A Sanctified Art

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2019 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

WHAT CAN'T WAIT

ART, REFLECTIONS, & PROMPTS FOR THE SEASON OF WAITING

A Sanctified Art
sanctifiedart.org

A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31ST

Hopes for the Coming Year

WHAT CAN'T WAIT? 2020

What can't wait in this new year? What practices, intentions, and habits do you want to adopt in this next year? Where is God actively creating hope, peace, joy, and love in your life?
In the space provided, write or draw any ideas that come to mind.

2019 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

NAME _____

CHURCH _____

PHONE # _____

EMAIL _____

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 30TH

READ JOHN 1:1-14

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

When we talk about the creation story, we often refer to Genesis. But the bible is full of creation stories, and the opening of John's gospel is one of them. Not to be confined to literal interpretation, the poetry of John 1 tells us more about the nature of God than about the contents of the cosmos.

Looking at this story of birth, what do we learn about God?

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1). God is living word, holy discourse. God is known to us in logic, debate, truth, and story.

What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people (John 1:4). God is living flesh, divine presence in human form, the embodiment of love for all people. God joins us in every human experience.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light (John 1:5). God is light that pierces through the darkness. Nothing can stop it or dampen its might.

In this painting, I meditated on the persistence of light. Light can travel endlessly through a vacuum; light waves won't diminish no matter how far they have to travel. Therefore, starlight travels through space for billions of light years to reach us on earth. Can you imagine that? Perhaps that's God's nature and constant posture—endlessly traveling through time and space just to reach us.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Light Pierces Through | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

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Advent is a season of waiting, but is idle waiting what God wants of us? In preparation for the coming Messiah, we wonder together—what things can't wait? What demands our immediate attention? What requires our work and preparation? What is it that God can't wait for? Is it our praise, reconciliation, and proclamation? Is it the end of suffering, isolation, and fear?

We hope this devotional might awaken you to the ways God can't wait to create hope, peace, joy, and love. We invite you to carve out time each day to listen for God speaking to you through art, poetry, silent reflection, and embodied prayer. As we are called to action during this season, may we also be mindful of what can wait—for we are also called to rest and receive the gifts of Sabbath.

This Advent, join us in imagining, prioritizing, and preparing. As we wait, what can't?

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Sarah Are
Hannah Garrity
Lauren Wright Pittman

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29TH

WHAT CAN'T WAIT?

Carve out time today for prayer and quiet contemplation.
Read this poem as part of your devotional time.

I confess—
I am good at waiting.
I waited for someone else to be passionate before I made a change.
I waited for you to say, "I love you" before I was honest.
I waited for affirmation about my work before trying harder.
I waited for anyone else to take the lead instead of speaking up.
I waited for you to forget instead of saying sorry.
I wait for a compliment before I feel beautiful.
I wait for your call before calling back.
I wait for an opinion before stating my own.
I wait for a rainy day to slow down.
I wait for a sunny day to get outside.
I wait for Saturdays to call home.
I wait for free time to read my Bible.
And too often, I wait for Sunday to pray.
I have lived well, but I have also sat on my hands,
Turned my head, closed my eyes,
Lived in denial, pretended it would get better,
Believed in someone else's call over my own,
And ignored the fact that these hands belong to God.
But these hands belong to God.

I guess what I'm trying to say is,
What if Mary waited nine months so that we wouldn't have to?
And what if the disciples waited three days so that we wouldn't have to?
There is love to sow,
Peace to reap,
Joy to feel,
And a promised day that I am longing for.
So if you want to join me,
I'll be busy, unlearning years of sitting and waiting.

Prayer by Sarah Are

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28TH

SABBATH CAN'T WAIT

What *can* wait? On this day of Sabbath, identify one thing in your life that feels urgent but can actually wait in order for you to rest. Commit to one of the activities below, or spend time doing something else that centers and recharges you.

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Try cooking or baking with a new recipe.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Dance or play music.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Take a nap.
- Draw or create something.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Play a board game with friends or family.
- Read a book.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1ST

GOD'S PROMISED DAY (HOPE) CAN'T WAIT

Carve out time today for prayer and quiet contemplation.
Read this poem as part of your devotional time.

Someone once told me that hope
was naive—
A foolish game that children play
When they pray that summer
won't end,
And bedtime won't come.

Someone once told me that hope
was naive as they
Cradled pessimism in their lap like a
sleeping cat,
Stroking their ego while they stoked
a fire within me.

Unfortunately for them, I'm allergic
to cats.
And unfortunately for them, those
who deny hope
Will never know vulnerability;
For hope requires us to believe in a
better day—
Even when this one is falling apart.

Hope looks the 24-hour news cycle
in the face,
Hope looks our broken relationships
in the face,
Hope looks our low self-esteem
in the face,
And declares at low tide that the
water will return.
Hope is exhaling, trusting that
your body will inhale again.
Hope is watching the sunset and
setting an alarm.
Hope is planting seeds in the winter,
assuming summer will come.

I never said it would be easy.
The ground is frozen, you are
thirsty, and the night is long.
But I will say this—
I have found hope to be the rhythm
of love and the fiber of faith;
For to hope is to believe in God's
ability to bring about a better day,
And like a child with an
Advent calendar,
I will always be counting down
the days.

So to those who cradle pessimism
and fear,
You can find me outside—
with the kids—wishing on stars,
Praying to the God of today
That tomorrow will be just
as beautiful.
Set your alarm.
We'd like for you to join us.
The sunrise won't wait.

Prayer by Sarah Are

Swords into Plowshares | Hannah Garrity

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27TH

READ ISAIAH 9:2-7

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God..." These musical attributes wash over us each Christmas season. Why aren't we more familiar with the imagery at the beginning of this passage? It is imagery from a prophet speaking to a people defeated, oppressed, and living in the shadow of Assyria's military might—a "land of deep darkness" (Is. 9:2). It is a bold, particular, contextual hope punctuated by broken yokes, splintered rods, and burning materials of war.

The boots and garments of warriors are burned as fuel. These violent elements are set ablaze and physically transformed into warmth, light, and fuel for justice. I think this text calls for action and a shift in our identity. We are no longer to be defined by violence. We are called to be people who make peace—those who tear down systems of oppression. We are to transform the things of war into light. What exists in your world that needs to be set on fire? What darkness, violence, or negative energy can you transfer into fuel for peace?

In this drawing, light radiates from the broken ends of the rod which previously weighed down this woman's shoulders. The fleeting darkness of violence encircles this first mandorla of light, but the flames which consume the weapons of war cannot be contained by the darkness. In traditional Christian art, the mandorla, or a pointed oval, usually frames the entire body of Christ. In this instance, the mandorla frames the inbreaking of light—the point at which oppressive substance is destroyed. This is an image of Christ breaking into the world—Christ lives and breathes through our participation in dismantling injustice. This image stands parallel to the familiar image of a child born with authority resting on his shoulders—the Prince of Peace. We need to hold these images together in tension and in harmony to find the gravity of this prophecy and our role in it.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Fuel for Justice | Lauren Wright Pittman

MONDAY, DECEMBER 2ND

READ ISAIAH 2:1-5

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

What is God's view of the world? What does God plan for this world? This text is all about God's vision for the earth becoming a reality. It's all about beating swords into plowshares. It's all about building peace.

How does this vision come to be? In this image of hands, I imagine how we might actually make God's vision come to life.

I listen to Christian rock because it is the only station I can play in the car that doesn't play curse words for my children to hear. I change the station, however, when the radio personalities come on because the statements are often slanted heavily to a viewpoint that is judgmental at its root. I find this to be an intriguing dichotomy. The music is preaching the gospel, God's vision; the commentary is perpetuating division. Why do we do this? There must be another way.

There's a song that often plays on my Christian rock station from Matthew West's album, *Into the Light*. The song is called, "Do Something." The songwriter sees the pain of the world and asks God to do something. "I did, I created you," God responds, suggesting that with our hands and with our words, God has created us to act in God's name.

Here, in acrylic on canvas, a man wields a grinder, burnishing the edges of a sword that has been reformed into a plow. Growth, not death; care, not fear. The simple analogy of the sword transformed into the plowshare reminds us that peace is at the heart of all that God envisions for this world.

How might you make God's vision come into reality?

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3RD

Hope Can't Wait

ACTION PROMPT

Practice hope today by believing that your actions—even small ones—make a difference. Donate time, money, or resources to an organization that is helping create God's promised day where all are cared for and all are well.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26TH

READ LUKE 2:1-14, (15-20)

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

What If God Had Waited?

What if God had waited
For Mary to be wed,
For Herod to relent,
For a legitimate birthing bed?

What if God had waited
Until the powerful promoted
peace,
And the politicians agreed?

What if God had waited
For a plan with no risk of failure,
For a place that felt safe
and secure?

What if God had waited
For the anxious to find rest,
For the cynic to know hope,
For the brokenhearted to
be whole?
For the wars to cease,
For the violence to end,
For the fears to pass,
For the weapons to be banned?

What if God had waited
For the earth to heal,
For the laws to change,
For every life to matter
the same,
For the addict to be freed
from shame,
For the refugees to not
be blamed?

What if God had waited
Until all was calm,
All was bright,
For a future that might
Never come?

What if God had waited?

But God couldn't wait.

God couldn't wait to be love
known in flesh and bone—
And neither should we.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

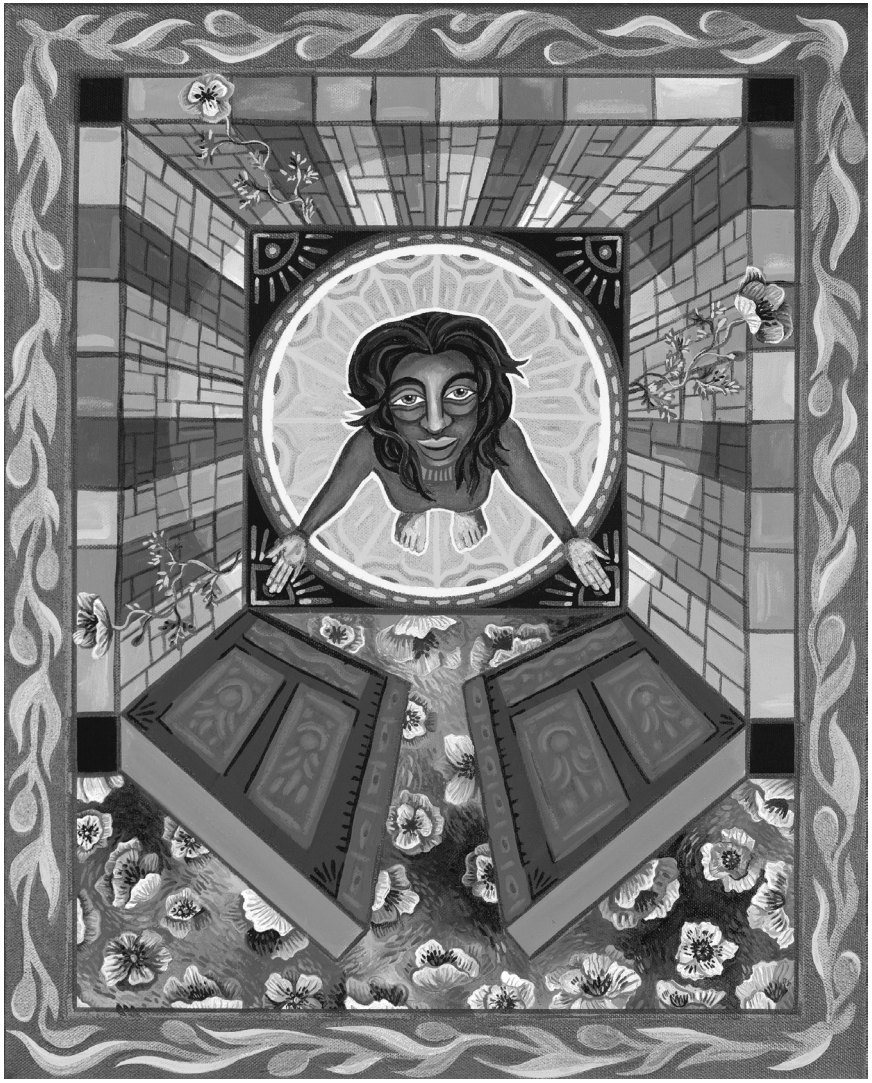
God Couldn't Wait | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4TH

God's Promised Day Can't Wait

JOURNALING & REFLECTION

Isaiah 2:1-5 speaks of God's promised day—a day when wars end, swords are beaten into plowshares, and spears become pruning hooks. In the space below, write what God's promised day looks and feels like to you.



Peace Without Your Walls | Lauren Wright Pittman

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25TH

Love Can't Wait

JOURNALING & REFLECTION

On this Christmas day, make a list of all the areas in your life where love is known and felt. You might mention people, places, pets, or experiences. Close in prayer, giving thanks for all the love in your life.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24TH

Courage Can't Wait

ACTION PROMPT

Write a love letter to a stranger. Begin with a salutation such as, "Dear beloved one," and fill the letter with affirmations and encouragement. Close the letter with, "No matter what, you are loved." Fold and tuck the letter in a public place—a park bench, a car windshield, a mailbox—for a stranger to receive.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5TH

READ PSALM 122

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

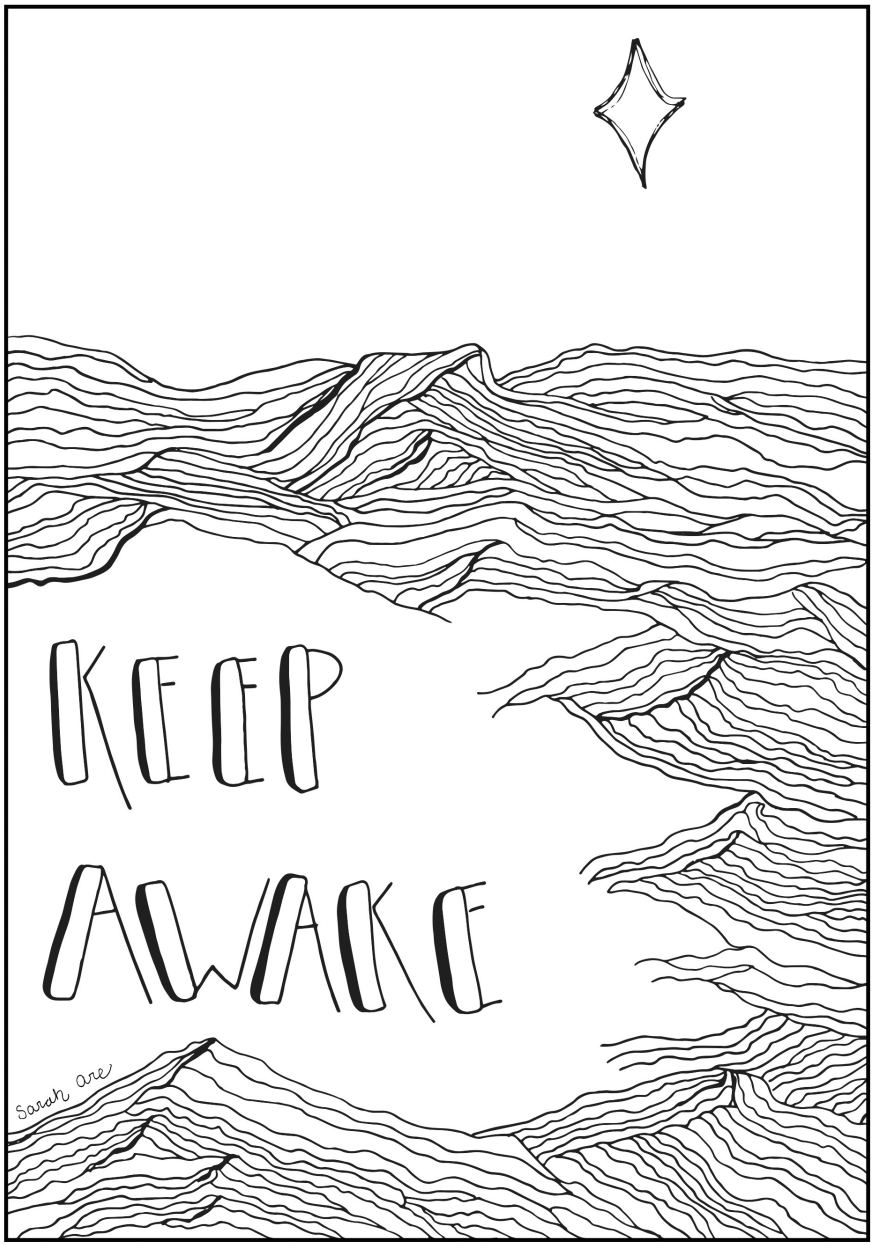
We all desire peace and security for ourselves, our families, and our communities. It seems, however, we often disagree about how to achieve peace and security, and about who is deserving of such well-being. Often, those who have realized even a baseline sense of peace and security quickly forget what it was like to be without. Fear creeps in and we separate ourselves with walls and isolate ourselves within towers. We worship and exist with people like us because it feels safe. We hoard peace and security as though they are finite resources, and elevate our own peace and security above that of other nations. We pray for ourselves, even if our answered prayers result in our neighbor's harm. This self-focused, defensive ideology is becoming increasingly pervasive in the United States, and it's finding strongholds in other countries too. Powerful people appeal to this inward-turning gaze, stoking fears and encouraging division.

This text celebrates refuge. As we know well from the news and the growing volatility at our borders, there are many who have become refugees—those seeking security and peace—while those within their walls and towers seek the good of themselves.

When I began to paint this piece, I kept wondering how walls and peace can coexist, but if I'm honest, if true shalom were to be realized, there would be no need for walls or towers. For me, peace looks like open doors leading out of the confinement of stone walls and into a field of poppies. For me, peace looks like flowers scaling walls, weakening the strength of stone foundations, and over time, bringing the barriers down. Peace looks like open arms—open to the difficult work of welcoming peace, and open to receiving the boundless gifts of a truly peaceful world.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Love Surprises Us | Sarah Are

MONDAY, DECEMBER 23RD

READ MATTHEW 1:18-25

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

I imagine Joseph scoffing at Mary's explanation. "Trust me." "How can I?" I hear a tense conversation filled with tears and devastation. I sense fear of societal judgement. What will people say?

Joseph is skeptical. He knows he cannot be the father of the baby. He decides to break his engagement with Mary.

He must feel so betrayed by her. So, how is it that he can believe the angel in the dream?

Suddenly, he welcomes the opportunity to parent Jesus anyway. He follows through on his commitment to Mary anyway.

Trust in Mary, trust in God; Joseph could only have managed his role in this story with trust. His faith relies heavily on trust. Deep down, we know who we can trust. Subconsciously, we all know right from wrong.

In this image, Joseph has just placed the wedding ring on Mary's hand. They have just said their vows, committing their lives to each other. Here, Joseph seals his trust in Mary's word, his trust in the word of God, with action.

Whom do I need to let God lead me to trust? Where in my life is my justified skepticism keeping me from God's call? How am I letting my concern for the opinions of society impede my willingness to act on God's word?

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Trust | Hannah Garrity

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6TH

READ MATTHEW 24:36-44

FROM THE ARTIST | SARAH ARE

When I was a little girl, my mom asked me to recount the best part of my day every night before bed. If I had a bad day I would promptly tell her that *nothing* was good. There were zero positive moments. However, my patient mother would not accept that answer. Before I could sleep, I had to name at least one thing worth celebrating. This ritual taught me to look for the good in my days, and in many ways, I think that is what this text is inviting us to do.

For years people have wondered how to interpret this particular scripture. Is it implying that God will come and some will be left behind, or that some are being called forward into new lives with new vocational callings? How do we understand verbs such as "taken" or "keep awake"?

When I read this scripture, the thing that stands out is how love surprises us. Throughout scripture, God's love for this world and for humanity shocks the system. Tables are turned, people are healed, the outcasts are seen, children are welcomed, and boundaries are broken.

In this Advent season, I think we are invited to look for God in our midst—to look for the surprising places that love shows up. We are challenged to stay awake so that life and the divine do not pass us by.

The repetitive language of fields and water led me to create the line drawings around the text. As I began to draw, I was able to see the worker's fields described in the text, as well as the Shepherd's fields, and the scenery Mary and Joseph may have passed on their way to Bethlehem. These simple lines serve as a reminder that God's surprising love and grace shows up in ordinary places along the way.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7TH

SABBATH CAN'T WAIT

What *can* wait? On this day of Sabbath, identify one thing in your life that feels urgent but can actually wait in order for you to rest. Commit to one of the activities below, or spend time doing something else that centers and recharges you.

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Try cooking or baking with a new recipe.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Dance or play music.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Take a nap.
- Draw or create something.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Play a board game with friends or family.
- Read a book.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22ND

COURAGE (LOVE) CAN'T WAIT

Carve out time today for prayer and quiet contemplation. Read this poem as part of your devotional time.

When people talk about love
They talk about heartbreak.
They talk about the love that
got away,
And the love that left them longing.

When people talk about love
Rarely do they say, "be brave."
I wish they would.

To love is to pull the oxygen from
your lungs and to say,
"Here, take a breath."
To love is to come out from hiding,
To allow the light to shine on you.
To love is to wear your heart outside
of your body—
Fingers crossed that the holder
handles it with care.
To love is to trust that sometimes
hurt and pain come with the
territory,
But you're going to love anyway.
So love anyway.

Love like there's no tomorrow.
Love as if love is not a scarcity.
Love like Mary, who cradled a baby
amidst the threat of being stoned.
And love like Joseph, who took a
child in that he knew was not
his own.

Of course I say all of this because
I need to hear it too.
There are dusty corners of my heart
that I still protect—
Love stored up like grain
While the world is in famine.

So the next time you see me,
Remind me to be brave.
The next time you see me,
Invite me to stand in the light
with you.
The next time you see me,
Handle with care and maybe,
Just maybe,
We'll find a holy and wild
Love that won't wait.

When people talk about love
They talk about heartbreak.
Rarely do they say, "be brave."
I wish they would.

Prayer by Sarah Are

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21ST

SABBATH CAN'T WAIT

What *can* wait? On this day of Sabbath, identify one thing in your life that feels urgent but can actually wait in order for you to rest. Commit to one of the activities below, or spend time doing something else that centers and recharges you.

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Try cooking or baking with a new recipe.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Dance or play music.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Take a nap.
- Draw or create something.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Play a board game with friends or family.
- Read a book.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8TH

REPENTANCE (PEACE) CAN'T WAIT

Carve out time today for prayer and quiet contemplation. Read this poem as part of your devotional time.

Sometimes,
While the sky is still dark,
I slip sock feet into tennis shoes and go for a walk.
Step by step
I ask my deepest questions,
While the sky lets go of its deepest dark blue.

Am I doing enough?
Ink to indigo.
Does my brother know how much I love him?
Indigo to navy.
Will my friends keep showing up?
Navy to royal blue.
Will we ever know peace?
Royal blue to gold.

And after a while, my pilgrimage must end,
So I turn apologetic feet toward home
And walk my repentance back toward the sun.
And once again, while I stand in sock feet and tennis shoes,
God takes my breath away.
For once again,
The sky's deepest void is now a watercolor of light.

And I am reminded
That like the sky,
God touches everything.
And I am reminded,
That like the sky,
Nothing is so broken that it can't be painted gold.

In the morning light, there is peace.

Prayer by Sarah Are

A Child Shall Lead Them | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20TH

READ PSALM 146:5-10

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

In 1911, Helen Todd, a leader in the women's suffrage movement, coined the phrase, "bread for all, and roses too,"[3] to advocate for both fair wages and better working conditions for women factory workers. The phrase took on life as a chant in textile strikes and as a refrain for other suffragists. It expressed the heart and soul of the movement. Bread referred to the necessities for survival—safety, shelter, wages, food. Roses symbolized the things that are often treated as luxuries only for the rich to indulge in—the arts, education, nature, beauty.

In other words, women of the early twentieth century insisted that they deserved to not only make a living; they also deserved to make a life worth living.

In this psalm, we are reminded that God provides bread—food for the hungry, protection for the immigrant, sight for the blind, justice for the oppressed, freedom for the imprisoned. And God offers roses—joy to those who find hope and rest in God. God's justice isn't just about survival. God desires our thriving, too.

In this image, I depicted two hands. One reaches up in need, with urgency. The other opens in a posture of generosity. A question mark cuts through the space between them, inviting us to consider who is in need of not only bread, but roses too.

Who are the hungry among us? What does it look like to feed those hungering for beauty, for delight, for the kind of joy that leads to a whole and holy life?

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

3 Todd, Helen. *The American Magazine*. Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1911. 619.

Give Us Bread, But Give Us Roses | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

MONDAY, DECEMBER 9TH

READ ISAIAH 11:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

The image of the stump of Jesse might have knocked the air out of those first hearing these words. The stump represented the end of the Davidic dynasty, the family line believed to carry Yahweh's goodness. The monarchy was either thwarted by the Babylonian exile, or the Assyrian empire—historically, we're not exactly sure. Regardless, Isaiah names what no one wants to say out loud—Jerusalem's political future feels dead, cut off, stunted by despair.

The image of a stump might accurately represent how we feel about our own future. Greenhouse gases and sea levels continue to rise. No place—schools, sanctuaries, theaters, malls—is safe from mass shooting attacks. Our government leaders fight like lions and wolves starving for dominance.

We also need Isaiah's vision for a reordered world where creation exists in harmony, not as a threat to itself.

When reading this poetry of peace, I found myself pausing at the line, "and a child shall lead them" (Is. 11:6). The example of Naomi Wadler came to mind. After the Parkland, FL, school shooting,[1] Naomi, an eleven-year-old at the time, organized a walkout at her elementary school to honor victims of gun violence. In addition to those slain in Parkland, Naomi and her fifth grade classmates also recognized people of color who are killed by gun violence every day and never make news headlines. Naomi went on to speak courageously before crowds in DC and on TV shows about the need for gun reform. When she spoke, she held the nation—and much of the world—captive with her passion, her insight, and her urgency.

Where is new life shooting up? Perhaps in the places where God can't wait for peace. Perhaps in the voices of our children, who urge us to find a better way.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

1 On February 14, 2018, a gunman with a semi-automatic weapon shot and killed seventeen students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Repentance Can't Wait

ACTION PROMPT

Think of someone to whom you might be needing to apologize. This might be someone whom you have hurt or disappointed, or someone who has been harmed by your inaction. As an act of repentance, write this person a letter, offering a full and honest apology. If it feels appropriate to do so, send the letter to this person. If not, keep the letter and offer it to God as a private prayer for reconciliation.

READ ISAIAH 35:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

When I approached this piece, I read the first few verses of the passage until a phrase stuck in my head, "like the crocus [the desert] shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing" (Is. 35:2). I thought I might paint a study of a crocus flower—one zoomed in on the subtle shifts in shades of purple. However, when I began to roll the phrase around in my mind, I felt the need to paint the colors of the desert. The text says the desert blossoms "like a crocus" not "with crocuses." I almost missed the desert for the flowers. For me, flowers are evident metaphors for joy and a clear testament to God's magnificence. After all, Emerson wrote, "Earth laughs in flowers."[2] My initial instinct with this painting was to transform the desert with flowers, but instead, I think I needed to see the desert for what it is.

The desert is often associated with desolation, scarcity, and death, but it's really a place of surprising, subversive beauty—a place of meeting the Divine. I found myself grabbing paints I don't typically use—mauves, ochres, pale greens, and dusty pinks. My painting intuition doesn't often lead me to desert colors because I'm drawn to deeply saturated hues that I find more obviously beautiful. It takes a bit more effort to see the desert as a place of abundance and overflowing worship of our Creator, but I think this intentional shift in seeing is part of what it means to prepare the way during Advent. What would it look like to delight in elements of creation that you often overlook? How can you help the parched places of your corner of the world blossom into new life?

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

2 Ralph Waldo Emerson, from the poem, "Hamatreya."

Desert Blooms | Lauren Wright Pittman

Peace Can't Wait

JOURNALING & REFLECTION

Think of a person, place, or situation in desperate need of God's peace. With that in mind, write a prayer for peace in the space below.

One with Mystery | Lauren Wright Pittman

Delight Can't Wait

JOURNALING & REFLECTION

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46b-55) is Mary's hymn of praise to God. In the space below, craft your own song of joy, giving thanks to God for that which you are grateful.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17TH

Joy Can't Wait

ACTION PROMPT

Record a short video message that is joyful and send it to a friend. Make the message fun and playful—sing a song, dance to upbeat music, or simply tell your friend how much they mean to you. After you send your message, ask your friend to also record a joyful message and pass it along to someone else. Spread joy.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12TH

READ MATTHEW 3:1-12

FROM THE ARTIST | LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

A curious, odd, status quo-threatening man emerges in the wilderness of Judea. He shouts in the place of desolation—a dangerous place where God has repeatedly shown up throughout Israel's history. John lifts up his voice, entreating people to make an about-face from the things that keep them from God, and move toward the new thing God is doing. He invites people to dip their weary bodies into the river, wade into mystery, and to tell the truth—taking on a posture of confession and surrender.

This eccentric man wears the clothes and eats the food of one living at the mercy of the land. His embodiment is that of an outcast, defined by common elements—camel hair, locusts, and honey. This is the one entrusted with introducing the world to God's incarnate self. John's cries bring the powerful to the edges of society where Jesus would spend his life and ministry. John points us to where God is to be found—in the wilderness, at the margins of power, at the periphery of looming, destructive systems, where the waters of Baptism ripple and swirl, where grace is abundant and God draws near. I drew John at one with the wilderness. His shape is hardly distinguished from the powdery textures and deep, cool colors of the waters of the Jordan. He is at one with the wonder and mystery of the coming Messiah. He holds out his hand, inviting the viewer to choose trust and dive fully into the unknown.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Flourish | Hannah Garrity

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16TH

READ LUKE 1:46B-55

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

Somehow, Mary is thankful. How is she doing that? How can she genuinely appreciate her situation? Her perspective amazes me.

Carrying a baby is difficult even in the best of circumstances. The physical and psychological weight grows quickly. Society changes its view of you, you change your view of yourself. Like Advent, it is a time of waiting. It is also a time of anticipation, dread, concern, excitement, pain, fear, and confusion.

Mary is carrying a child out of wedlock. Her fiancé is considering leaving her. She has nothing but her word to explain this circumstance to him, to her family, to her community. All of the typical and difficult pregnancy feelings must have been multiplied, yet Mary is thankful.

In this painting, I cast Mary's hands in a ballerina's dance. She reaches up in prayer, in praise. She reaches up to glorify our God. She reaches up in thanks for the most challenging thing she has possibly ever had to deal with.

Should I be counting my challenges as well as my blessings? Should I be glorifying God for the pain in life as well as the joy? Perhaps, I should.

PRAYER

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

A Dance | Hannah Garrity

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13TH

READ PSALM 72:1-7, 18-19

FROM THE ARTIST | HANNAH GARRITY

The psalmist prays for wisdom for his leader, King Solomon. The leadership actions are specified: "defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor" (Psalm 72:4). The psalmist contends that these actions of righteousness create peace for the nation. In a poetic rejoinder, the psalmist imagines this form of leadership as nourishment that will cause the people to flourish.

God bless our elected officials. May they defend the poor, deliver the needy, and crush the oppressor. Thus our people will flourish.

Leadership is an opportunity to be aware of the needs of your people, to focus on the overall group goals, and to engage people in meaningful work; thereafter, if needed, comes the enforcement of rules, the compliance. Author Daniel Pink argues that engagement before compliance is the order that humans will best respond to.

In my classroom, I explored this idea last school year. As the year progressed, I found that the more I focused on engagement first, the less time I spent on compliance. This year, my students needed more support than the year before. No matter what I did, the room was most productive if I had personally checked in with every child in the class. Once I had done that, the confidence level rose palpably and a hum of productivity ensued.

In this coloring page I have expressed this poetic idea of the intangible measures we hope for in our leaders. Rain falls and grass grows, nourished in the endlessness of the cyclical day, the sun and moon.

God bless our elected officials. May they defend the poor, deliver the needy, and crush the oppressor, that our people may flourish.

PRAYER

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14TH

SABBATH CAN'T WAIT

What *can* wait? On this day of Sabbath, identify one thing in your life that feels urgent but can actually wait in order for you to rest. Commit to one of the activities below, or spend time doing something else that centers and recharges you.

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Try cooking or baking with a new recipe.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Dance or play music.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Take a nap.
- Draw or create something.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Play a board game with friends or family.
- Read a book.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15TH

DELIGHT (JOY) CAN'T WAIT

Carve out time today for prayer and quiet contemplation. Read this poem as part of your devotional time.

I have seen Joy face to face.
She was dancing.
She took my arm in the crook of hers
And spun me around until I couldn't help but laugh.
We met in the kitchen with Motown
And then again at your wedding.

And I ran into Joy in my mother's recipe box.
Her handwriting looked like my grandmother's.
And she smelled like our famous chocolate cake.

Once I saw Joy in the street.
She was at the parade.
There was glitter in the air
And a father hugged his son.
Joy cried happy tears.

And I have seen Joy on the loose,
Running to keep up with you as you go.
Did you know that Joy is looking for you?

I know that your heart hurts,
And that you're not sure if you like yourself.
I know that this world is scary
And I know that love can feel fleeting.
But Joy told me to tell you—she's at the door.
She delights in who you are.
She's inviting you to dance.
I pray and pray you'll let her in.
I pray, and pray, and pray.

Prayer by Sarah Are