for this moral crisis, but the truth is, too many of us simply accept the way things are. As we prepare for the coming of the Savior, let us examine whether we are the rich who need to be cast down. Let us ask, every day of our lives, whether with our lips and in our lives we are working with Jesus to feed the hungry and lift up the lowly, to bring justice and righteousness to the earth. Come, Lord Jesus. Come.

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# EXPECTANT WAITING

BY JEN WICHMAN

In this time of pandemics of all kinds—the pandemics of racism, of gun violence, of mass incarceration, of child poverty, of inadequate healthcare, of Covid19... Advent is such a critical season. I find myself joining people throughout our community and the world longing for and awaiting a savior who will bring comfort and healing, and will make all things new. In this time of pandemics of all kinds, we await a redeemer and rescuer who, as Isaiah prophesies, will feed, gather, carry, and lead his flock like a shepherd. We await and long for the coming again of Christ—the only one who can and will make all things new.

My own witness of high-stakes waiting involves volunteering as a court companion with Religious Coalition for Nonviolent Durham (RCND), accompanying homicide victims' families through the court process.

Often, our families wait two or three years for their loved one's case to come to trial. Imagine, then, the hearts that show up to court. And further—imagine the intensely condensed wait during jury deliberation, with a verdict so close and yet completely out of their control. Can you imagine the place that brings our neighbors' hearts to? With the heavy, dehumanizing weight of our justice system centered on one they hold dear? I can't. Any more than I can imagine the corresponding nightmare transpiring on the "other side" of the courtroom aisle. But I can show up, so our neighbors don't wait alone.

This advent season, RCND invites you to meditate on high-stakes waiting in our community. How do we experience expectant waiting in our own lives? How do we show up for our neighbors?





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# WE MEET AS NEIGHBORS!

BY REV. DOROTHY CLARK



I was a fan of Mr. Rogers TV show long into adulthood. I was impressed that Mr. Rogers found it so easy to treat all peoples as neighbors. Several years ago, I realized I had not fully embraced the second part of the Greatest Commandment. As I was leaving for work one morning I prayed a simple prayer: “Jesus let me see you in all I encounter today.” All went well that day until it was time to return home. As I went to my car I saw a young man that I had seen frequently, but I always avoided contact with him. I didn’t even speak for fear he would try to start a conversation. But that day, remembering my prayer, I stood by the car and looked directly at him. He was having a conversation with himself and, as usual, carrying all his belongings in bags. But as he passed by me he stopped talking to himself, looked directly at me and flashed the friendliest smile. I returned the smile and I felt good! I got in my car, still smiling! I said “Jesus I know that was you!” That day was the beginning of an acceptance of who my neighbor really is. It’s not limited to persons who live on the same street as me. Or who work in the same space as I do. We are all neighbors and thereby responsible to and for each other. If I meet you on the streets of Durham during this Advent season, I pray we can greet each other as neighbors!



## FROM THE FIRST CENTURY TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: THERE IS STILL "A CRY FOR JUSTICE"

BY BISHOP WILLIE JONES

Galatians 3:26-29 is a 1st century text for a 21st century church. Today, we still struggle in the 3 divisions identified in the text. The disparities, outcries, and injustices in the area of ethnicity, class, and gender affects the City of Durham, the Body of Christ, and beyond. Examples of these three divisions can be seen in the brutal plights against black and brown people, women suffering and human trafficking, unequal housing and wages, and the fight for voter rezoning. The answer that Paul gave back then is the same answer now: When God sees us, He sees us through the lens and blood of Christ, His Dear Son; therefore there are NO DIVISIONS or INJUSTICES!

During this Advent season, we must endeavor to be one with Christ so that we can walk in unconditional love and live beyond the temptation to be culturally or socially biased. During this Advent season, we must endeavor to honor God with pure worship so that the aroma may be sweet and not polluted by negative thoughts.

During this advent season, we must endeavor to walk by faith and know righteously that God sees all, knows all, has not forsaken His people, and will avenge injustices in His Season. During this Advent season, we will endeavor to posture ourselves to wait on Him as we seek to prosper our intimate relationship with Christ. Our humble daily outcry should be: "Lord, help me to be JUST so that I may see JUSTICE through your eyes and heart."





# MARY, DID YOU KNOW?

BY REV. DR. TAMMY RODMAN

Mary Did You Know” is one song that I love to hear as the Christmas season nears. It is a song filled with the reality and hope of our Savior's birth. God’s love chose to send Jesus to earth through a young girl who was of no great importance, to be born in one of the most humble ways possible in a barn, in a manger. When I think of the love of a mother as she holds her baby, as she smells the newness of possibilities for her little one, holding her heart as she imagines releasing them into this world; I wonder what were the hopes and dreams of the mother of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and all between, I cry with the mothers who struggled to bring their children to a place of opportunity and safety only to have them snatched away. I pray for the mothers of all the McDougald Terraces of the world. I pray that you never give up. Jesus comes as a sweet baby and grows up to become a savior. As the forces of this world put his unjustified death on display he rises from the grave with all power and authority in his hands. His death and resurrection are the beginning of a movement that will never end. Luke reminds us Jesus was sent by God to share the good news of God’s love to the poor, to set free those who are captive. He came to lift the oppressed and to help us see God’s love and will for our lives with clear sight.

# CHRISTMAS DAY

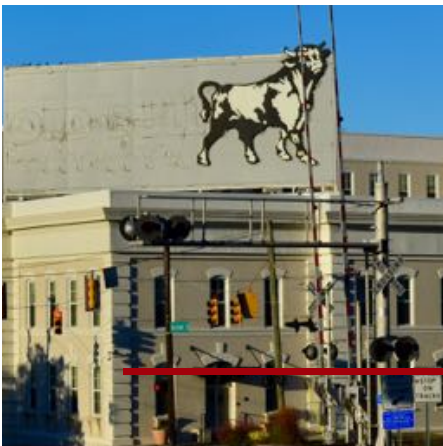
BY SARAH KUHN



When we speak of Christmas we often stop with the birth of Jesus. The stories about Anna and Simeon who we encounter in the Gospel of Luke are less popular, but I find them to be such a treasure for our study of the life of Jesus! Anna and Simeon live their lives inside the temple, and when they meet Jesus, they have been there very long time. I wonder sometimes if that got lonely, as sometimes Christmas can get a little lonely, especially this year.

Perhaps you are celebrating physically alone, perhaps alone in spirit. You may be separated from dear family and friends. Perhaps you do not feel as though you belong to a family. Perhaps Christmas Day is a lonely time for you every year.

And yet, Jesus has come for the lonely, for those who have been rejected from every family, for those who live in the temple awaiting the goodness of heaven to arrive.



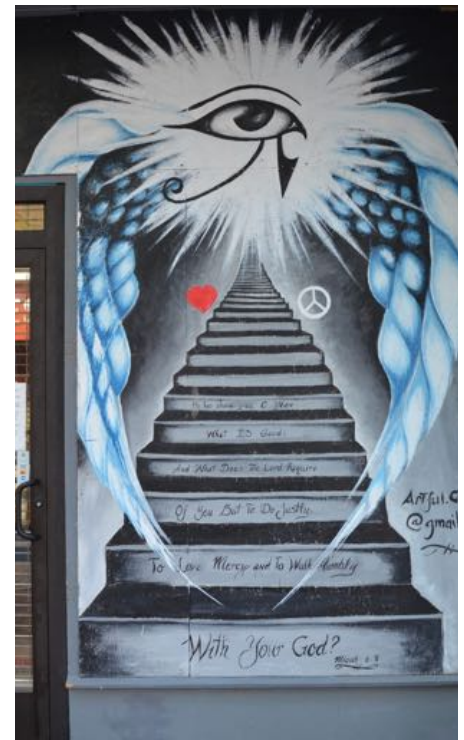
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For a moment, let us believe that we belong to God more than to anyone else. If you are alone or lonely this Christmas season, I encourage you to seek the face of the Messiah, even if it stings to look. Find Jesus reaching out to you through the friendship of others, the comfort silence can bring, or even, through the stories of those who waited faithfully in the temple. Jesus is fully present with us in our loneliness, in body and spirit, something we know because he came to earth to be with us. The incarnation is radical closeness...the opposite of loneliness.

Jesus' name Emmanuel means God with us. Jesus our mother, brother, sister and friend. Jesus belongs to us, and we to him. Who is Jesus' mother? You are. Who is Jesus' brother? You. Who is Jesus' closest relative? You my friend, are Jesus' closest of kin.  
God with us.  
Amen.



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# CONTRIBUTORS

THE AWESOME PEOPLE BEHIND THIS PROJECT



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Rob Shields is the Executive Director of ReCity Network, a co-working space for justice activists and community organizers.



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## **OUR MISSION**

The mission of DurhamCares is to foster collaboration, develop leaders and educate the people of our city to care for their neighbors in holistic ways.

## **OUR VALUES**

We are motivated and guided by the life and work of Jesus Christ.

We listen to all voices, particularly those on the margins.

We value collaboration that is inclusive, equitable and holistic.

We educate, train and equip others.

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