Breaking In Advent Study Week 1

Below is a guide for your group to dig deeper into this week's advent sermon. I recommend following each step but also allowing for your group to explore what comes to your hearts and minds and allow space for God to Break In.

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When we gather together, the best way to begin is with a word of prayer. As a group, please choose someone to lead your opening prayer.

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Please go around the group and introduce yourself by name and then answer this icebreaker question:

What is your favorite weather for Christmas day? (White Christmas? Stuck-at-home ice storm? Christmas on the beach?)



We value this time together and want to ensure that all feel safe and heard. Below are your promises to each other. Please read each one individually and ask for a group consensus that all are in agreement.

- 1. We will do our best to attend each meeting and to be on time.
- 2. We will listen with open hearts.
- 3. We will be compassionate and affirming to others.
- 4. We will share time equally amongst each other.
- 5. Anyone has the right to pass on any question.
- 6. We will not give advice.
- 7. Each individual will speak only for themselves.
- 8. We will all engage as much as possible, and not just be observers.
- 9. Each individual is accountable for their own growth.
- 10. We will all keep each other in our prayers
- 11. We will respect the confidentiality of each other. This is strictly required. What is said in the group stays in the group. If you want to tell someone outside of the group what you said in the group, that's up to you, but do not tell what anyone else says. We will extend this respect to one another.

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Give the group a minute to reflect before inviting responses to the following questions and then give everyone a chance to respond.

How is it with your soul?

- Given the ups and downs that life throws at everyone, what is the state of your inner being today?
- Think back over the past week. What was your highest high (the time you felt most encouraged / closest to God) and your lowest low (felt most discouraged / distant from God)? And how are you feeling right now (encouraged/discouraged/somewhere in between)?

Read John 1:1-14 (I am using the NRSVue translation.)

"In the beginning was the Word..." In the Gospel of John, the phrase "the Word" is loaded with meaning. John is reminding us of two significant ways this phrase was used in the ancient world: first of all, in the Hebrew Bible there is a focus on the creative word of God. When God created, God spoke and creation came into being. In addition, the word of God was sometimes related to the wisdom of God present in creation as personified in Proverbs 8. "The word" was also an important concept in Greek philosophy where it meant the creative principle or order behind the cosmos. In both cases, "the Word" meant more than just something that we speak or a few markings on a page; rather, it designated someone or something of great power, creativity, and significance. So when John says "In the beginning was the Word," he is drawing on these deep traditions and calling to our minds the majesty, order, and generative force of God.

John later goes on to say, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..." this is one of the clearest examples of what we call the doctrine of the Incarnation, meaning God becoming human and dwelling among humanity. What is interesting about this passage is that the Greek word we translate "lived" comes from the same root as "pitched his tent." It was common at the time to use the image of a tent to talk about physical bodies, and there was another important tent in the Hebrew Bible that John would have been thinking of: the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle, and later the temple, was significant as the place where God lived among God's people. John is pointing out to us that in the Incarnation, in the life of Jesus, God is again dwelling among God's people.



- 1. Who is the Word of God?
- 2. What did the tabernacle and temple represent in the Hebrew Bible?
- 3. What does the Incarnation say about the presence of God with us?
- 4. How does God "taking on flesh" change how you see your own body?
- 5. What changes in your concept of "God" (all powerful, all knowing, etc.) when you say this God "took on flesh"?
- 6. What statements have you heard said about God that aren't true of Jesus?

Please share with the group any prayer requests you may have this week. These could be things you are grateful for, people in your life you are praying for, or places in your own life that you desire God's presence. It is not a requirement to share a prayer request.

And then ask someone to close in prayer.

