

## Advent Series Doing Christmas – December 3, 2023

### Reflection on Personal Practices:

1. Share your own Christmas decorating traditions. How do you prepare your home for Christmas, and what decorations hold special meaning for you?

### Biblical Foundations:

#### Read: Genesis 12:6-8

<sup>6</sup> Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring<sup>a</sup> I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

<sup>8</sup> From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

#### Read: Joshua 4:1-7

<sup>4</sup> When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, <sup>2</sup> "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, <sup>3</sup> and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."

<sup>4</sup> So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, <sup>5</sup> and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, <sup>6</sup> to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>7</sup> tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

2. **Ask:** What is the significance of altars and memorials in the Bible, as seen in these two stories? What role do they play in one's faith? How do they help pass on faith?
3. **Apply:** How might Christmas decorations serve as visual reminders of God's goodness? How do specific decorations in your home remind you of the Christian message and the story of Christ?

**Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9 –**

<sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

4. **Ask:** What does this scripture add to the discussion? How did these efforts change how the Israelites related to the law of God? Do you have any visual reminders of scripture in your house?

**Read** Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it”. The advent wreath was invented by Rev. Johann Hinrich Wichern in 1839 as a teaching tool for children.

5. **Ask:** What do you think it teaches and how does this help pass on a legacy of faith?

**Read:** There are several festivals, feasts, and holy days described in the Bible such as Passover, The festival of Weeks and the Festival of Booths/Tents. These days have their own traditions attached to them and they are commanded to rejoice.

6. **Ask:** How might the preparations for these feasts help facilitate rejoicing?
7. **Ask:** How do our Christmas preparations contribute to our eventual rejoicing? How might environmental factors like decorations refresh your heart and increase your joy?

**Read** this quote from Methodist Pastor Eric Scott

**Decorate your life with Hope.** Tutor a young child or plant a tree. Those are hopeful acts. They display confidence in a future God will provide. Decorate your life with Hope.

**Decorate your life with Peace.** Give a telephone call to someone with whom you have been estranged. Share a plate of cookies with the meanest neighbor on the block. Those actions fulfill our calling to be peacemakers. Decorate your life with Peace.

**Decorate your life with Joy.** Join a group of Christmas carolers. Take a poinsettia to someone in the hospital or a nursing home. Do something—anything—that adds a little more beauty to this already beautiful world God has put into our hands. Decorate your life with Joy.

**Decorate your life with Love.** Give up a precious Saturday and donate your time to building a Habitat for Humanity house. Visit a lonely neighbor. Those kinds of sacrificial actions echo the sacrificial love of God through Jesus Christ. Decorate your life with Love.

**Discuss:**

8. What do you think of the idea of decorating your life as described above? How would that honor Christ?
  
9. Which idea do you most resonate with?

**Close in Prayer**