



* deepening * exalting * gathering * stretching *

“The Work of Christmas by an Easter People”

**A message to the United Parish Congregation
from Vision Team 2**

*Deepening your relationship with God,
each other, and our community*

The Work of Christmas by an Easter People

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” I Thessalonians 5:16-18

These are the words of Paul found in his letter to the church in Thessalonica. We can think of this passage as guidance as to what will sustain us to do the “work of Christmas” we heard about in the worship service last week. To be the light of Christmas in the world, we need to pray without ceasing. **How is it possible to do that?**

The Advent small group program taught us several ways of deepening our spiritual practices – breath prayer, centering prayer, praying the hours, walking the labyrinth, lectio divina, guided meditation, and sharing with each other the road of our own personal spiritual journey. **So, what is next?**

Vision Team 2 is working on developing another small group program for Lent. But the challenge put to the Thessalonians and to us here in the United Parish is to “pray without ceasing” NOW. **So, let’s do it!**

Starting today, January 17th, and until Easter Day, on Sunday, April 4th, Vision Team 2 is inviting each member of the congregation to engage in personal spiritual deepening by Praying the Psalms. **What does this mean?**

Each day carve out a few minutes to use a Psalm as your prayer. Be creative in how you do this. You can:

- Read an entire Psalm silently or aloud to yourself
- Read an entire Psalm aloud to a friend or partner or family member
- Take a passage from a Psalm and make it into a breath prayer
- Find the essence of a Psalm and use this to be the name of God that you use in a centering prayer
- Draw a picture of the Psalm
- Sing the Psalm

Be creative and come up with other ways of approaching the Psalms in prayer. Do it one way one day and another way another day, but **do a new Psalm each day**. If you do one Psalm a day from Sunday, January 17th, through Sunday, April 4th, you will have gone through 78 Psalms and if you do two a day, you will have gone through all 150 Psalms.

Why the Psalms? Jesus, as a devout Jew, prayed the Psalms every day and went through the whole Psalter repeatedly. Jesus' disciples and the early church also prayed the Psalms repeatedly. They did so because the Psalms speak to various needs and emotions that we experience in our daily life. Prayers of gratitude, lament, confession, forgiveness, longing, fear, anger, praise, and more are contained in the Psalter. In other words, the Psalms are food for the soul.

How will we know if we've succeeded? Our hope is that by Praying the Psalms each of us becomes more aware of God's steadfast love, better able to communicate with God, more

conscious of God's presence in our lives, and spiritually fed so that we might better discern our response to God's grace and love. To gain a sense of our commitment to this effort as a congregation, there will be a poster in the Marion Street Lobby where you can put a star next to the Psalms you read during the past week. Place your stars and let's see how many points of light we will have by Easter.

"Praying unceasingly" is possible – particularly when each of us takes a few minutes and we have an entire congregation working and praying together to become an Easter People.

So, join with other members of the congregation and take up the challenge, make music in your heart, and receive God's love.

*"I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the
Lord, and greatly to be praised; God's greatness is unsearchable." Psalm
145:1-3*

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

By Howard Thurman