

God calls us to be people who dream! Jesus taught us of God's dream every time he spoke of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom is a world that is completely different from the one we live in- one that is better in every way- one where all of God's people and all of God's creation is brought back to the way God made them in the first place which was perfect before we messed it up by turning away from God. The word for bringing something back to the way it was before is called restoration. In this better world people wouldn't judge each other or make some people better than others and all that we do would be loving. The word for being that kind of person is called righteous. In this better world everyone would know and understand the Word of God and they would be able to talk to others about the God they know and love and experience. That's called revelation. Can you imagine (or dream of) that world? There would be such joy! God, humanity, and creation would all rejoice in the light of Christ that both rains down on us and shines bright from us.

Palms Presbyterian Church shared this weekly devotional that combines the tradition of the Advent Wreath and the Native American tradition of the Dream Catcher (which we adapted for general use). We invite you to gather five candles (three blue, one pink, and one white), a white underlay, a ring, some green yarn, and feathers (real or cut out of paper). Find a space in your home where you can leave your underlay, dream catcher, and candles set up with the devotional close by.

Week One

Say: Advent is a time of getting ready to celebrate the mystery of Christmas which is when God came into the world to be with us. Advent wreaths help us to mark the time of getting ready week by week. They are usually round because circles have no end and neither does the love God has for us. They are usually made from evergreens because they remind us of the gift of eternal life given to us by Jesus.

Dream Catchers are made by Native American mothers to protect their sleeping children from bad dreams. All parts of the authentic Native American dream catcher have meaning tied to creation. Traditionally they are made only with items from nature. Wood rings, feathers, carved wooden beads, and leather string. The shape of the dreamcatcher is a circle because it represents the circle of life and how the sun and moon travel each day and night across the sky. The dream catcher web catches the bad dreams during the night and makes them go away when the day comes. As for the good dreams, the feathers act as a fluffy, pillow-like ladder that allows them to gently fall upon the sleeping person in peace.

Today we will make our dream catcher and set up our sacred space before we do our devotion. The circle represents both the circle of life and the never-ending love of God. The yarn is green like the evergreen of an Advent wreath to remind us of Jesus' gift of eternal life. The feathers are the colors of the Advent candles- blue for Mary, pink for joy, and white for Christ.

Instructions: Tie the end of your long yarn to the ring anywhere you like. Pull it across the ring to a location on the other side and tie it there (make sure it's pulled tight). Continue stretching the yarn across the ring to different locations until you have the "web" in the center the way you want it. Cut off any extra string you may have. You can tie beads into the yarn as you go if you choose to add some decoration. When you're done with that, tie the blue paper feather with the word "Restoration" on it to the end of one of the short strings in your bag. And tie that half-way up on the left side of your dream catcher. Lay it out on the white underlay so the word is face up. Place one of the blue tealights next to it, light it and say:

Today we catch God's Dream of Restoration; let it burn inside of us as the candle burns. God spoke these words to Isaiah many years ago and they are spoken to us this day... "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." (Isaiah 41:17) God wants all of God's people to have enough of everything they need. No one should have more than anyone else. That's part of restoring the world to the way God wanted it to be before we turned away from God. Even though God says, "I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" God's way of answering them is to send us to help. How can we make sure all people have enough of everything they need?

Talk, as a family, about different ways you can donate time, supplies, or money in your community to help those who are less fortunate and decide to do one or more of your ideas this week.

Say: It's not just others that need to be restored, we all do! The Psalmist who wrote Psalm 80 asks God to "restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we might be saved." Even though we may have all we need, we still turn away from God sometimes and we still are not kind and loving to all people all the time which is how we would be if the world and everything in it were restored to the way God wanted it before we turned away from God. How can we be kind and loving to others this week?

Talk about different things you will do to be kind and loving to others. Also, think ahead to how you can stop yourself if you feel angry or sad with someone so you don't hurt them back.

Say: Even though we are changing the light (extinguish the candle) ending our Advent devotion, and moving on with our week, we have caught God's Dream of Restoration. Let us pray: Holy God, let your Dream of Restoration burn inside of us all week as we show your love and kindness to ourselves and others to make Your world the place you want it to be. Amen.

Week Two

Pick up your dream catcher and tie the blue paper feather that says "Revelation" on it, next to and a little below the paper feather for Restoration. Lay the dream catcher back down on the white underlay with the words on the feathers facing up. Make sure the feather of Restoration is next to the first blue candle that you set out last week. Place a second blue candle next to the feather of Revelation.

Say: This week we light the candles for the Dreams of Restoration and we catch a new dream- the Dream of Revelation.

Light the candles.

Say: Let the Dream of Revelation burn inside of us as the candle burns. God spoke these words to Isaiah many years ago and they are spoken to us this day... "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 40:4-5) This might sound confusing, but Isaiah didn't mean that the earth would actually change- the world won't become flat with no mountains, hills, or valleys. He simply meant that one day it will be easy for all the world to see how good and loving God is. But knowing that isn't enough, John the Baptist "testified to the Light" (John 1: 8) and tells us to as well. Now, he didn't mean the light from a lamp or the sun or the moon. John called Jesus "the Light" and Jesus called himself "the Light of the World." So, to testify to the Light means to tell other people that Jesus came into this world to be with us, to love us and to teach us to love God, ourselves, and others. This love is what saves us from living a life without hope, without faith, without love, without joy. When we tell others all of this we are revealing who God is to them, helping them to see so they can tell others too. That's the Dream of Revelation. What can we do this week to help others see and know God?

Say: Even though we are changing the lights (extinguish the candles) ending our Advent devotion, and moving on with our week, we have caught God's Dreams of Restoration and Revelation. Let us pray: Holy God, let your Dreams of Restoration and Revelation burn inside of us all week as we show your love and kindness to ourselves and others to make Your world the place you want it to be. Amen.

Week Three

Pick up your dream catcher and tie the pink paper feather that says "Righteousness" on it, in the same place on your dream catcher as the feather of Revelation, but on the right side (eventually you will hang a center feather in the middle of the bottom of your dream catcher, but not yet). Lay the dream catcher back down on the white underlay with the words on the feathers facing up. Make sure the feathers of Restoration and Revelation are next to the blue candles that you already set out. Place the pink candle next to the feather of Righteousness.

Say: *This week we light the candles for the Dreams of Restoration and Revelation that burn in our hearts and we catch a new dream- the Dream of Righteousness.*

Light the candles.

Say: *Let the Dream of Righteousness burn inside of us as the candle burns. God spoke these words to Isaiah many years ago and they are spoken to us this day... "They will be called oaks of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord." (Isaiah 61:3) Righteousness is a big word and many people confuse it's meaning. There are many who think that they are better than others because of their love for God and Jesus. They think they know exactly what the Bible means and how to live, but they are not loving to those who don't believe, think, and live the way they do. They think they're righteous, but they're not. When John the Baptist tells us in Mark 1:7 "one who is more powerful than I, is coming" he's talking about Jesus. God gave us Jesus to show us what true righteousness looks like. Jesus taught us to welcome everyone, even those who are different from us. He taught us to help others as much as we are able and he taught us to love others as much as you love God and yourself. That's true righteousness.*

Answer these questions and decide on one thing you can do this week for each question.

- How can we be welcoming to others?
- What can we do to help others?
- What can I do to show God my love?
- What can I do to love myself?
- What can I do to show others I love them?

Say: *Even though we are changing the lights (extinguish the candles) ending our Advent devotion, and moving on with our week, we have caught God's Dreams of Restoration, Revelation, Righteousness. Let us pray: Holy God, let your Dreams of Restoration, Revelation, and Righteousness burn inside of us all week as we show your love and kindness to ourselves and others to make Your world the place you want it to be. Amen.*

Week Four

Pick up your dream catcher and tie the last blue paper feather that says "Rejoicing" on it, in the same place on your dream catcher as the feather of Restoration, but on the right side (eventually you will hang a center feather in the middle of the bottom of your dream catcher, but not yet). Lay the dream catcher back down on the white underlay with the words on the feathers facing up. Make sure the feathers of Restoration and Righteousness are next to the blue candles, and the feather of Revelation is next to the pink candle that you already set out. Place the last blue candle next to the feather of Rejoicing.

Say: *This week we light the candles for the Dreams of Restoration, Righteousness, and Revelation that burn in our hearts and we catch a new dream- the Dream of Rejoicing.*

Light the candles.

Say: *Let the Dream of Rejoicing burn inside of us as the candle burns. Mary the mother of Jesus spoke these words many years ago... "My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1: 46-47) when she visited her cousin Elizabeth before Jesus was born. Elizabeth's baby jumped with joy in her stomach when Mary came close. All of them knew Jesus was special before he was born. They knew he would save the world- they didn't know how, but they knew he would, and they were filled with joy! They had caught the Dream of Rejoicing! The word "rejoice" simply means to feel and express great joy.*

Many years after Jesus was born, lived, and died there was a man named Paul who loved Jesus and rejoiced in that love. He traveled all over the land telling others of Jesus and his love and when he couldn't travel he sometimes wrote letters. Those letters taught and encouraged the people of the early church and they teach and encourage us today. In one Paul said, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances." Thinking about our lives in positive ways, even when things are hard, and giving thanks to God in our prayers is important and helps us to stay filled with joy

so we can keep telling others about the love of Jesus and how it does and will make the world a better place. Let's say thank you to God right now.

Talk about all the things in your life you are grateful for, even the hard things. Explain how the hard things in life can be good. They teach us to be strong, patient, gentle, kind, loving, and that we need God and others in our lives to help us.

Say: Even though we are changing the lights (extinguish the candles) ending our Advent devotion, and moving on with our week, we have caught God's Dreams of Restoration, Righteousness, Revelation, and Rejoicing. Let us pray: Holy God, let your Dreams of Restoration, Righteousness, Revelation, and Rejoicing burn inside of us all week as we show your love and kindness to ourselves and others to make Your world the place you want it to be. Amen.

Christmas Eve/Day

Merry Christmas! Pick up your dream catcher and tie the last paper feather that says "Radiance" on it (it should be white), in the bottom center of your dream catcher (It should hang a little longer than the others). Lay the dream catcher back down on the white underlay with the words on the feathers facing up. Make sure the feathers of Restoration and Righteousness are next to the blue candles, and the feather of Revelation is next to the pink candle, and the feather of Rejoicing is next to the other blue candle that you already set out. Place the white candle next to the feather of Radiance.

Say: Today is Christmas Eve/Day! Today we light the candles for the Dreams of Restoration, Righteousness, Revelation, and Rejoicing that burn in our hearts and we catch a new dream- the Dream of Radiance.

Light the candles.

Say: Let the Dream of Radiance burn inside of us as the candle burns. God spoke these words to Isaiah many years ago and they are spoken to us this day... "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you... Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice..." (Isaiah 60:1-5). And John tells us "what has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." (John 1:1-5) Today is the day that we celebrate Jesus, the Light of the World, coming into the world to be close to us, to teach us, to love us, and to save us. We are filled with such joy that we cannot help but shine the light of Christ that lives within us so brightly that it cannot be missed.

Say: Even though we are changing the lights (extinguish the candles) ending our Advent devotion and the Season of Advent, and moving on with our lives, we have caught God's Dreams of Restoration, Righteousness, Revelation, Rejoicing, and Radiance. Let us pray: Holy God, We give you thanks for the birth of Your Son, the gift of the Christ-Child, God among us, the One who fills our hearts with Your Dreams of Restoration, Righteousness, Revelation, Rejoicing, and Radiance. Let them burn inside of us all the days of our lives as we show your love and kindness to ourselves and others to make Your world the place you want it to be. Amen.