Advent Devotional December 10, 2026

Scripture

Psalm 147:12-20

12 Extol the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
14 He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
15 He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
16 He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
17 He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
18 He sends out his word and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
19 He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the Lord!

Devotion

The Rev. Dr. Rick Willhite '86

The psalmist raises thanks and praise for God's provision of human necessities. These are the very things we long for: security for one's nation; peace among citizens; the well-being of children; provision of food through the uninterrupted cycles of nature—all expressions of God's eternally creative love. How well God knows our needs!

This swelling hymn of praise reaches its crescendo with the last two verses, which cite God's "statutes and ordinances." Those strike a different note, don't they?

"Statutes and ordinances" —strange objects for thanksgiving, entangled as humans tend to be with attraction to possessions, experiences, power, status, and control. At first glance, the possibility of a life oriented around "statutes and ordinances" might strike one as . . . rather restrictive.

But pause to gaze down from the peak of the final verses. Isn't the implication clear? A life attuned to God's "statutes and ordinances" *is precisely what enables a quality that can be called "blessed."* Justice, peace, provision, compassion toward the vulnerable—these don't just happen. They arise from human intentions—yours and mine—practiced in accordance with God's statutes and ordinances.

Nobody put it better than Jesus (Mark 12:28-31):

> When asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with

> all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

We have Jesus' word on it. Those are calling and core guidance for those who follow him. To embody them is an endlessly creative, evolving, and challenging practice of a lifetime. There will be errors. We will face the need to forgive and to be forgiven. We will learn to lean hard into God's grace. The psalmist counsels us to take heart and notice. Grace is always.

Prayer

Gracious God, shape our minds and hearts to cultivate conditions that support what is good and wholesome for ourselves and for others. Help us to remember Your call again and again and again. May we thus become blessing. May it be so by Your strength.