

Instructions:

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.

**Series: Draw Near**

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of our Savior who has drawn near to us as a helpless babe. The season before this, called Advent, is marked by a sense of deep longing; that God would draw near and that the places of brokenness in our world would be overwhelmed by the hope, peace, love, and joy of Christmas. The Kingdom of God has come near to us, yes, but sometimes it's hard to feel it. While we celebrate God coming near to us, in our busyness and stress and to-do lists, we don't always feel near to God ourselves. Join us this Advent as we intentionally make room in our lives to draw close to God by leaning in to wonder, justice, and truth.

Message description:

Crowds, compelled by John's message, gather around him. I imagine his passion spewing out of him in a frenzy of inflammatory statements and doomsday predictions, his words strategically designed to stir the heart and incite action. "What then must we do?" Different groups step forward, eager and yet afraid of what this new way of life might require.

John's responses are particular. There is no one-size-fits-all to justice-making. Each group must resist the ways they are tempted to perpetuate systems of inequity. Soldiers must resist ruling with intimidation and threats, preying upon the poor. Tax collectors must resist embezzling funds. Those with more than enough must resist hoarding their resources. Bearing good fruit requires pruning one's life of power, wealth, and resources acquired at the expense of others. God promises a restored earth, one where all are fed, all are made well.

Key Scripture: Luke 3:7-18; Zephaniah 3:14-20**Questions based on this week's teaching:**

1. What is bringing you joy right now? How are you experiencing God's nearness this season?
2. Read Zephaniah 3:14-20. Where do you see God's promises for a restored earth present in this prophetic vision? Where do you see joy at work?
3. Where do you see God's justice at work in the world right now? What actions and choices help you to draw near to justice?
4. **Practice justice this week.** Donate money, time, or items to a local organization serving those on the margins of wealth and power, and/or call one of your elected officials to express your support for or opposition to an important issue.
5. **Optional:** Read the attached poem followed by a moment of silence.

Draw near to justice by Sarah Are

It takes all of me to draw near to justice—
My whole, sinful, honest self.
There is no option for part of my heart to break,
for a fraction of my mind to recognize truth,
for just one of my legs to march.
It's all or nothing,
my life or our lives,
daylight or darkness.

Maybe that's why justice is so hard.
In order to be just, it takes all of who we are—
Sins, scars, guilt and all.

So I pray—
Break my whole heart, God.
Break my heart and in the cracks,
in the fractured places,
plant seeds of strength
so that justice will grow in me
and I in it,
like a wildflower that can't be tamed.
Bit by bit
I cling to your word.
Bit by bit,
I turn my heart into a garden
for your justice to take root.

It is not an option for part of my heart to break.

Questions of reflection:

- What speaks to you in this poem?
- Where do you long for justice to grow in you, our church, and our world?
- Close in prayer using this poem.