HELLO

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Hello Advent

Writings compiled from Sunday2Monday.blog by Starla Smith

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Advent is coming... Dec 1

This time of year, always calls me to come away to quiet. Every year, I hear myself say the same thing, "If the leaves and flowers and all the living things around us in nature prune back, go dormant, and hide away for the winter. Why do we run, hustle more, and run at an unsustainable pace? Why can't we also slow and hide away?" Why does it take pandemics, death, pain, sorrow to slow us down?

I hope we leaned into the slow...

Advent reminds me that God split history into two seasons. When Jesus came in the flesh, His birth commemorated the close of what was the old season called the Old Covenant and His birth began the rejoicing of all creation to God, who gives us a new season called the New Covenant. That birth came after a time of anticipation. Each day Mary's womb slowly swelling and little movements were felt from within.

Now, we have been gifted the beauty of each day becoming a new day. Each week being ripe with the hope of new life. Each year kissed with the anticipation of a new season.

Advent is one of the ways that I like to prepare for a new year, the season is just full of anticipation for what is in store. It's time to look to the coming One, Lord, what do you want to do in the new season of my life.

For now, we listen...



Enter into Advent. A place of hope that slowly starts to rise as we walk this journey calmly like watching the morning sunrise. As it peeks above the horizon the day becomes full of what could be.

Slowly...Gently... Moving deeper with Him into Advent. We try so hard to push and shove each day, each week, each year ahead. Making our own way. Heaven forbid that anyone get in the way. We jump after others with our blunt ax tongues, chopping off hearts and hands reaching out. Father, forgive us we know not what we do.

Is it not in all the lifeless places that we need resurrection and promise of new life? We must call those things that are not as though they were...

Heart be holy!

Hands be help!

Head be filled with heaven! ... and in that moment hope will arise, and faith will make a way.

Slow down...Enter the quiet. Let your heart rejoice, "The Lord will restore me."

The Son of Heaven will arise in our hearts, that moment of humility comes to pass from my lips to my ears. It is there that I see God.

Advent I see the COMING of the SON into my world. Make room this season to encounter Christ in a more intentional way.

Micah 7:7 But I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.

See - Week 1

See the coming of Christ in the midst of the Christmas season. See more than just the pretty lights, trees, and things we can get. But rather to see Christ and to see each other. Where is Christ coming? Can you see Him? Can you hear Him?

See...hear...out from the quiet: how He has made us to become His lights in a dark world.

He calls us daily to love others when they are unlovely, not ugly or repelling, but absent of walking in faith or walking of love. We live with a daily tripping and spinning of anger, worry, doubt, joyless – un-love-liness...

Look behind the words, behind the eyes. Find the tiniest of lights that peek through the folds of the flesh. See the image of Christ there in between the bends and twists.

John 12:46 I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.

Love the unlovely. Every one of them a brother or sister. Humankind we are. Broken, messed up, and all of us in need of the coming of the Christ. Maybe you can be "the more than just decorations" to someone else's Christmas season. Be light, those that shine through the darkness!

What kind of unlovely causes you to hide your light?

Coming - Week 1

Christ opens my eyes to see His light enter into my world. Isaiah promised that people that walked in darkness would see a great light. We live on the other side of that promise.

For all these years, I've been walking with Him, I am still learning to keep my gaze fixed on Him. Honing my eyes away from the distractions that will potentially chain me. I try to be more focused on submitting to His every prompting. Me, chasing hard, after the One who has already been chasing me. His love finds me when I am lost in some dark alley and valley of the heart. When I am off track and lost this God seeks me out. He goes to wherever I might be and doesn't give up until He has found me. He shows up and turns on the light in the places in me that drool for attraction and attention. The places that cave and crave other things more than Him. Those places ...

Those dark corners of the soul...that is where Jesus wants to shine His light.

At the coming of Christ, we no longer have to live in darkness! That's the promise and yet we still feel the shadows of darkness lurking all about us. One day He will return, and the darkness will be no more.

Isaiah 60:19 The Lord will be our Everlasting Light.

What does your soul drool, cave, and crave?

Broken - Dec 8

He knew He would come to suffer.

He came to be born anyway into this suffering dark world. Cries of ache and broken hearts, all lost and tossed in darkness, have called across the centuries awaiting the savior. The suffering King... the One promised to come to save us.

He would be broken for us, so that we could break out of darkness & walk into His light.

The gift He came to bring us, that when we speak simple words -Papa....Abba....Help!

He would scoop us up in arms of love. See Him there, the One who is called the suffering King. He who cries with us. He who walks with us and talks with us even when we are deaf and dumb. He who comes close to us even though we can't see Him when we are blinded by our ache and pain.

He never leaves us or forsakes us. By faith, we know this – we feel His heart tearing with us and when this flood of tears is done, He brings His favor and writes goodness among the pain of our pages for us to read and reread for generations.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

What's breaking your heart this season?

Blessed-Week 2

The blessings are many that His hand have given. These blessings like promises have uprooted me from a world I was dying in and planting me in good ground. I've landed and planted right upon the Rock called Christ.

BLESSED He has called me.

Long ago God called to Abraham to come and follow Him to a land that He would show him. The Lord promised, "I will make you a blessing, I will bless those who bless you."

This give and take, this ebb and flow, this blessing and being blessed, isn't it a turn and returning. This world has a way of walking us right away from our God and leading us down dark and hollow paths.

As we've traveled, the Lord has places off ramps to turn off and return to Him all along the way.

Acts 3:19 Repent, turn back that your sins be blotted out, that a time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. And He may send the Christ appointed for you – Jesus!

Keep returning to Him... His promises do not fail.

In what ways do you need to return to the Lord?

Laugh - Week 2

I am a serious-minded person and if I am not careful, I can get too serious and suck the life out of myself and everything.

I remember when the pastor several years back would call me out for not laughing, or crying for that matter, when he would tell jokes and stories. I was often stuck in the serious zone. See, I must keep joy present and so must you!

The joy of the Lord is our strength. If it's not - you know the type - we become those who are wearing angry eyebrows and all, like Bert on Sesame Street. Over the years the Lord has taught me to laugh, to enjoy in life, and enjoy those in it with me. I found my silly bone when I led the youth group. Laugher is goodness to us.

Laughing takes the worry out, washes it clean away. Worry pulls the face to the ground; joy raises it up to the heavens. Rejoice!

This silly wild in me is a thing I hid and didn't reveal outside my own home and to close family. I remember it being there as a small child but as I grew, I struggled, and I still struggle at time to find the joy – Lord, teach us to laugh even more!

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

How is your ability to laugh and find joy in this season?

Un-Ask-Able - Dec 15

Glen Packingham said, "God spoke into a pagan culture to a man who heard His voice in a way that was understandable for him in a culture of human sacrifice and appeasing the god's above." At long last, I see God wasn't asking for the un-askable when He asked Abraham to bring his son up to the mountain. He was showing Abraham how He is the giver. He provided Abraham with a ram in the thicket. He was expressing to this man, in this culture that He is a provider and wholly different than other gods.

The world is always after our un-ask-ables. It desires to take from us everything that is dear.

This world barrels down on us to work harder and make more money. Stealing our time from our family. It calls us to be more efficient and get more out of your day, so we push and push, raising our blood pressure, just to pass the test and trial, half dying in the process either by body or soul. The whole world is geared like that. Every where we turn there is another article or link to click:

- How to get a cleaner home in 7 days
- How to organize and thrive
- How to be more. (can you imaging...)
- How to be more ???

But...hasn't the more already been provided. He is the more that we seek and when I seek Him – I find rest for my weary ways. He gives me grace for all the gaps in my life.

Colossians 1:17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

What is calling you to give more and more in this season?

Stairway- Week 3

Jacob saw a stairway from earth to heaven in a dream. He saw the angels going up and down the stairway. This picture that Jacob saw was of a person who would bridge the whole span of the universe to get to you and me.

Can you imagine being shown such wonder and grace?

Everyday God has beauty built into the creation of life to cause us to pause and see what He is doing in the world. Things like little faces that smile and stop me still, just so I can look long. Birds in the air flying in sync that cause me to stop and awe at how perfectly they move together. Mist on the water that is icing over, as it pulses a sense of wonder in my veins.

In those places the curtain that covered my eyes are lifted, and every moment glistens with grace, and I stop trying to build my own stairway and let Jesus be my bridge. He became the stairway to take me like an escalator up into the heavens.

I dont have to work my way up to heaven. I just have to be still, and He takes me on from glory to glory.

John 1:51 I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.

What beauty have you seen lately to remind you of that glory?

Work it out - Week 3

Have you ever noticed that the people & the things that try your heart the most are the very people and things that cause you to grow in patience the most, if only, we would choose to rest in the perfect test and choose peace?

When life hits us hard it's easy to think that we've been forsaken and birthed for the burden until we see Him lacing love, kindness, and goodness like a beautiful patch work quilt. Often that sight comes in hindsight.

In the meantime, we must walk by faith and not by sight. This walk is a journey to be experienced with Him by our side. Sometimes He walks along silently. Sometimes He has much to say. But through it all He is the One who holds us up on the inside, so that, we understand it will all work out for GOOD because that's what He does! That is how He Fathers.

God takes what is intended to tear us apart and uses it to where we belong.

Genesis 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good.

How are the pieces of your life falling together for good? Can you see it?

Chase - Dec 22

GOD CHASED US FIRST.

David was a man after God's own heart and was a complete mess, but God called him blessed and loved him.

I think that is what we are all after, don't you? To be loved! Brokenflawed.....messed up and missing the mark. That is me. Yet, He loves.

Everyday we live distracted lives, attracted to things that feel good, and pay fast. Our affections float after just about anything. And yet, He loves.

Everyday we fail like this and He endured the cross to make a way for us to always be able to turn around and say "Father, help me! I want to love you. I am scared. I am sorry I ran away, again!" And every time God sees His Son in us and says, "come here, my love, come away with me."

Knowing we would chase everything but Him. He still chased us first.

Psalm 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What are you chasing after? Again and again, it's time to stop running?

Carried - Week 4

God carried the cross for those with broken reputation, those with marred and jaded pasts, and scoops us up in his arms and pours the oil of love over us. He fills every crack with the divine, "Grace, Grace, God's Grace, Grace that is greater than all my sins!"

He gives us new words to speak, "I was wretched but now made whole."

Have you ever felt that?
Knowing your past...
or knowing your now...
and He still comes for the most broken, the vilest, the most lost

Still, He comes!

The burden we bear, this heavy weight of what we have done, of where we have been. He carried it!

Colossians 2:13-14 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

What weights and burdens have you been carrying? Simply give them over to Him in prayer.

Incidents - Week 4

I can be just as blind as anyone else missing the goodness and joy that is happening all around me. I am so thankful for those who have chosen to walk with me and not let me forget. This beauty Christ brought us. This glorious gift of community. These are those who love me even when I am blind. These each displaying a different gift and grace of opening my eyes.

When I feel my life getting behind and it flusters me. When the cold wants to squeeze the joy of the season out for me. When clutter chokes me out and creates a sense of overwhelm. It is right there that it just so happens, right when running my errands, I see the birds. The little birds all flitting about in the light dusting of snow or the barren brown picking up little bits of this and that – a picture of provision.

God is in the incidents where everything just works out. It is there that I can breath deep. I remember that I have no need for stress or fuss. God has me.

Matt. 6:26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Incidents

Matt 6:33-34 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

He's surrounded me with His people of love and it's all good. Especially when I stop fighting it all. God is at work, every day at work, in your "little things." He is behind all the details of our lives -interested and engaged! He cares about what you cry about. The trouble comes when we care more about crying than we care to see His care that comes when we are crying. We fail to see His love coming... coming... never ceasing ... for us.

Do you see it?

Listen - Week 4

We need a washing of eyes. I need this washing of eyes. We are not to live by what we see but rather to walk in faith. Did you hear? Walk in faith. It's there we see the Love...the joy... the good. Him everywhere! We need the sight that He has in His eyes. Have you ever judged a book by its cover and passed it right by. I have, decided right there on the spot that I most likely would like to read that book based on if the cover has good coloring or symmetrical head lining. I judge the appearance. It's no different with people. I know we are all like this! We say we are not judgmental, but we are and the only out is to be constantly reminding ourselves of Christ who chose to take the judgment I deserved. He did that to be with me despite that face that I totally deserve to be judged for the things I've done. So, I must lay down my gavel and humble my heart. Instead of only hearing what people say and not understanding why they say it. Instead of reacting to the tone or the expectation I fear it there in the words. I must learn to hear the heart of what is said. That is not easy to do. I don't score high on mercy. I have to work at empathy and compassion. I have to make a real effort to slow those calculations and analyzation.

I have had to learn to bend my ear because I trip when weighing the words, the tone, the punctuation, looking for meaning. I have to drag my heart to the cross to curb the natural path in me, so I can hear the heart under and beneath the words.

Listen

It is at times, quite a chore. Underneath, and well below the surface, I want to know the hearts of those around me. I want to understand them and care for them. I want fresh eyes and ears to hear and see like Christ this Christmas. I want my life to be about the deeper things, not living by the fear of what another thinks or what it looks like. I want to live by what it isGOD in YOU -God at work in you. I want to love in action.

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love..

What words, tones, and feared expectation have you been tripping over this season?

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Advent is always a wonderful way to keep Christ close during a wild and busy time of year. I hope you were able to slow down, let the Lord lead your pace, turn and return while encountering His presence.

Thank you for reading and studying along with me.
- Starla

"In the silence of a midwinter dusk, there is a sound so faint that for all you can tell it may be only the sound of the silence itself. You hold your breath to listen. You are aware of the beating of your heart. The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment."

~Frederick Buechner

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