

The Isaiah Poems

Isaiah 35:1-10 | Advent 2016

Session 3: Treasure Hidden in Plain Sight

PREPARING THE SPACE

You may wish to create an "alter-table" with a purple or blue cloth, a candle, and a picture of a desert in bloom, or place a Christmas bell or other symbol of joy.

WELCOME & LIGHTING A CANDLE

As you light the candle say:

*"Break forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light!
And usher in this time of confidence and joy."*

(Adapted from words by Johan Rist)

Let us enjoy the light! Take a few moments of silence.

CIRCLE TIME

This is a time for all participants to "check in." There is no cross talk or discussion. Start with yourself and then go around the circle.

As you get ready for Christmas, briefly share one tradition that brings you joy.

You might also want to invite the group to share any experiences with their practice of "Stop. Look. Pay Attention" from last week.

THE POEM OF THE PROPHET

Read Isaiah 35:1-10, and leave a moment of silence.

As you read it a second time, invite the group to notice their energy and what they feel as they listen to the images. Are you drawn to one particular image?

You might want to go around the circle and invite participants to share the image they felt drawn to. It is not a time for long conversation; just the image quietly dropped into the centre of the circle.

PLANNING YOUR SESSION

Gather items to help create your space.

You will need a Bible.

Make copies of Participant Sheet #3. It has the Entry Points to be read during the session.

You will need photographs, Christmas cards or pictures cut from magazines for the Visio Divina (Sacred Seeing) practice.

The directions for leading Visio Divina are included on pg. 3. If you think participants might like a copy, it is also in the Supplemental Resources.

If your group enjoys singing then choose a chant/song for beginning or at the end.

You might want to consider with the group if they want to have time to share tea/coffee and Christmas cookies or cake at the end of the next session. Keep it simple!

The session is designed for one hour but you can adapt for a shorter or longer time.

ENTRY POINTS

See the Participant Sheet #3 for the Entry Points. Invite the group to read the Entry Points silently or by taking turns reading aloud.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR PROMPTS FOR JOURNALLING

These questions have no right or wrong answers. It is important to stress this with the group. The questions help start a conversation. Use as many as you like or ask participants what questions they have and discuss possible responses.

1. So many things happened to the People of God in the wilderness. As a group, recall as many stories as you can of the wilderness experiences. What are some reasons Isaiah might choose the wilderness as his setting for this vision. What makes the wilderness a place of transformation?
2. Are there ways that "wilderness" is an image for your spiritual journey? For your congregation?
3. You can almost taste the longing in this poem-vision. Where do you hear creation longing for wholeness? Take time to imagine the shape of longing or yearning in your life or in the life of your community of faith. What promise is this poem offering?
4. Isaiah also promises joy in this place. What is joy?
5. This poem also explores themes of wholeness (salvation) and transformation. Can you think of stories where joy is the product of transformation?
6. What are some practices that help us open to joy? What are some postures that help us invite joy, even when there is little or no joy?

A PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK: VISIO DIVINA (SACRED SEEING)

Review this Prayer Practice with the group. You might want to say something like this:

Visio Divina (Sacred Seeing) is based on an ancient spiritual practice. It uses familiar pictures to help us see that of God, often hidden in plain sight.

Suggest the participants to use the photograph, Christmas card or art they brought. (Have extra for those who forgot.) Invite the group to sit quietly holding their picture while you lead them through the process of Visio Divina. (See the Visio Divina sheet on page 3. It is also in the Supplement Resources.)

BLESSING

Invite participants to stand in a circle. You may want to end with a chant/Advent carol. If yours is not a singing group, you might want to close with these words:

*"From Joy I came,
For joy I live,
And in Thy sacred joy
I shall melt again." - (unknown)*

Extinguish Candle

Leave with Light lingering about you and know that God is always coming into the world.

Visio Divina – The Practice of Sacred Seeing

The practice of Visio Divina (Latin for divine seeing) is a prayer practice that creates space to listen and pay attention to the Holy in our lives. Based on the 6th century monastic practice of Lectio Divina where the object of prayer is a passage of scripture. In Visio Divina we invite Spirit to speak through images.

Get Ready: Take a few moments to get ready. Find a comfortable position where you can gaze at the photograph. Settle into God's presence by connecting with your breath. Move your awareness from your head into your heart. Know that God can be known through many different forms and images. Be present. Be open.

Eyes to See: Allow your eyes to gaze gently on your image. Let them sweep the whole of the picture. Notice the shapes and the colours. Notice the lines and the details. Look for symbols.

Notice if there is a place on the image where your eye is invited to linger. Are you called back again and again to a certain detail or colour? Try not to think about it too much. Simply notice where your energy is drawn. Notice where your eye is avoiding or passing over. What part inspires you? Where do you experience resistance?

Slowly become aware of the place on the image that is just for you today. It might be a colour, a shape, or a tiny detail. Linger here. Be open and present to this.

Open Heart: Take a second longer look. Open your imagination. As you reflect on your place on the image, what feelings or longings are evoked? What memories or hopes are stirred? Make room within your heart for whatever wants to emerge.

Be here. Be present. Let go of judging or critiquing. Simply be, lingering here, opening your heart to whatever wants to rise.

Respond: Slowly begin to notice what is being revealed in your seeing and through what you are feeling. What is the invitation in this moment of your life? In the day-to-day life you are living what is God calling you to do or be? What insights have you gained? What invitation is growing in you? What work would you like to do today?

Enjoy: Let go. Rest. Enjoy a few moments of stillness in this space.

You may want to spend time reflecting on your experience or writing in your journal.