



bless the
Advent We
Actually Have

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL FOR
THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

By Kate Bowler and The Everything Happens Project

WEEK 2

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10
- SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

Bless this *Peace-Filled* Advent



“There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared. It is itself the great venture and can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to want to protect oneself. Peace means giving oneself completely to God’s commandment.”

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

* <http://q-r.to/advent-spotify-playlist>

Peace Amid Chaos

I will hear what the LORD God speaks; he speaks of peace...Merciful love and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have kissed. Faithfulness shall spring from the earth, and justice look down from heaven.

—PSALM 85:8, 10-11 (RGP)

“Shh, the baby’s sleeping!” says every new parent ever. But who can resist sneaking in on tip-toe to catch a glimpse of all that sleeping beauty. It’s no wonder God chose to win our hearts by coming to us as an itty-bitty infant. God speaks to us through the coming of Jesus, and that word God speaks, is *peace*. “Peace on earth and good toward all,” sang the angels at his birth (Luke 2:14, The Kate Bowler Version).

Yet, just as the peace of a snoozing baby is temporary, Christmas is precisely the time when peace can be in short supply too. There is so much expectation, so much longing and desire wrapped up into this celebration that it can be one of the most stress-filled times of the year. So much to do, and so little time. High pressure traditions that used to be fun or meaningful. Obligations that stretch us too thin. Disappointment that so-and-so didn’t show up *again*. But somehow we still find the time for the annual Christmas fight. *Ah, some traditions never die*. What we really need is a run-up to Advent—an Advent to our Advent—so we can get ready for getting ready.

Each Advent, there comes a point when I need to lock myself in the nearest bathroom. Take the deepest of breaths. Light a candle maybe. And find a way for peace to be possible even here and now in this chaotic, too-full moment. Carving out a place where wholeness and shalom can envelope me. Settle me. Where differences dissolve and justice is satisfied.

The Hebrew word for *justice* in Psalm 85 is often translated “righteousness,” being made right with others and before God in a natural, moral, or legal sense. Jesus is our righteousness and the place of new beginnings, a change of heart, of fresh forgiveness, and of new life that can spring up in the places that were once dried up and gone. *Does that sound nice right about now or what?*

In the meantime, we practice waiting by opening ourselves to the refreshment God can rain down on us, even now in our longing, in the midst of so much disarray and unsettledness. Maybe here, we can create more and more space for this by giving over our worries and anxieties to God, naming them to ourselves and per-

haps even to each other. We can breathe deeper when the heavy things we carry have been set down (or are at least shared with another). This is a form of peace—not only momentary relief from our struggles, but also

the recognition that there are things we humans don't know, can't know, and that it's like this for us all. *Life is hard, but we don't have to go it alone.*

PRACTICING ADVENT TOGETHER

Gather your family together over dinner, invite over some friends, or FaceTime some of the kids in your life.

- Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and read **Psalm 85** aloud.
- Light two of the purple candles and read this blessing from *The Lives We Actually Have* (p. 220) as a prayer:

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

—LUKE 2:14 (NIV)

Blessed are we, the fearful,
though we long to be people of peace.
We can't lie:
we are afraid.

Afraid there won't be enough—
enough resources,
enough time,
enough memories.

Blessed are we who ask you for wisdom,
show us what to turn from,
what to set aside.

Come Lord, that we might
see you,
move with you,
keep pace with you.

Blessed are we who ask that this Advent
we might dwell together quietly in our homes.
Come, Lord, that we might be for others
the peace they cannot find.

Blessed are we who look to you and say,
God, truly, we are troubled and afraid.
Come govern our hearts and calm our fears.

Oh Prince of Peace,
still our restless selves,
calm our anxious hearts,
quiet our busy minds.

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING TOGETHER:

1. What is taking up your attention, stealing your peace, or causing you anxiety this Advent season?
2. Kate describes hiding away in the bathroom and lighting a candle when she feels overwhelmed or in need of a break. What habits or practices do you turn to when you need a break?
3. In Galatians 6:2, Paul encourages the church in Galatia to “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ” (NASB). What are you carrying? Can you share it with others now? Even if it isn’t easily fixable, can you shoulder it together?



Embracing Our Humanity

And in the same area there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And then an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were very afraid. But the angel said to them, “Listen! Do not fear. For I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: You will find the Baby wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly there was with the angel a company of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men.”

—LUKE 2:8-14 (MEV)

This was no picture-perfect, Instagram-worthy baby announcement. This was real life. The shepherds were probably terrified when shiny beings appeared to them in the middle of the night and started speaking and singing and bossing them around. Jesus was born in a smelly barn, in poverty, with all of the natural, messy details that accompany a birth. Soon, this tiny baby and his family would become immigrants on the run (Matthew 2:13-15). This birth story was complicated, scary, smelly, and not easy. Yet, we often skip past those very human details to only hear the angels singing a song of “good news and great joy.”

As you probably know, one of my constant prayers is “God, let me see things clearly.” This is hard to do when we are taught to look on the bright side, find a silver lining, grin and bear it, or to count our blessings. After all, everyone is supposed to feel joy and gratitude, *especial-*

ly at Christmas. The problem is that we can never find peace if we try to swallow up “bad” emotions or ignore reality. They don’t stay bottled up forever—which could be why we explode over Christmas dinner or snap at the clerk in the check-out line at the grocery store or feel so unsettled as we try to go to sleep every night. This way of living is anything but peaceful for us, for our families, or for that poor grocery store clerk.

True peace comes when we see things clearly, see the whole story, not just the good parts. Jesus’ birth did not deny the human experience but embraced it. Jesus’ humanity was part of the gift of peace and goodwill that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds and for all of us. This Christmas, may we embrace our humanity and the humanity of others, finding a way for peace to reign alongside all the chaos.

READ THIS BLESSING

for feeling it all (p. 4)

FROM THE LIVES WE
ACTUALLY HAVE

Oh, you beautiful creature, here is your permission slip to feel it all. To feel the joy and delight and excitement. And the sorrow and fear and despair.

REFLECT

- Place a checkmark below if you have ever had a friend, family member, or church tell you one of the following:

<input type="checkbox"/> Look on the bright side	<input type="checkbox"/> Big girls don't cry	<input type="checkbox"/> Can't you just be happy?
<input type="checkbox"/> Find a silver lining	<input type="checkbox"/> Give it to God	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't say that and make it true
<input type="checkbox"/> Grin and bear it	<input type="checkbox"/> Count your blessings	<input type="checkbox"/> Start a gratitude journal
<input type="checkbox"/> Fake it til' you make it	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose joy	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't worry be happy
<input type="checkbox"/> Just trust God	<input type="checkbox"/> Be optimistic	<input type="checkbox"/> God always works for the good!
- Now, think about the things people said that felt more helpful, maybe more empathetic.
- What emotions have you been pushing aside or bottling up? Are there feelings that you are denying for the sake of Christmas? For the sake of the kids? For the sake of _____? How can your willingness to validate, accept, and feel those feelings in a safe way bring more peace to you, your family, and the world this Christmas?

GOING DEEPER

- Psychologist Dr. Susan David is concerned by the way toxic positivity often causes us to bottle up or brood upon our feelings. Susan helps us explore other options for dealing with the fragility of life—listen to her and Kate in this clip, "[Toxic Positivity](#)" (7 min).¹
- Gratitude is not a guaranteed "solution" to the problem of pain or struggle. Listen to Kate explain why she can feel both grateful and rage against forcing people to "brightside" their circumstances in [this video](#) (1 min).²
- Chris Tomlin and Audrey Assad sing "[Winter Snow](#)" (3:32 min).³ This beautiful song explores the many ways God could have come to earth, yet God chose to embrace humanity.



1 <https://youtu.be/-FBwV54X3Ko?si=wsiqwrmurcPOjGmV>

2 https://youtu.be/Gfpr2UyKu9A?si=VV_d8yw3LUD9hxnR

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDCtpIZH_DA

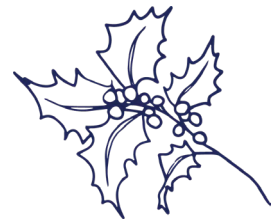
A (Not-So) Perfect Christmas

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:7 (NIV 1984)

Let's take a little quiz. How obsessed with the Christmas Season are you?

- I own more than one Christmas sweater (bonus point if they are ugly).
- I have Christmas-themed earrings.
- I have more than one Christmas tree (bonus points for every real tree).
- More than one room in my house is decorated.
- I start decorating before Thanksgiving (bonus point if it is before Halloween).
- Even my pets have stockings.
- I have a cookie exchange (bonus point if you host it).
- I make a gingerbread house every year (bonus point if it is a megachurch).
- I participate in the annual Christmas pageant.
- Christmas music is all that plays in my car or home in the month of December (bonus point if you start in October).
- I watch 3-5 Christmas movies throughout December.
- I watch 6-10 Christmas movies throughout December.
- I watch 11+ Christmas movies throughout December.
- I use the Hallmark Christmas Movie App.
- I am using more than one Advent devotional.
- I force my family or friends to wear matching pajamas.
- Elf on the Shelf visits my house.
- I attend every Christmas event at church and in my town.
- I go Christmas Caroling to people's houses or to the downtown square.
- I drive around for more than an hour to find Christmas Lights.



Now, tally your score: _____

If you scored between 0-5, you're a **Christmas Grinch!**

It sounds like you have a good balance of managing the over-the-top with the sweet spirit of Christmas.

If you scored between 6-10, you're a great **Christmas Cindy Lou Hoo!**

You bring such a sweet Christmas spirit to all you do.

If you scored between 11-20+, you are a **Christmas Elf!**

Part of Santa's reliable crew, you are bringing cheer and singing loud for all to hear!

I will admit it here and here only. I am a Christmas Elf myself. I think I come by it earnestly since my dad is an expert on Christmas. No really. *He wrote Santa's Biography.* I want the Christmas season to feel like magic. But, then life happens. Like the big feelings when the gingerbread megachurch collapses because Toban didn't make the icing sticky enough (but who's pointing fingers). Or I am in too much pain to go to the Christmas show I bought tickets for months ago. Or a flight gets canceled. Or the traditional family fight causes everyone to leave the room. The magic of the season doesn't

erase our regular problems. The chronic pain or doctor's appointments or alcoholism or mental health issue.

The chaos of Christmas can feel anything but peaceful or idyllic. And yet, this is the season we celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace, a peace that is instituted not through armies or edicts but through a tiny infant. Truly that is peace that surpasses understanding. So this is the Christmas we actually have—sometimes messy, sometimes frustrating, and sometimes absurdly joyful. May we make room for the Prince of Peace in every imperfect moment.

READ THIS BLESSING

*FROM THE LIVES WE
ACTUALLY HAVE*

for when you just can't find any peace (p. 38)

*God, in this dark valley,
let your light reach me.
Let your Spirit comfort me.
Help me understand how my body
and mind and heart
can be at rest even here.*

*Jesus said,
"I have told you these things,
so that in me you may have peace.
In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart!
I have overcome the world."*

—John 16:33 (NIV)

REFLECT

1. What are the ways in which you have been trying to force or create peace in your life? How have you been trying to meet the needs of others in order to keep the “peace” in your world?
2. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace,” telling us to “take heart!” because he has overcome the world. How might Jesus’ words give you permission to find peace for yourself instead of forcing peace to happen in the world around you this season?

GOING DEEPER

- Take a moment to pray to God to teach you how to slow down this season by listening to “[Slow me Down](#)” by The Porter’s Gate (4:11 min), also on our [Advent Playlist](#).¹



- What would your ideal Christmas season feel like? Circle the words below that you wish were true (or add your own).

PEACEFUL	ENGAGING	SILLY	TENDER	LOVING	NURTURING	LIGHT-HEARTED
JOYFUL	GIVING	COZY	CHEERFUL	CONTENT	TENDER	MEMORABLE
INTIMATE	ENERGIZED	CARING	DREAMY	RENEWING	HOPEFUL	WHIMSICAL
WARM	EXPECTANT	CALM	INSPIRING	RESTFUL	FUN	FAITH-BUILDING

- Now, let’s get honest. Including the options above, how does your actual Christmas feel? Circle the words below that feel true (or add your own).

RESTLESS	FRAGILE	TIRING	SERIOUS	LONELY	OVERWHELMING
FRUSTRATING	SAD	NUMB	STRESSFUL	ANXIOUS	HEAVY-HEARTED
RESTLESS	HOPELESS	UNCERTAIN	RESENTFUL	RENEWING	DISAPPOINTING
JEALOUS	EXHAUSTING	LOUD	FEARFUL	MEH	UNCOMFORTABLE

- How can you prepare and make room for the Prince of Peace in your heart this Christmas season? What ideals are you ready to let go of in order to find more peace and more of what God has for you this Christmas?

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0W6tNWtJTk | <http://q-r.to/advent-spotify-playlist>

Bless it All

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.*

*From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.*

*He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.*

*He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.*

*He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of his servant Israel,
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,*

*The promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.*

—LUKE 1:46-55

(THE CANTICLE OF MARY, MODERN VERSION IN *THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS*)



Suddenly, Mary found herself pregnant and unwed—a cultural no-no at the time. Her fiancé Joseph would have every reason to break it off as soon as he knew the truth, leaving her futureless and disgraced. We wouldn't have blamed Mary for being down and out about what was happening to her. But instead she erupts in a song of praise. How could Mary have *that* reaction under *those* circumstances? Her song defines humility because it embraces all she can't control, and lets everything rest on a goodness far beyond herself. Mary blesses it all and sees herself as somehow within that blessing too—despite the reality in front of her. Maybe there is something we can learn from Mary as we too open our hearts to God and to God's promises. When we bless it all—all we know and can't know.

This models the same wisdom of the ancients who, in the decades after Jesus lived on earth, saw that when we bring it all to God there is a mysterious “peace that sur-

passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams says that the good life “is honest about where it lives.” From that place of honesty, all our instinctual and reactive selves can be brought to God whose loving gaze is the beginning of the healing we seek. Williams says that it is a place of both prospect and refuge, “where my rhythm is echoed, my speech is understood. My face is seen...To be recognized and recognizable, lifts from me the burden of making myself up.”

So with the apostle Peter we can invite our worried and anxious selves into the presence of God. This is the intimate space where peace-making within oneself begins.

“So, humble yourselves under God's strong hand, and in his own good time he will lift you up. You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.” —1 Peter 5:6-7 (Phillips)

READ THIS BLESSING

*FROM THE LIVES WE
ACTUALLY HAVE*

for a peaceful day or night (p. 20)

*Oh peace, you are the mountain we glimpse from afar,
the height and depth of our needs.
We chart our way to you by starlight,
through paths overgrown with wrongs we ourselves have seeded,
then left to grow unchecked.*

REFLECT

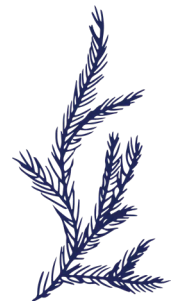
1. Let your worries and fears and disappointments come to the surface. Take them by the hand and lead them into the light of day for a conversation with God. What can you tell God about how these things are affecting you?
2. What is God saying to you about them?

GOING DEEPER

- Listen to Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) put to music by William Kembrough in “[Mary’s Song \(Our King of Peace\)](#)” (3:30 min), also on our [Advent Playlist](#).¹
- As many in this community have expressed, they live in “the landscape of the unknown” and that is where you might be living right now. Look around. What is it that *can* be known? What feels like solid ground? Take pen and paper and, without thinking too much, jot down those things that ground you.
- Sometimes—maybe most times?—it’s just true that “we live between a problem and a solution, between sick and healed, between a prayer and a miracle.” This quote is from Kate’s conversation with writer Taylor Harris whose child has an undiagnosed condition. Listen to “[Peace for Our Anxious Selves](#)” (35 minutes)² for the nuggets of wisdom that surfaced about living in this liminal space, in lives that are a continual Advent as we wait together.
- What does the most ancient Christian wisdom tell us about what a good life is, and what can ground us? [Listen to this talk by the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams](#) given in 2018 to the Camden Hospital Psychotherapy Unit (38 min).³



1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VpYAi9j6hY> | <http://q-r.to/advent-spotify-playlist>
 2 <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/taylor-harris-peace-for-our-anxious-selves>
 3 <https://youtu.be/Kkg9aCxOWfs>



The Peace of Truth

What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

—EPHESIANS 4:25 (MSG, A PARAPHRASE)

Don't you love it when you open a gift on Christmas morning and think, *oh you really, really shouldn't have*, but out of politeness and gratitude you say, "I love it!" Maybe we have learned to perfect the art of the half-truth. But perhaps our dishonesty to keep everyone comfortable has come at a steep cost. The cost of being known and of knowing one another. How many times have you answered "How are you?" with, "Great!" or "Fine!" or "Busy!" while, in fact, you know you're barely holding it all together? Or actually could use a friend? Or you don't want to come across as needy?

Maybe today, we can take a note out of Jesus' book, instead. Jesus came to earth as a human, so that he could

echo back our story. So that he could hear our prayers and say, "Same. I get it." Jesus has loved and lost (John 11:1-44). Jesus has cried and been frustrated (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus felt alone and forgotten (Matthew 27:46). Jesus wanted things to change and knew that they couldn't (Luke 22:42, "Lord, take this cup"). Jesus understands the fragility of being human and didn't try to hide it. He was honest with his friends about how he felt and what he was going through. Jesus' prayers were honest and true.

Maybe peace starts with the courage to share the truth with someone and to hear them echoing back to you a clear and resounding "same," or an "oh yeah, me too!" A peace in knowing we are never, ever alone.

READ THIS BLESSING

FROM THE LIVES WE
ACTUALLY HAVE

for truth-telling—however bitter or sweet (p. 28)

Blessed are you, the truth-teller. And what a miracle it is when your candor finds a chorus that echoes back: "Same."

The friend who will hear it. The parent who will stomach it.

The partner who doesn't roll their eyes.

They hear you, and it feels like a revelation.

Every. Time.

REFLECT

1. What is your truth that you need to speak to someone today?
2. How can sharing your truth help release you from the isolation and loneliness that half-truths create?
3. What is like to have someone in your life who understands and has felt your truth in their own ways? What does it feel like to know that Jesus has experienced your reality as well?

GOING DEEPER

- Let's Talk! Realizing that we have not been honest with either ourselves or with our friends is a hard reality to face. Often, we have very good reasons that we created a half-truth, usually to protect ourselves, to protect our friends, or to protect our relationships. But half-truths don't help build full-relationships. Honesty builds relationships. So think of one or two safe people you have in your world that can handle the truth about your life and how you feel. Write down the names of those two people and set a time to talk to them.
- "[Your Peace will Make Us One](#)" by Audrey Assad (3:40 min) is set to the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" emphasizing how God might be marching us to truth.¹
- Maybe you are the person who is very honest about how you feel and maybe a bit of an over-sharer (like me!). Perhaps, there is someone you have crossed paths with lately that needs to hear your story, your truth, so that they know they are not alone. If you have the courage to share your story, then maybe they can say, "me too!" And that would be enough to bring more peace to their world. Can you think and pray about someone who needs to hear your story and set a time to share it with them? Or sometimes I pray, "Lord, if you need me to talk to this person, present a time and space."
- Writer Kelly Corrigan was sharing her "crappies" from the past year with Kate, and shared this bit of wisdom: when we share our real stories, it allows our friends to have "more of you in our hearts." Listen to "[Cheers to the Crappies](#)" (4 min).²



1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTQWSfzY2mw> | <http://q-r.to/advent-spotify-playlist>

2 https://youtu.be/4_8qPNgDJ8E?si=9Zpyy0_fSiEjXnO

Something Else is Also Happening

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

—JOHN 14:27 (NIV)

There's a wonderful trick I do when I am very afraid, and it's a game called "Something Else Is Also Happening." It goes like this.

I'll be having a truly terrible moment, like I'm getting my blood drawn in a dark basement of the hospital, and then I decide that's not the only thing going on. So I tell the bloodwork nurse that it's probably not a coincidence that he's brought me somewhere discreet to feast on my rich, delicious, B+ blood. And there's always like a horrible moment where he stares at me and then there's a terrible silence. But then he begins to lightly stroke the inside of my elbow crease, as if just considering it for the first time. And then he says something like, "I always ask for the night shift." And then I'm like, there it is! I'm not just someone who has lots of health problems. I am living an exciting plotline with a nurse who's pretending to be a vampire.

"Something Else Is Also Happening" is a great addition to sadness or anger or fear or any number of emotions

that rise up in the face of suffering. A sort of absurd perspective-pull into something else taking place alongside my pain or fear or anger. Like the time I got very interested in my intake nurse's dating history. Not to erase the pain or fear but to give myself permission to care about something else for a minute, too.

So then, what are we to make of Jesus' words when he says to his disciples, "Don't be afraid." *Easy for him to say. God is God after all.* But maybe that's actually the point. Maybe Jesus knows that *something-else-that-is-also-happening* too. That's the meaning-making Jesus offers: His presence. At Christmas as God-in-human-flesh, God with us. As the Easter-risen-Savior who says, "Don't be afraid. It's me!" And then as the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth to be with us even unto the end of the age. A story far bigger than our fear or anxiety or anger. A story we can find ourselves inside.

READ THIS BLESSING

for the gift of doubt (p. 100)

FROM THE LIVES WE
ACTUALLY HAVE

*Blessed are we remembering that you hold all things together.
You are the invisible scaffolding that supports us,
the canopy of love that covers us in the present,
the stable pillars, sunk deep into our past,
and the sparrow that flies confidently toward the future
bearing for us the peace we could never have attained for ourselves.*

REFLECT

1. When talking about peace, Jesus said, “I do not give to you as the world gives” (John 14:27). What do you think he meant? What is the peace of the world? What is the peace of Christ?
2. We sometimes try to console ourselves or others by trying to make sense of our troubles. Do explanations work for you? Always, sometimes, never? If not, what works better?
3. Imagine Jesus was sitting with you right now. What would you say to him? What troubling doubts or awkward questions might arise? What comforts or consolations?

GOING DEEPER

- Like Kate’s game of “Something Else is Happening,” how might the art of the absurd be a comfort for you? Listen to Kate’s conversation with the absurdly funny writer, Jenny Lawson: “[The Art of the Absurd](#)” (40 min).¹
- Song suggestion: “[The Road, The Rocks, and The Weed](#)” by John Mark McMillan (3:36), also on our Advent Playlist.² This song reflects on a God who comes down and suffers with us.



1 <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/jenny-lawson-the-art-of-the-absurd>

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcAazEpsUJY> | <http://q-r.to/advent-spotify-playlist>

GOING DEEPER (CONT.)

- In Kate's conversation with historian Michael Ignatieff, he spoke about how comfort and consolation are different. Human comfort can come with a hug or a look of concern from someone we trust, but consolation goes deeper. It gives us a reason to go on. Notice, Michael didn't say that consolation gives us a reason for why the bad thing happened. When speaking about his grief after the death of his younger brother, he says:



"This is not Hallmark greeting card time. When you've been hit by something that hard, you have a right to expect that your friends will choose their words very carefully because we've all got a very good detector for what's false. And there are very few forms of consolation we actually trust."

Listen to this [conversation with Michael Ignatieff](#) on how to genuinely keep pace with someone who is suffering (5 min).¹

- In John 14:16-17, Jesus tells his friends that the Holy Spirit will come and be with them forever. Jesus calls this spirit the Comforter, another Advocate (another one who is just like himself), and the Spirit of truth. Truth is a reality that lies outside ourselves, one we don't have to make up. What do you imagine the relationship is between truth and peace? How does reality create a sense of peace in your own experience?

¹ Clip: https://youtu.be/v5ekyAaHR7g?si=SNCGZE7hrR_3CMfm
Full Episode: <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/where-we-turn-for-meaning/>

Peace Be With You

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

—LUKE 24:36-43 (NRSV)

The story of Jesus begins and ends in peace. The angels proclaim peace to Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1:28), and to the Shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). And upon his resurrection, Jesus himself proclaims peace to his disciples after he endured great pain and death (Luke 24:36). The peace of Christ is very different from any worldly peace. It is not something we can create or obtain by mastering our own lives. The peace of Christ comes from an other-worldly love and grace—a love that sends God’s son to earth as a vulnerable baby to show the world what love feels like.

In many Christian traditions, there is a part of the service that includes a time for the congregation to pass the peace. We leave the comfort of our regular pew (don’t

you dare sit in my seat) to turn to our neighbors and speak the words, “peace be with you,” and receive the words, “and also with you.” This tradition is more than a simple exchange or greeting. It is a covenant, a promise, shared between believers that they are living towards the ever-expanding peace of Christ. The act of passing the peace is one of extending unfathomable grace and unconditional love to our neighbors, to the stranger, to the one standing next to us. And often that person is not one we would necessarily choose (they might not prefer us either). No matter how broken or smelly or don’t-have-it-all-together we might be, we are invited to join in the chorus of those who come in peace, just as Christ taught us. Together.

READ THIS BLESSING

*FROM THE LIVES WE
ACTUALLY HAVE*

for when you want more (p. 186)

*To be fully known, and fully loved, in all our humanity.
That is a God-sized project.*

*Blessed are we, thankful that we can live our human-sized lives
in the glad company of the vulnerable and the broken, the imperfect
made whole in the love of God, through Jesus Christ.*

REFLECT

1. What are some ways you can offer the gift of peace to yourself, showing yourself love and grace?
2. How can you offer others the promise and hope of peace by “passing the peace” this Advent season?

GOING DEEPER

- Pass the peace through prayer. Too often peace is something we have half-heartedly prayed for because we are so limited in our ability to dream of peace in a world of pain and chaos. Peace isn't dependent on outside circumstances and peace isn't dependent on whether you like or enjoy someone's presence. Peace is much deeper than like or dislike. Peace is much broader than getting along. Peace is a promise. So find a piece of paper, post-it note, or pull-up a blank google doc. Write “PEACE” in the middle of the paper. Begin to pray and talk about the kind of peace that Christ can bring to our lives. You can start writing scripture around the word. You can draw objects that bring peace to your life or you can simply write down names of people whom you find have a peaceful spirit. Pray for a deeper understanding of peace as you draw, think, and reflect.