

Aloha! Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the church year. Happy New Year! Advent means Arrival / Coming. He has arrived, and He is to come again. Today, I share with you the good news of what makes our New Year's Day so special as we prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:27).

Our minds and bodies are built to have fears, and these fears may keep us alive. When we are afraid, our minds are ready to react and with as much force as necessary. We become super aware, anxious, and not at peace. Our minds are not as efficient, and everything takes longer to do. We feel worried, stressed, anxious, and discontent. This worry impacts our health, our thinking, and our relationship with God.

The peace that Jesus gives us is unconditional. Our world is full of conditions. Quid pro quo, this for that. Jesus gives unconditionally. It is forever and not like what is given in our world, just as the bible verse said.

Peace is also felt as the Holy Spirit in our lives: a comforter, healer, teacher, counselor, and friend.

Here are three things we can do to enjoy peace this new year.

1 - Renew our relationship with God, embrace our changes in life, seek forgiveness, and reaffirm our desire to wash away our sins. His love is great. When we walk with Jesus, we are never alone. The relationship is held by commitments—our commitment and God's commitment. I believe holding up our end of the bargain is the hardest, as we are sinners. Jesus does forgive us.

2 - Trust His word, know Jesus will fulfill His promises. He is with us no matter what. We need to let go of our own strengths, skills, and our minds. We need to trust that God is well aware of our needs and is willing to help us. The Holy Spirit is with us. Know that at times, we are human, we will fail. We may even feel weak

in our faith. It is this weakness that reminds us to seek His grace.

3 - Pray and ask for the courage to do what is needed. Pray to the Holy Spirit as well. Listen for the Holy Spirit, who guides us to love and compassion. Silence our worries, silence our fears, and silence our anguish. Let the new year of Advent be the bath to cleanse us. Use time each day to clean and make space for Him. Speak out with the Lord what you are cleaning. Give names to what you no longer need, and let it wash away in your spiritual bath.

When we prepare for the birth of a young baby or the arrival of a family member into our home, we begin with deciding what space will be for the baby or an uncle. Where will the baby sleep, eat, be cared for, and bathed? We may even buy our uncle's favorite snacks. Family is provided a feeling of safety and at peace. We intended for them to be at peace. We prepared with an intention so that others feel belonging.

We must forgive ourselves for what we carry. We must forgive others for what they carry. Our forgiveness builds belonging, as together, we move forward. Romans Chapter 15 verse 1 describes, "How the strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength." Together, we are the body of Christ. Just as any part of the body is no more or less important, we, when together, are the embodiment of Jesus Christ today.

When we choose Jesus Christ our Lord into our hearts, we become baptized, we proclaim our faith to Him. We prepared ourselves for that moment if we could. Some of us may have been relatively young when baptized. Time has passed, we have all done great things, we have all sinned. What a blessing to wade through our humility, and prepare for Him, Christ our King, again. It is time to align our stride so that we walk with Him with greater confidence. It is ok that we have fallen out of step with Him. Jesus expects that. I sure hope He expects it. In my humility, I can have faith that my suffering, our suffering, is an opportunity to walk as He did.

When we prepare for Him, do we not have open doors, open arms, and open hearts? I challenge us to maintain open arms, beyond words, and embrace those who need to be cloaked with love and forgiveness as we are leaders of our faith.

God is our source of hope. He supplies us with hope. In our relationship with God, we can be comforted. Just as we prepare for ohana, it is time to welcome our new year and prepare our mind, body, and spirit for His coming.

Prepare your mind, trust in God to take all your worries and fears. Trust that He is with you and provides all that you need. Prepare your body with health, nourishment, rest, and love; provide your spirit with rest, forgive yourself, forgive others. Let Him take your angst. Prepare to welcome the Holy Spirit.

When we prepare ourselves, we are securing a future with grace. Renew our relationship, build trust, and communicate with Jesus through prayer. Take this day and build grace in your life. Find the place that God needs you to be His light, and shine with your brightest and best you. Be the beacon of hope that we all aspire for. Be the beacon for others. If we all do this, we will all help each other.

Please pray with me:

Our heavenly Father, please give us the courage to open our eyes, to see what we need to see, so that we may prepare ourselves for You. Would You please give us the strength to renew our relationship with You? Please, we ask You to bless us with Your humility to recognize that every difference we have as people is something we have in common. Help us bring our relationships and communicate with Your words and spirit. Give us an opportunity to demonstrate our trust to You. Help us nourish our bodies, heal our wounds, and grow from our past. Help us wash away our sins, freeing ourselves of the anguish and guilt that falls behind, help us walk tall, guide our eyes to Your everlasting light, and let us stay blind to the distractions of evil. Arm us with love and compassion, let us speak the truth, and build upon each other. Let us see our strengths and see how we can make others stronger. Guide us in your footsteps and help us stay the pace. Forgive us our sins, and help us clear our hearts, minds, and souls for You, our Lord Jesus almighty. Amen.