



Week 1-December 1: Rome-Longing

Read: Romans 8:18-25

In 2023 a viral meme on TikTok and Instagram asked how often people think about the Roman Empire. It was amusing, but also bewildering because as it turns out almost everyone seems to be thinking about the Roman Empire....a lot. It is funny that an empire from 2000 years ago, that we never stepped foot in, could loom so large in our minds, but also perplexing that we seem so drawn to a time period, that while undeniably ingenious, also held so much brutality. Perhaps, the truth is that in Rome we see echos of our own world that both thrill us and concern us greatly.

Like Rob notes in his Advent study, "Rome is that place where decisions impact your life beyond your control." **What represents Rome to you?** There are a lot of ways to answer that question, all of them valid. Regardless of how you answer the question you understand the potent mix of powerlessness and hope that exists in situations like that. We long for more than we see and feel. As Rob puts it in the book, "This is where Advent begins, in longing."

For those who got to hear Rob's interview with Governor Holcomb, what did you take away from that? It is amazing how similar the human spirit can be. It doesn't matter what place or position you find yourself in. The author Susan Sontag once noted, "My library is an archive of longings." Maybe at our most human we are a bundle of longing and that is why Advent resonates so deeply. As Rob said, "the longings of Advent are deeper and spiritual."

The good news is that God joins us in our longing, and even speaks in our longing. **Have you ever considered that God longs for change in our world more than we do?** When we feel a sense of longing for ourselves or for our world, God has already been there and felt it. As you pray and consider during this Advent season realize that the crossroads of your longing and God's presence in your life will create an opening for you.



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ON THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM

In the book Rob states, "What comes to you may feel large and beyond your ability to change, but stick with it. Keep listening, because God doesn't reveal God's will to God's people without making a way."

Where does your heart feel compelled this Advent season? Where do you feel most helpless? Where do you desperately want change in your life? Where do you see the world around you needing change? Where does your heart dance with longing and find possibility?

Rome never has the final say in life. Advent is the promise that God will come. Take a few moments and spend time talking with the Holy Spirit. If you're feeling courageous tell God where your longings lies. Then be still and listen. (If this is hard for you you're not alone. Being still could include going for a walk, creating art, journaling, playing music, etc. Don't worry if you're doing it right. Just by trying to do it you're doing it right.) You might be surprised what God has to say to your longings. "

Closing Prayer

Sovereign God, empires rise and fall, but your good purposes remain. As you called your saints in the past to challenge the power of this world with the power of your justice and love, so you call us. We know we cannot change this world on our own. We also know we cannot change it without you. In Jesus Christ, you reveal your will and join us to him so we may participate in bringing it about. This Advent season, grant us courage and trust to do do, in his name.

Amen

Reading Schedule for "On the Way to Bethlehem"

- December 8 Read Jerusalem-Waiting
- December 15 Read Nazareth-Simplicity
- December 22 Read Bethlehem-A Place of Grace(pages 83-96)
- December 24 Read Bethlehem Humility(pages 96-107)
- December 29 Read Persia-A Place of Return



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