

SMALL GROUP ADVENT REFLECTIONS

This is a discipline for use in relation to the Sundays of Advent, a method of aural reflection on the text of the gospel appointed for the coming Sunday. It follows the pattern found in Becoming the Story We Tell.

Participants may sit in a circle or around a table. In this form of scripture reflection, it is desirable for the group to engage the reading aurally (rather than reading along); only the reader needs to have a copy of the text. The group thus requires a single copy of these two procedural pages (for the leader or host) and a single copy of the readings (to be shared amongst those called upon to read aloud). The leader may need to encourage readers to speak slowly and audibly.

It is recommended that the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible be used for the first hearing of each of the readings. These readings are available at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>. In some circumstances it may be desirable to use different translations when the reading is repeated.

This method of group reflection may employ a cross as a 'talking stick' (only someone holding the cross can speak): everyone may be given the opportunity to respond to the current question when handed the cross by the person on the left. See p. 142 of "Becoming the Story We Tell" - <http://5062d9ba7ccc362f4859-cd58abbe0e6243265c5a27e702ee6c8b.r55.cf2.rackcdn.com/The-Primates-Proposal.pdf>

One possible setting for this method of reflection is the order for Home Prayers, p. 685 in the Book of Alternative Services.

The following links may be used for the commentary before the First Hearing each week:

Commentary for Matthew 24.36-44 (Advent 1):
<http://aplm2013.blogspot.ca/2013/11/0-0-1-745-4248-table-song-eighth-day.html>

Commentary for Matthew 3.1-12 (Advent 2):
<http://aplm2013.blogspot.ca/2013/12/preachers-study-year-advent-2-2013.html>

Commentary for Matthew 11.2-11 (Advent 3):
<http://aplm2013.blogspot.ca/2013/12/preachers-study-year-advent-3-2013.html>

Commentary for Matthew 1.18-25 (Advent 4):
<http://aplm2013.blogspot.ca/2013/12/preachers-study-year-advent-4-2013.html>

Opening:

The leader (or host) may begin the time of reflection with a brief introduction in these of similar words:

The season of Advent (along with the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany) emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the herald of God's Kingdom. To speak of our Lord in this way, however, is to recognize him as more than a preacher of the Kingdom. After all, the prophets and John the Baptist were also preachers of the Kingdom. To speak of our Lord as the herald of God's Kingdom is to claim that in Jesus the Kingdom is present. As the great missionary bishop Lesslie Newbigin once said, "In Christ we are no longer dealing only with the proclamation of the Kingdom; we are also dealing with the presence of the Kingdom." Jesus Christ is the herald and embodiment of God's kingdom.

Each of the Gospel passages we will encounter this Advent is rooted in this understanding. Each of these passages also prompts us to a rigorous and perhaps uncomfortable examination of the degree to which our ultimate allegiance is not undivided and fully aligned with God's promised Kingdom. Each passage, however, not only poses a challenge, but also offers hope for us, for the church, and for the world.

The leader may then continue with the following prayer:

Let us pray. *(allow a time of silence)*

Give us ears to hear, O God, and eyes to watch,
that we may know your presence in our midst
during this holy season of preparation and joy,
as we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ.
We ask this in his name.

First Hearing:

- The leader may read aloud the commentary provided for the scripture reading.
- The leader then invites one person to read the passage aloud, after giving the following instruction to the group: "Listen for promises or signs of the Kingdom of God." The rest of the group simply listens.
- SILENCE. The leader then passes the cross to the person on the right, inviting response to the question, *What promise of God for the world do you hear? Name one way in which this promise offers you hope?* The cross is passed around the circle until everyone has had a chance to respond.

Second Hearing:

- The leader invites someone else to read the passage aloud a second time, after giving the following instruction: “Listen for any explicit or implicit challenge this promise might pose.”
- SILENCE. The leader then passes the cross to the person on the right, inviting response to the question, *What challenge does this promise pose to you, to the church, or to the world?* The cross is passed around the circle until everyone has had a chance to respond.

Third Hearing:

- The leader invites someone else to read the passage aloud a third time, after giving the following instruction: “As you listen to the passage one more time, think about what it might mean to live life in expectation of this promise.”
- SILENCE. The leader then passes the cross to the person on the right, inviting response to the question, *What do you need to do in order to prepare yourself for the fulfillment of this promise?* The cross is passed around the circle until everyone has had a chance to respond.

Open Discussion:

- The leader places the cross in the centre of the group and invites people to name and discuss the issues arising from hearing the gospel.
- The leader closes the discussion when the agreed time limit has been reached and initiates the prayers.

Closing Act of Prayer:

- The leader invites everyone to offer a prayer for the person on his or her right. The leader may suggest a form of prayer, such as, “Strengthen *N* in your love, and prepare *her/him* for the coming of the Lord.”
- The leader may close with the following prayer:

God of justice and peace,
from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness,
that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder
before your marvelous deeds.
Raise our heads in expectation,
that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord
and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.