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The Awakened Heart
By the Rev. Salying Wong

Have you ever had an experience, a moment, where you felt truly at peace with yourself? Did you feel it when the beauty of the earth touched you; or a painting or a poem or a dance? And you felt returned to yourself, somehow—though you didn't realize you had somehow left yourself behind. In this moment of peace, did you think, "I'm so glad I'm alive to have seen this, to be here." Have you had a moment when love felt real, a moment when you felt love pouring from you and pouring into you and you did not doubt it? Was it holding a child in your arms or petting an animal or looking at the sunrise or sunset or walking among trees? Think about when you have felt this. That is your heart waking up to what is real. This is Advent wakefulness—it is the heart awakening to what is essential, to what is eternal. For a moment, the non-essential falls away. And you think to yourself, "Why was I so worried? God is here and has always been here." In fact, if it weren't for God presencing God's self in me, I would disappear. For, I am nothing without God. The mystic teacher, James Finley, says that without God presencing God's self for us, we would disappear. But, since we would be nothing without God, our very presence is the presence of God.

But, we forget this. We get overwhelmed and reactive; we get judgmental, which is fear having its way with us. This is our human condition. The human condition is full of storm and tempest. Oddly, it is this noise and its drama that puts us to sleep—puts us in spiritual somber. So, when Advent encourages us to, "Keep awake," it is to wake from the inessentials that claim so much of our life. To be awake is to live in what is essential. What is essential is that God is here; God is never gone; what is essential is that

God's love sustains us. God has come for us, is coming for us, will come for us—this is the Advent coming.

Advent says that we actually can practice this state of wakefulness. I'd like to lead us in a short guided meditation as part of this practice.

Close your eyes. Take a breath. Now imagine yourself walking in a garden. You're looking for Jesus. You have a burden you're carrying in your heart. You see Jesus sitting on a bench and you understand that he's been waiting for you. You sit beside him and he enfolds you in his arms. You rest there awhile. When you are ready, you whisper in his ear all that you're carrying. He is listening to you. You pour yourself out. When you are done, you sit together in silence. He then whispers in your ear the words that release you from your fears. What is it that he says? Perhaps he says those Advent words the angel said to Mary, "Be not afraid." And you find that somehow because Jesus says it, you are released from the tyranny of fear. It doesn't mean you are no longer afraid, but you don't feel the grip of its power to throw you around. You return to yourself. You rest in this essential truth—you belong not to your fears, but to God. You rest in this. Now, you are ready to leave the garden. As you close the gate, say to yourself, "I will not break faith with my awakened heart. I will come to Jesus as he comes to me, everyday."

[This meditation is an adaptation from James Finley's work.]