Advent Devotional December 6, 2026

Scripture

Psalm 25

Of David.

1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
5 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

8 Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
9 He leads the humble in what is right
and teaches the humble his way.
10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

11 For your name's sake, O Lord,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
12 Who are they who fear the Lord?
He will teach them the way that they should choose.

13 They will abide in prosperity,
and their children shall possess the land.
14 The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes his covenant known to them.
15 My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.
18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

19 Consider how many are my foes
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
20 O guard my life and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.

22 Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.

Devotion

The Rev. Helen Kester '06

"To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
my God, in you I trust." (vv. 1-2)

We live with a persistent message: "It is up to you. Be strong enough. Know enough. Work hard enough. Do enough. Make it happen." Even those preparing for ministry can absorb this message: "Study more. Read more. Serve more. Lead more. Meet every expectation." And, somewhere in the margins: "Remember to take care of your soul."

Psalm 25 begins somewhere else: "To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul." The psalmist begins not with what can be accomplished, but with the recognition of need: "Teach me. Lead me. Forgive me. Have mercy on me." The psalmist does not appeal to personal achievement but to God's steadfast love and mercy.

That is a profoundly *Advent* posture. Advent reminds us that salvation does not begin with our reaching toward God; it begins with God's coming toward us. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot manufacture meaning. We cannot become sufficient through effort, knowledge, or accomplishment. We receive.

And yet, Advent arrives in the midst of a season that continually tells us otherwise. Christmas invites us toward more—more gifts, more activity, more celebration, more consumption. But more cannot fill the deepest places of the soul. We know this because it is possible to arrive at Christmas surrounded by abundance and still experience profound emptiness.

The psalmist knows what we so easily forget: the soul's deepest need is not for "more," but for God: "Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth." (vv. 4-5)

The request for forgiveness in Psalm 25 is not simply a desire to have guilt removed; it is a desire to be restored to God's way. Mercy makes a new life possible. God's forgiveness and God's guidance belong together.

Perhaps this is a word especially worth hearing in Advent—and especially in the midst of theological education and preparation for ministry. Before we are pastors, students, leaders, teachers, or caregivers, we are people who need God. Our vocation does not begin with what we can do for God. It begins with what God is doing in us and among us.

So perhaps Advent asks us to lay down the burden of being sufficient: the need to know enough, accomplish enough, and prove enough. And instead, to lift up our souls.

God is where it starts.
God's mercy is enough.
God's steadfast love is enough.
God's presence is enough.

And because God comes to us, we do not have to save ourselves. “All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness.” (v. 10) That is the promise on which Advent rests.

Prayer

Merciful God, teach us Your ways and lead us in Your truth. Forgive us when we try to become sufficient through our own strength and accomplishment. Remind us that our lives and our vocations begin with You.

As we wait for Christ, teach us again to receive—Your mercy, Your love, Your presence. Amen.