

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, December 21, 2025

Gracious one, you are as close to us as our very next breath. So we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments. That by your power you would quiet any voice within us but your own that we might hear your word for us this day. And that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

A couple of years ago, author and podcaster Mel Robbins went viral with a simple phrase, "No one's coming." No one's coming to push you. No one's coming to motivate you. No one's coming to improve your life. That was the gist of the short video that went viral. She concluded a litany of those "no one's coming" phrases by saying there's a tremendous amount of liberation when we accept the fact that no one's coming. And like millions of other folks, I found her words compelling. I think the video had broad appeal because it empowered people. It encouraged people to push through passivity. It resonated in a world where help often doesn't come. I found it compelling. But the longer I sat with it, the more I realized my discomfort with it. And I realized after a while that that discomfort was rooted not in the fact that the message...it was rooted in the fact that, however viral that message was, what she had to share simply was not the story that I claimed as a Christian—the story of my faith. At the center of Christianity is this stunning claim that God did not stay distant, but indeed in Jesus Christ God has come to dwell among us. The gospel does not emphasize a self-help plan, a moral improvement plan, although it is often distilled to that by some. The gospel does not emphasize inspiration from afar. Instead, the gospel claims that God enters history. God takes on flesh. God shows up vulnerable and poor and refugee.

Christian hope does not begin with human effort. It begins with divine initiative. In fact, the incarnation is God's flatout refusal to say that you are on your own. A close friend of mine reminded me of a lesson that we learned from one of our favorite seminary professors more years ago than I'd like to say, that one of the most consistent threads across all four of the gospel accounts is this. We cannot save ourselves. We know this in some ways to be true in our own lives. We can't rescue ourselves from fear alone. We can't heal ourselves alone. We can't fix the world by just trying harder. The same is true in the gospels that we've read, the lessons that we've heard this evening. The shepherds were not powerful people. Mary and Joseph are not in control of this situation. Even Caesar, who thinks he runs the entire world, cannot bring about salvation.

If salvation were something that we could accomplish on our own, the incarnation would be unnecessary. And so when the world says no one's coming, the Church dares to say one already has. Christian hope is not passive, but it's also not self-generative. Hope in the Christian sense is not an optimism about ourselves. It is a trust in a God who dwells among us. Throughout

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Advent, we've insisted on hope. That's been our series. If this is your first time joining us for worship in this season, we invite you to go back and spend some time, maybe in the quietness of the week to come, and reflect upon those messages that we've heard throughout Advent. We've insisted on hope. And we've done that not because the world is less frightening now, but because we believe that God refuses to abandon it. So what does this mean for you, for me, for us, for our world on this holy night? The reality is that for some we come into this place with weariness. Some come into this place with fear, others come with grief, others with uncertainty, even others with quiet longing. And when we gather in this place with every bit of what we carry with us here, we claim the promise once again of Christmas. Christmas proclaims that when we cannot carry ourselves, God comes to carry us. When we cannot save ourselves, God comes to save us. Tonight, we do not gather because we have it all together. We gather because Christ has come—to love, to heal, and to hold the world. The song then of Christmas is not to try harder. It is fear not. For unto you is born this night a savior. May it be so for you this evening. May it be so for our world.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.