

## Advent December 12, 2020 - Fasting and Prayer

The purpose of Advent is to prepare ourselves to celebrate Jesus' birth, to spend time thinking about Jesus as our redeemer, and to find solace in the fact that God came to dwell with us and will make all things new in the end. During Advent, the ancient church would spend time fasting and praying. Often, this time was used to pray and fast for those who were preparing to be baptized. The following guide is to be used with that purpose in mind. The Elders are inviting you to spend the day praying for someone you love and care for.

**Matthew** 17:1 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There **he was transfigured before them**. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!**" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

**6:00am** In Luke's account of this story, he tells us that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray. The transfiguration is a powerful moment where Jesus allows his closest disciples to see him in his glory. We should not read past the connection between the act of Jesus praying and his transfiguration. In 2 Peter 1:4, Peter tells us that we are participants in the Divine Nature. This means that we are also in the process of being transfigured – our true identities in Christ are being revealed. This process begins with prayer. **Sit quietly. Imagine yourself on the mountain with Jesus. Write down what you think your first reaction would have been. Spend time worshipping Jesus as you consider his glory. (Ideas: Tell him who he is. Take a walk and thank him for his creation.)**

**8:00am** "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*" We listen to a lot of different voices: the news, sports radio, friends, pastors, parents, etc. However, the Father's instruction to listen to Jesus should put a dramatic pause on all the other voices in our life. Advent, in many ways, is the collective church echoing this instruction from the Father. We all need to listen to Jesus. One of the ways we recenter ourselves on Jesus is by prayer and fasting. **Take a few moments and, if possible, lie down on the floor and just listen for the voice of Jesus.**

**10:00am** Once the disciples heard the voice of the Father, they were afraid. As you begin praying, tell Jesus clearly what causes you fear. **If it would be helpful, write them down.**

**Mark** 9:14 When they came to **the other disciples**, they saw a large crowd around them and the **teachers of the law arguing with them**. 15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were *overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him*. 16 "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. 17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." 19 "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

**12:00pm** Like the disciples, we all try to fix the problems of other people on our own and often end up in arguments and unproductive conversations. Consider and pray: **Who are you trying to fix? What do you want to change in people that just won't change?**

**2:00pm** In this passage, the man who has brought his son to be healed clearly expresses the problem to Jesus. **Lay out before Jesus the burdens and struggles** of the person/people you have been desperately trying to fix/help/heal on your own. **Ask him to intervene.**

**4:00pm** Jesus is upset by the unbelief of the people, including his disciples. Our attempt to fix/help/heal other people is a demonstration of our unbelief in the power of Jesus and the power of prayer. **Write out a confession of the ways that you have tried to fix/help/heal other people for your own benefit. Confess the ways that you have tried to help others change by your own power instead of God's.**

**Mark** 9:20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. 28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

**6:00pm** When questioned about why the disciples were unable to cast out this demon, Jesus answers that this could only be done by prayer. Our longing as followers of Jesus is to draw near to God and see those we love draw near to God. Jesus clearly indicates that this only happens through the process of prayer. **Spend time praying for the people you love.**

**8:00pm** In this particular story, a spiritual force is clearly at work in the boy's life. During the day of fasting and prayer in September, we focused on the armor of God (Ephesians 6). God continues to invite us as a community to seriously consider the spiritual battle underway in the lives of people around us. Consider and pray: **What are some ways that you can arrange your schedule in the coming weeks to regularly practice putting on the armor of God and to spend additional time in prayer?**

**10:00pm** Re-read Matthew 17:1-8. Following this day of prayer and fasting, what stands out to you? Spend a minute praying through it once more before you go to bed.