

## Scriptures/Messages

### October - December

In the First Word for October 6 (which is World Communion Sunday!), Luke 17:1-4 starts with Jesus being emphatic, even threatening to any who would harm others, particularly the “little ones”. But after this, Jesus moves in a different direction, encouraging us to be a people richly capable of forgiveness. ***“Stretching to Stay United”*** might be the title of verses 3 and 4. The four verses paint a picture of where boundaries should be absolutely firm and where they should be fluid. How are your boundaries? Firm where they need to be? Fluid where they need to be? How do we best balance both?

In the First Word for October 13, we see Jesus as healer. Luke 17:11-19 also shows us the various ways people respond to that healing. ***“How the Best Healings Finish”*** is with thanks. in the Greek this passage is curious. Basically, words for healing improve across the reading, with the best one (“well” or “whole” coming at the end from being thankful/grateful. On this, the third of four celebration events for our church’s 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Schuyler Rhodes, our District Superintendent will be with us on Sunday!

In the First Word for October 20, Jesus in Luke 18:1-8 seems to be saying ***“Go After It”*** in our prayers. Jesus encourages us to go after whatever goodness is needed in our lives Because we can count on God being good. All of us know prayers that are answered and prayers that seem not to be. But Jesus calls us here to consider the goodness of the One we pray to.

In the First Word for October 27, from Luke 18:9-14 we are reminded that ***“We Are Similar”***. In this story, Jesus paints a vivid picture of a person who sees himself as better than others. Instead Jesus teaches it is better to know ourselves honestly as wounded like everyone else. This is honest self-awareness and brings us into a truer and better relationship with God and with our human family.

In the First Word for November 3, Luke 19:1-10 calls for a ***“Letting Go”***. Jesus sees genuine change in someone and celebrates it. We all see people, famous and not, in light of who they were. Jesus invites us to see people beyond their past and for who they are NOW, and for who they may yet become. Otherwise we’re ALL in trouble! Poignantly, this is the week the church celebrates All Saints Sunday, for those who have gone before us.

In the First Word for November 10, Luke 20:27-38 raises an interesting question that could be titled ***“How Much Better”***. Jesus seems to be saying the way spouses will be united after this life will be better than any of the ways we can be united now!! This story begins with a salacious challenge from the Sadducees from a cultural practice in that day that can seem bazaar to us now. Jesus turns it around and makes his proclamation that life after this one will be so different, so much better, that we haven’t even got imaginations enough to conceive of it. We can trust our future selves to God with confidence.

In the First Word for November 17, Luke 21:5-19 contains an odd message of Jesus in the Gospels. In his time, there was a form of storytelling called “apocalyptic”. It is built around haunting and threatening imagery, quite like horror storytelling in our time. But here, you’ll notice that Jesus slips into his version of the style words like “Don’t go after the doomsayers” and “Don’t be terrified”. This a “No Fear Here” version of a fearful picture. “I will give you words and a wisdom”. So, whatever happens, we don’t need to try to read tea leaves, and more importantly, God will never forsake us. Trust, Hope, and Don’t be afraid! This Sunday, our Bishop Minerva Carcaño will be with us for the culmination of our 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a congregation!

In the First Word for November 24, we get a good reminder as we head into Thanksgiving Sunday. In John 6:25-35, we’re reminded that the bread (or turkey) we eat, the “stuff” of our lives, can’t be what we focus our work on. Do good. See the Jesus in the meal. See the *more* in the stuff. Then the story moves to the promise that God is giving us great goodness in the bread. May you see Jesus in all you encounter this Thanks Season.

In the First Word for December 1, the First Day of Advent, we get Matthew’s version of Jesus’ apocalyptic teaching in 24:36-44. Jesus’ advice? “Hope”! Don’t be a doomsday looker. Do good all the time. Then doomsdays are never a worry of yours!

In the First Word for December 8, we get a John the Baptist view of Jesus’ coming. Matthew 3:1-120 cries out 2,000 years later, Bear Fruit! This is a great calling for us to remember in the Christmas season. The gifts aren’t all about us. Hopefully they convey God’s love while moving us out to be God’s love in the world. This is true to the Jewish emphasis on “Peace” as *shalom*, of living in right, honorable, caring relationships, not just as an absence of conflict.

In our First Word for December 15, Matthew 11:2-6 sings “Joy!” Jesus says the kin-dom of God has arrived. They don’t have to look further. Rejoice that Goodness is on the march. And we get to be a part of it!

In our First Word for December 22, Matthew 1:18-25 gives Jesus the title “Emmanuel”, *God with us*. Not just *FOR* us. Here. Now. Take time to breathe in the presence of God in this fast-moving season.

December 24, Luke 2:1-14 (15-20) John 1:1-14

In the First Word for December 29, Matthew 2:13-23 reminds us that the coming of God’s gift into the world is often met with hostility. And horrible things can result. This is the other side of our story. The Great Gift is with us. And we must anticipate that sometimes that is demanding in a way that others, even sometimes we ourselves would rather it not be here! It’s a New Year upon us. The gift of God is great. Bless you this end of year and New Beginning!