Advent’s Promise by Reverend William H. Critzman

In these Advent days, we prepare and long, we take stock and also store up. We prepare for Christmas—shopping and baking, trimming trees or smaller, apartment-sized decorations. We plan for guests, or travel. We look forward—and also brace ourselves—for time with family and friends we haven’t seen in, I don’t know, how long has it been?

We come to church. We light candles around a wreath, counting the weeks: one is for hope, two for peace, three—ahh blessed surprise!—that’s for joy, and four, four lights for love. We hear prophesies of old, wondering have they been filled, do they still hold, how will they come again this year. We anticipate a small child, an innocent one’s arrival. Sure, it is heralded by angels; it is also persecuted by a jealous ruler and protected by an overbooked yet still generous innkeeper.

Which is all to say that these days are filled with surprises, small twists that may reveal great reversals in the over-rehearsed and well-worn narratives we tell of our lives. Even now, even as we wait and watch for the coming light of the world, even now Christ comes to be in our midst. Even today, there are blessings that have not yet been known. Even this moment, God is doing a new thing. A new thing for each of us, a new thing for West End Church, a new thing for all of us.

Friends, as we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming once again of Christmas’ blessings, we are preparing for a new season in the life of West End Church. In the coming weeks, we will be conducting a church census to ensure—like in times of old—that all the church is registered, and that our records are up to date. In January, we will begin our search for a new associate minister—more on that in the coming weeks. Over the coming New Year, we will begin new programs, welcome new members, and grow together in new ways as the one church of Jesus Christ planted here on the corner of 77th Street and West End Avenue.

And yet, even in this season of preparation and longing, let us not get ahead of ourselves, nor take anything for granted. Instead, may we look for the blessings of surprise that come in the ordinary moments of making plans and hoping for the days ahead. May this poem by the 13th century Sufi poet, Rumi, be an Advent blessing to you, a blessing for this and every new day.

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

With Advent’s promise of peace, hope, joy, and love,
Pastor Will
**A Few Thoughts About Confession by Pastor Howard**

“What is the most meaningful part of the service?” I’ve polled people. More than a few said it was the prayer of confession. I was surprised because in our time the prayer of confession is often thought of as negative, a guilt trip and a downer.

Yet as one person said, “It gives me fresh start to the new week”. And another, “It’s feels like a good soul cleansing.” And, “It forces me to look honestly at myself.”

For me, far from being negative, the prayer of confession is a wonderfully positive statement that we human beings, unlike other creatures (as far as we know) are gifted with consciences. We know right from wrong—a God-like knowledge.

Speaking of positive, always coupled with the confession is an assurance of forgiveness. The two are inseparable. The Apostles’ Creed, featured so prominently at the front of our sanctuary, doesn’t say “We believe in sin. Period.” but “We believe in the forgiveness of sins.” Great news, isn’t it?

I like Anne Lamott’s summary of prayer as “Help,” “Thanks,” and “Wow!” But one important prayer is missing: “Sorry.”

Sin has been defined as separation from God, from others, and from our best selves. Novelist Frederick Buechner has said, “To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn’t already know. But until you confess them, they are the abyss between you and God. When you confess them, they become the Golden Gate Bridge.”

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p.s. I had low expectations. I counted on the Steinkamps, myself, and maybe two other people to turn out. I’m talking about our inaugural Second Sunday Service Project on November 11. Our service project was to make sandwiches for the NY Common Pantry. The goal (NOT set by me) was 200 sandwiches. “No, way,” I thought. The six of us will be there until midnight.

But me of little faith! Over forty kids and adults showed up to make and package what turned out to be 350 sandwiches. And we did it in less than an hour.

If you missed out on the first one, join us at our next Second Sunday Service Project on December 9th, where we will again be making sandwiches for NY Common Pantry.

If you are really feeling the spirit of service this season, join us again on Tuesday, December 11th at 6 p.m. in the Chapel where we will assemble Christmas gift bags for the all too many gift-less New Yorkers. You can register at bit.ly/HolidayHopeBags2018 or via the sign-up sheet in the back of the sanctuary. Someday, ask me how last year those bags made my Christmas one of the best ever. I can’t wait until December 11th!”
December is here and along with it some terrific musical offerings. Advent opens with the ancient morning introit set by Palestrina: *I Look from Afar* on December 2, the first Sunday of Advent.

Don’t miss our Annual Community Carol Sing-Along on Tuesday, December 11 at 7 p.m. It’s a fun-filled hour of calling out your favorite carols and singing both sacred and popular Christmas songs at full throttle. Be sure to bring the children because we’ll be singing all their top hits too, from *O Come, All Ye Faithful* to *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer*! Following the carol sing, we’ll have cider and cookies. And it's FREE.

The West End Choir and Momenta String Quartet are rehearsing for our unique Service of Poetry and Carols on Sunday, December 16 at 11:00 a.m. With readings and poems read by members of the congregation, this service is modeled after the popular Festival of Lessons and Carols, so beloved among many churches, but ours uses Christmas poetry through the ages, as well as beloved carols and anthems of the season. It’s a great way to introduce friends to the extraordinary beauty of our church and its music!

Our special West End Christmas Choir is back to sing a gorgeous piece called *This Christmastide*. Open to all adults – music reading is not required – learning materials will be supplied. We will rehearse IMMEDIATELY following the service on December 9th in the Sanctuary and immediately prior to the service on December 16th. See me after church for your copy of music or email cpowell@westendchurch.org and I'll send you a PDF and listening file.

Our Taizé services continue on Wednesdays in the sanctuary at 7 p.m. (but not on December 26 or January 2). The sanctuary is bathed in candlelight, and melodies to chant or listen to are accompanied by oboe, flute, violin and keyboard. The readings are from scripture and poetry. The service lasts about 45 minutes, and offers a chance to unwind from the hustle and bustle of New York.

Finally, the traditional Epiphany service will grace our worship on Sunday, January 6, at 11:00 a.m., with the West End Choir and Melodia Women’s Choir. Music, readings and the congregational circle of light signify Jesus’ message of peace, justice and hope to the world.

See you in church!
- Cynthia
On Moms, Church, and Holiday Stress by Rebecca Stevens-Walter

I never thought I would be saying this, but the holidays really stress me out. You see, I used to watch my mother run around and worry and stew during the holidays and I would think, that is never going to be me! But these days, I find that I’m doing the same things my mother did (and does) as we go into the Advent and Christmas season. I have wondered many times if there is a way to avoid all this stress. Even thinking about traveling to a remote tropical island gives me nightmares about airport traffic, packing too many clothes, and making sure my family also has everything they would need for the trip. No, I don’t think that stress can be totally avoided. I just think it is part of the human experience.

Moms do a lot of extra physical and emotional work this time of year. It would be too much to explain here, but the complicated nature of creating something meaningful and memorable for our children often rests on the energy and creativity of moms. So many moms wake up at 5 a.m. to set up their Elf on the Shelf shenanigans. So many moms spend hours on the internet to find the best cyber-Monday deals. So many moms are taking their children to Nutcracker rehearsals, school parties, and holiday events. So many moms are thinking ahead to the new year and wondering how they will get through 2019. So many moms are looking back at 2018 and wondering how in the world they made it to here. Indeed, moms do a lot of physical and emotional work this time of year.

How can church be a place that counters the stress and anxiety of the holidays, particularly for moms? Well, first, church can be a place where we can take a break — come, take a seat, breath, listen to beautiful music, hear a story of Christ’s love. Church can be a place to reside in the company of God’s grace and mercy as we navigate stress and anxiety. Church can be a place where we ask for prayers and receive the embrace of a community when we need it most. Church can hold the stress and anxiety and simultaneously provide hope that relief is soon to come. Church can be a place of quiet rest and needed comfort.

Let’s say a prayer for moms who might be feeling the stress and anxiety is getting to be too much:

Dear God,
We pray for moms today and for folks doing the work of moms.
We pray that moms may find adequate respite and rest during the holiday season.
We pray that the Church might be a place of comfort and relief for moms.
We pray that the work of moms be noticed, appreciated, and celebrated.
We pray that moms are able to revel in the holidays while also being able to accomplish the goals of their everyday living.
We pray that moms may enjoy many moments of magic, mystery, grace, mercy, and love during this special time of year.
We pray this in the name of Jesus having been born to a mom who no doubt understood stress and anxiety. God hear our prayer.
Amen

CONSISTORY CORNER by Andrea Steinkamp

As we enter this season of expectant waiting, it may feel as if West End already spent much of our past year in expectant waiting, and perhaps you are beginning to tire. I hope in the coming weeks you can be renewed by the promise of hope, peace, joy and love found in Advent, because hope, peace, joy and love are alive at West End!

There is energy and excitement building in our community, resulting in many ideas and much work ahead. Sometimes it can all feel overwhelming, especially when we can’t keep pace due to structural and systems deficiencies that need to be addressed before forward progress can be made.

In the two months since Pastor Will has joined us, we have worked to listen to your yearnings and evaluate and strategize how to best respond to the many and varying needs of our congregation. In doing so, we have realized there is much we still don’t know; most importantly, who makes up the body of Christ at West End today?

To that end, during the month of December we will be conducting a church census, for both members and non-members alike. We want to know who makes up your household, and how we can be in touch with you, and your birthday (so we can celebrate you!), and what is most important to you about church. To serve one another, we must know one another, and this is our first step in getting re-acquainted.

Please visit our census table at the back of the sanctuary during one of the four Sundays of Advent to be counted (consider this your own personal journey to Bethlehem!), or take a moment to update your information online at bit.ly/WECCensus2018.

Together in Christ,
Andrea Steinkamp on behalf of the Deacons and Elders of West End Collegiate Church
December 2018

2 — Intergenerational Education, 9:45 a.m.
  Worship with Communion 11 a.m.
  Congregational Lunch, 12:15 p.m.
  Wholeness Center, 1 p.m.
6 — Taste of Heaven Worship, 4 p.m.
  Taste of Heaven Meal, 4:30 p.m.
  AA, 6:30 & 7:30 p.m.
5 — Taizé, 7 p.m.
  AA, 7 & 8:15 p.m.
7 — KidSpace, 5 p.m.
  Youth Group, 7 p.m.
9 — Intergenerational Education, 9:45 a.m.
  Worship, 11 a.m.
  Second Sunday Service Project, 12:30 p.m.
  Youth Christmas Eve Planning, 12:30 p.m.
  Wholeness Center, 1 p.m.
11 — Taste of Heaven Worship, 4 p.m.
  Taste of Heaven Meal, 4:30 p.m.
  Holiday Hope Bags Service Project, 6 p.m.
  AA, 6:30 & 7:30 p.m.
  Carol Sing-Along, 7 p.m.
12 — Taizé, 7 p.m.
  AA, 7 & 8:15 p.m.
14 — KidSpace, 5 p.m.
  Youth Group, 7 p.m.
  Book Club, 7 p.m.
16 — Intergenerational Education, 9:45 a.m.
  Worship, 11 a.m.
  Social Justice Ministry, 12:30 p.m.
  Youth Christmas Eve Planning, 12:30 p.m.
  Wholeness Center, 1 p.m.
18 — Taste of Heaven Worship, 4 p.m.
  Taste of Heaven Meal, 4:30 p.m.
  AA, 6:30 & 7:30 p.m.
19 — Taizé, 7 p.m.
  AA, 7 & 8:15 p.m.
  Pub Theology, 8 p.m.
21 — No KidSpace/Youth Group
23 — Intergenerational Education, 9:45 a.m.
  Worship, 11 a.m.
  Youth Christmas Eve Planning, 12:30 p.m.
  Wholeness Center, 1 p.m.
24 — Christmas Eve Family Service, 6 p.m.
  Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, 9 p.m.
25 — Christmas Day, Church Office Closed
  No Taste of Heaven
  AA, 6:30 & 7:30 p.m.
26 — Building and Office CLOSED in observance of the Christmas Holiday
  No Taizé
  AA, 7 & 8:15 p.m.
28 — No KidSpace/Youth Group
30 — No Adult Christian Education
ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
at
WEST END COLLEGIATE CHURCH

Friday, November 30
DECK THE HALLS, 5 p.m.
Christmas Decorating Party

Sunday, December 2
ADVENT 1 - HOPE, 11 a.m.
Pastor Jes Kast’s last Sunday at West End.
Join us for worship with a reception to follow.

Sunday, December 9
ADVENT 2 - PEACE, 11 a.m.
Pastor Will is preaching Peace, a Promise.
“Second Sunday Service Opportunity” - Join us after Worship in the parlor and chapel for our monthly fellowship with a side of sandwich making in support of the NY Common Pantry.

Tuesday, December 11
Holiday Hope Bags Packing Event, 6 p.m. - Warm up for the Annual Carol Sing-Along by helping us pack Holiday Hope bags filled with winter necessities to be distributed to our Taste of Heaven Soup Kitchen attendees. This is a fantastic all ages service opportunity! Please sign up at http://bit.ly/HolidayHopeBags2018.

Annual Carol Sing-Along, 7 p.m. - A free event for all ages! Join Pastor Will, Pastor Howard, Cynthia Powell and Eric Sedgwick in a sing-along of carols and popular Christmas tunes.

Sunday, December 16
ADVENT 3 - JOY, 11 a.m.
Service of Music and Poetry with the West End Choir and the Momenta String Quartet.
A beloved service with beautiful music, guaranteed to get you into the Christmas spirit!

Sunday, December 23
ADVENT 4 - LOVE, 11 a.m.
Pastor Will is preaching “Love, the Star.”

Monday, December 24
Christmas Eve Family Service, 6 p.m.
- led by our pastors and youth.
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, 9 p.m.
Pastor Will preaching plus special music by the choir.

Tuesday, December 25
Merry Christmas!
Building and Offices closed.

Wednesday, December 26
Building and Offices closed.

Sunday, December 30
A Service of Lessons and Carols, 11 a.m.