

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation, anticipation, adoration, and celebration. It is that time of the year when we celebrate the start of the church year. During the church year, we begin with the birth of Jesus and move to celebrate his life, death, and resurrection in the Easter Season. Then we move to the Season of Pentecost where we welcome and learn to live with the Holy Spirit. Today we start that process all over.

There is a process in everything. A process is a series of steps, or actions we take to complete something. When you get out of bed to start your day, you go through a process. I hope that process includes God. When you get to work, you go through a process. It is my prayer we include God in that process. When we travel by car, train, airplane or by bus, there is a process we follow. Even in the process of traveling, it will be good to include God.

God also has a process for guiding us to our destiny and fulfilling our purpose. In Genesis, when God wanted to save the children of Israel from hunger and starvation, he used a process that included Joseph. That process took Joseph through a pit and through a prison before he got to the palace where he became a leader in Egypt. God had a process to lead His people from Egypt to the Promised Land. That process took 40 years instead of 40 days, 40 weeks, or 40 months. God had a process to make David king of Israel. That process took David on a journey that defeated Goliath; David had to deal with the jealousy of Saul, and even live among the enemies of Israel for a while, but eventually David became king. God had a process for the Messiah to come into the world to save and redeem us. That process took about one thousand five hundred (1,500) years through the wilderness, through the time of the judges, the kings, the prophets, into exile, around the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. Some people thought it would never happen, but it did.

God's process may take us through unexpected places, but it will get us there. The key for believers is to trust God's process; we must follow God to see where he's leading us. The Advent season begins 4 Sundays before Christmas. Each Sunday we focus on a different theme. The theme for this Sunday is Hope. Hope is the expectation that something will come to pass. Hope is believing that what we see as a possibility will become a reality. Hope is expecting somebody to keep their promise. Bishop Tutu said, "Hope is being

able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness." We who follow Christ are people of hope. We believe that Jesus keeps all his promises. Isaiah 40:31 says, "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint." We are a people of hope and because we place our hope in God, we will not be disappointed.

Psalm 25 is reminding us to trust God's process. David wrote this psalm. We know David was anointed to serve as the king of Israel after Saul. But we know the journey to become the king of Israel was not a smooth one. Saul tried to kill David several times. Even when he was on the run, it was not always easy to live in safety. He even pretended to be crazy one time in 1 Samuel 21 when he thought the Philistines recognized him and would turn him over to Saul. After so many difficulties, David finally became King of Israel. I am sure David was thinking about his dangerous journey to the kingship that made him write Psalm 25.

What is Psalm 25:1-10 teaching us about trusting God's process? The first thing is that God's process is whole because it is holy. Verses 2 and 3 say, "I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. 3 No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause."

To say God's process is whole because it is holy means no one can do what God can do. God is God all by Himself. God cannot be compared to anything or anyone. It means God has no equal. Isaiah 46: asks us "With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?" There is no one like our God. The Bible tells us with God nothing is impossible.

God leads us to wholeness and completion. Jesus healed people and told them, "Your faith has made you whole." This means not only do you have your physical health restored, but you also have the restoration of your spiritual, emotional, and mental health. The Bible tells us we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are unique because God is unique.

Some people make the mistake of believing that Jesus is just like other religious leaders. Which religious leader created the world and continues to direct it? Which religious leader was God and took human form? Which religious leader offered Himself as a sacrifice, died, and came back from the dead? Which religious leader ascended into heaven and continues to be our sovereign Lord?

God's process is whole because it is holy. This means God does not do anything halfway. Whatever God begins, he brings to completion. Whatever God promised will come to pass. When God speaks, His Word goes forth and will not return until it accomplishes that which it was sent out to do.

We must trust God's process. Second, God's process is helpful because it is heavenly. Verses 4-6 read, "Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. 5 Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. 6 Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old." Like David, we must ask God to show us His path and guide us in His truth. God will show us the ways of heaven. That is why Jesus prayed, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We must trust God's process to guide us into the ways of heaven.

Another false belief people have is that heaven helps those who help themselves. There is nowhere in the Bible where you find that scripture. The truth is that we cannot help ourselves at all. We cannot save ourselves; we cannot redeem ourselves; we cannot overcome evil and temptations by ourselves. Paul made it clear when he wrote in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." God told Paul, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." Can we create the oxygen we breathe? Can we create blood to flow through our veins in and out of our hearts? Can we create soil to cause flowers, trees, and crops to grow?

God helps us by rescuing us from all kinds of situations, even those situations we bring on ourselves. Psalm 35:10 reads, "Who is like you, Lord? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them." If you have ever seen the painting of Christ rescuing a lamb from wicked wolves, you will understand that God rescues you and me from the dangers of this world.

The early Christians in the book of Acts were called People of the Way because they followed Jesus, the Way the Truth, and the Life. Jesus came to show us a new and heavenly way. The way of Jesus is a way that leads to forgiveness, redemption, and restoration. You and I are still People of the Way. We follow the Way of Heaven. We follow a new and better way of love, of humility, of gentleness, of kindness, and of forgiveness.

We must trust God's process. Third, God's process is hopeful because it is healing. Verses 7-10 declare, "Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. 8 Good and upright is the

Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways. 9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. 10 All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant."

Some make the mistake of thinking there is no hope for an afterlife; they say, "When you're dead, you're done." It is wrong to think this earthly life is the beginning and the end. Jesus told us in John 14, "I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I am you may be also. Jesus wants us to be with him in eternity. This is why Advent gives us hope. The hope we have in Christ heals our fear of death and it heals our worries about tomorrow. The hope we have in Jesus is one that tells us we can expect God to come through for us when we need Him to.

God's process is one that is hopeful because it heals. God heals our diseases. God heals the brokenhearted. Isaiah 55:3 tells us, "By His stripes we are healed."

A father went camping with his three children. During the night, while they were asleep in their tent, they heard noises. He woke up and saw his children were still asleep. Was it a bear? Was it racoons? He prayed that the children would not wake up and that whatever it was outside would not try to enter their tent. He was afraid but his fear stopped when he remembered God that promised to be with them in all situations. After a while, the noise stopped. The next morning, he asked the children if they heard the noises outside of their tent. The youngest child said, "Yes, I did daddy, but I went back to sleep because you were in the tent with us." This is what it means to trust God's process.

David wrote in Psalm 25, "In you, O Lord, I put my trust. I trust in you. Do not let me be put to shame and do not let my enemies' triumph over me." As we enter the Advent Season leading to Christmas, this is a time of preparation, adoration, anticipation, and celebration. It is also a time of hope. Let us remember that God wants us to trust His process. His process may not always seem clear, but it is a process that leads us to where God wants us to be. Let us trust God's process. God's process is whole because it is holy. God's process is helpful because it is heavenly, and God's process is hopeful because it is healing. May the Holy Spirit be our Guide. God bless us all. Amen.