

Session 1: God With Us

Session 1: God with Us

Stillness

We usually prepare for an important meeting or conversation by focussing our mind and body so that we can be fully present. At the beginning of each session we will suggest a stillness exercise and lead you through it. We begin today by inviting you to notice your breathing, the rhythm of it and the feel and sound of each breath as you inhale and exhale. With each in-breath, allow yourself to focus on the here and now. With each out-breath let go of any tension or concern you may feel other than being here, still, in this space. John's Gospel tells us that God is with us. God is here now, waiting to fill you with grace and peace.

The reading for today's session is from the Gospel of John.

Reading (John 1:1-14)

Reflect

During this year of pandemic, many of us have found ourselves distanced from the things that anchor us to who we are, or thought we were. Familiar patterns of life have changed: in our relationships, our work and our leisure. Who or what gives us a sense of who we are in such times? Who can break through the loneliness and isolation, the anxiety and the uncertainty? The name Emmanuel means God is with us. That's who God is – the one who is always with us; the God who is near to us, no matter what. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

John tells us that, from the very beginning, God's deepest nature and identity is to be word, life and light. This is who God is and God wants to share that nature and identity with us. God wants to speak, to be in relationship with us. God wants to breathe life into us and into the whole of creation. God is in my life and God is my life. There is no darkness in God. Nothing in my life or in the world can ever be stronger than God's love, shining through Jesus. Anyone who accepts the Word made flesh receives power to become the child of a God who is patient and gracious, waiting for us to accept the gift of grace and truth, offered freely and without condition.

The prologue to John's Gospel tells us that we have a choice: to accept the Word made flesh or not. All the stories we hear during Advent show God offering the gift of his presence. Mary, Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, wise men and shepherds, kings and inn-keepers, all receive the same offer. In the face of the unfamiliar we can open ourselves to the God of surprises or fall silent, reject the opportunity as threat or embrace it as gift. The choice is ours.

Talk to God

How do I feel as I hear the Gospel speak of God's plan to share our human life from the inside? How do I react to the thought of God's light, shining in the darkness? There's been a lot of uncertainty and anxiety around this year. Perhaps I've been feeling 'in the dark'. This retreat is an opportunity to share with God how that darkness has felt for me. Has anything 'come to light' that I hadn't noticed before: about me, about my life and relationships, about the world around me? I take some time to savour the words: 'light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it'.

I listen again to these words: 'He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.' What has helped me recently to recognise and accept God, present to me in my daily life? In times of trouble it can be hard to believe that God is truly with us, that we are in God's hands, come what may. Have the difficulties of this year challenged my capacity to live in faith, hope and love? Or have I found them growing in me, despite it all?

John tells us that 'to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God.' What does it mean to me to be given that power? I turn my thoughts to the many people on whom I depend: my family and friends, service workers who make my life possible, anyone I have encountered as a strength and support during the pandemic, those who have turned to me for support. What does it mean for me to see them as God's children, my brothers and sisters?

I ask God to shine the light of grace and truth into my heart, so that I can see myself and the world around me with his merciful eyes. As I enter into Advent, I name the graces that I need and desire at this time. I spend some time quietly allowing God's word to take root and become flesh in me.

O Wisdom

Lord and Ruler

Root of Jesse

Key of David

Rising Sun



King of the Nations

Emmanuel

Come, Lord Jesus