

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." -Ezekiel 36:24-26

The season of Advent is a reminder of the liminal space in which we live here on earth. Advent is a time of waiting and expectation. In other words, it is an in-between. It is the "almost" and the "not yet" in which we constantly live as followers of Jesus. We know that hope is for today, but also that hope is on the way. The fullness of our hope in Christ will be realized upon our union with Him in heaven. Until then, we wait.

Rossetti's "In the Bleak Midwinter" gives a glorious, realistic picture of our waiting and hoping. Often, the journey feels difficult, cold, and rattling. The brokenness in and around us threatens to steal our joy and peace in each moment and season. The pain of loss, heartbreak, and daily exhaustion can knock the breath out of us... "Snow had fallen, snow on snow."

However, we must open our eyes to see what the snow is doing. This painful chill is covering us in magnificent white. In all the struggling, our shortcomings and stains are being covered and cleansed. Ultimately, this icy cold is making us desperate for the warmth and light of Christ. If, by His grace, we can catch a glimpse of the glorious weight of this snow, its power and purpose, we will surely find ourselves in awe of our Savior. Jesus, the King who reigns in glory and grace, has already come, and is coming back. This in-between is not the end.

Born in simplicity and humility, our Savior asks the same of us. For us who feel all too aware of this in-between, all too aware of the stings of life on earth, the answer is simple. We do not have to sing loudest, celebrate most enthusiastically, or proclaim that all is well. We do have to surrender our hearts in hope. We do have to cling to the promise of what is coming. Glorious light will be born out of whatever darkness we face, if only we lift our eyes to grace.

Let your worship be simple. Let your worship be true.

However small or great your hope seems, give your heart to Jesus. Lend yourself to anticipation, yearning, and waiting. What is empty will be filled, what is broken will be restored, and what is lost will be recovered. Though the light may seem dim and the snow may seem bitter; know that we are being covered and cleansed. Draw near to the warmth of Christ. He has come, and he is coming.

Read Ezekiel 36:24-26, 33-38

1. What most resonates with you about the commentary above and/or the scripture?
2. Consider verses 24, being "back into your own land". Describe a beautiful picture of what your life, the city, and the world could look like if we saw this happen?
3. Do you see glimpses of this already happening, as we live in this tension of the "already, but not yet" life? Glimpses that show that God's kingdom work is being done yet hasn't been done completely?
4. What is God's goal (mentioned in these verses)? If his goal is truly the last sentence of 39, does your life reflect his desire? Are you being obedient in your sphere of influence to doing this? What could this look like?
5. Spend time in prayer, confessing, praising, and beseeching our Savior concerning the things discussed above.

**Lyrics to
"In the Bleak Midwinter"**

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air,
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.