



the Source

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me...

My family owns a tree farm in Georgia. It was pasture land when I grew up there, but when my dad quit the dairy and beef cattle business, he planted the pastures in loblolly pines. That was over thirty-five years ago. Those pines grew straight and tall and this year were ready to harvest. We also rent the 1500 acres to Atlanta hunters to help pay the land taxes, and the hunters were concerned that the removal of the trees would ruin their sport. In fact, cutting the timber has an opposite effect as the curious deer come out to inspect the changes, encouraged also by the tender new growth over the land. But the property certainly has changed in appearance as vistas now offer wider and longer views of neighboring ridges and hills, and what was dark forest now is open again. Sunsets, once hidden, are glorious, and God seems to smile over His creation in answer to our daily prayer, *"Thy kingdom come."*

Consider the Source Isaiah 35:1-10

Similarly, in our scripture reading for today, Isaiah 35, we see a beautiful picture of God's kingdom to come. Creation itself rejoices as God redeems humanity and makes everything right. The land will burst into bloom. Dr. Cotton says that our job is to watch for signs of hope that will be followed by more. For as it says in Romans 5:5, *"Hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

As we await the coming of Christmas and our annual celebration of the arrival of the Christ child, may we watch for opportunities to follow the nudgings of the Holy Spirit and to share the love of Christ, the one true hope of the world.

— Paula Holmes, First Church member

A Family Affair

On the third Sunday of Advent, we relight our candles for hope and peace. The new candle we light today is for joy. Like in previous weeks, we want to think of joy in a Biblical sense. Joy is more than just happiness. Joy is an attitude of the heart. You may remember that in Galatians 5:22, the apostle Paul indicates that joy is a fruit (or gift) of the Holy Spirit. It brings us joy to remember that God loves us so much that he sent his son to live with us on earth.

Unlike happiness, joy can exist in our lives with other emotions. Read Luke 1:46-55 together as a family. These verses contain Mary's song of praise to God after he chose her to be the earthly mother of baby Jesus. Mary was so young and found herself in a frightening situation, yet she praised God and rejoiced. She chose joy, rather than fear. Joyous people look for the good in every situation.

Reflecting on Mary's song, make a list of together of things that bring joy to your life. It might be fun to sing your joyful list to God.

Dear God: Thank you for your son, Jesus, and the joy that remembering Jesus' birth can bring. Help us live in such a way that our words and our actions help others know of the joy you bring to our hearts. Amen.

— Jennifer Hall, Director of Children's Ministry

Monday: Isaiah 35:1-2

In today's scripture, Isaiah announces a time when the glory and splendor of God will come to the parched land through blooming.

- Think about areas of your life that God may need to rule over anew to produce a fruitful bounty.

Tuesday: Isaiah 35:3-4

Isaiah encourages the feeble and weak to be strong and not fear, for God will come with vengeance to save them.

- Is there any part of your life where your fears or weaknesses handicap your efforts?
- If so, what do you need to relinquish to God so that you can trust Him to equip you?

Wednesday: 35:5-7

At that time, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap and the mute will shout; water will gush and foliage will grow.

- Where in your life do you need to invite God's healing power?
- Notice how these verses in Isaiah point directly to Jesus and His healing ministry.

Thursday: 35: 8-10

A holy highway will emerge for the redeemed alone who enter with joy and gladness.

- Who in your life needs to hear about God's path to redemption?
- How will you communicate this message of salvation to those in need around you?

Friday: Romans 5

Paul talks about faith and hope and reconciliation in this letter to the Romans.

- What allowed boasting does Paul encourage in this chapter?

Want to learn more about the Bible in 2018?

- ◆ New Disciple Bible Groups begin January 8, 9 & 10
- ◆ Special Event *Chasing Paul in Reverse!* January 21 & 28
- ◆ *The Challenge of Paul:* New study on Sunday mornings beginning February 4

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