

Christmas Eve Sermon – Lex Breckinridge

12/24/2019

Luke 2: 1-20

If you weren't in church last Sunday, you missed a truly charming Christmas pageant. There were reluctant sheep, including a black sheep who kept wandering out of the fold and back to Mom. Shepherds who memorized their lines and spoke them with great authority. Angels who heard on high. Three wise guys bearing gifts for a precious baby Jesus who slept right through the joyful chaos. And then there was the innkeeper who sternly turned away the weary expectant mother and her anxious husband because the inn was fully occupied, our innkeeper's heart softened enough though that she found some space for the exhausted travelers in what was undoubtedly a very smelly barn and there a miracle happened. Love was born amidst the sheep and the cows and the angels and the three wise guys, and the innkeeper whose heart was now fully melted – joined in the general rejoicing.

I've also been so conscious in this season, of the hardships and struggles, worries that immigrant families all across the world and very close to home here are facing in the conflicted political climate we live in. The Holy Family whose journey we enter on this night were immigrants too and their journey is the journey of every immigrant family. And thinking about the lies of immigrants today and 2000 years ago takes me back a few years to a time when I was the Rector of St. Alban's church in Austin. We did a lot of programs and a lot of work with a sister Episcopal congregation just up the road from us called San Francisco de Assis. San Francisco primarily serves the Central American and Mexican immigrant community in Austin and during Advent we would often celebrate La Posada with the folks at San Francisco. La Posada is a custom in Mexico and it is a re-enactment, complete with liturgy and music – in this case accompanied by trumpets, violin, and guitars – of the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. A youth from each of our communities would play the role of the innkeeper who would sternly advise Joseph and Mary that there was no room at the inn for them and the child they were expecting. We would accompany the Holy Family around the grounds at St. Alban's singing with them as they sought shelter. We would then make our way into the church where at last, the Holy Family was offered lodging in a stable. We sang a song of thanksgiving and prayed for the peace and the well being of all people. At the conclusion of the liturgy, our colleague, Fr. Jaime, the vicar of San Francisco, would speak to us about the special meaning of the La Posada to the immigrant community that had gathered with us that evening. Like Joseph and Mary on that cold lonely night 2000 years ago, immigrant families have left everything that is familiar and known in search of a better life. They have crossed borders, both geographical and cultural, in search of a home – a place where they can feel accepted and safe and secure. They come seeking a place where something new can be born in their lives. Fr. Jaime would remind us that the journey of the Holy Family and the journeys of immigrant families – all these journeys are really the human journey – the longing shared by all human beings, including you and me, to find a home- to find a place where we are loved and accepted for who we are – where something new can be born in our lives just as it was 2000 years ago in that very unlikely home.

After the liturgy, we would always head outside – the weather in Austin in December isn't like our December weather in the Northwest – for refreshment and a pinata. Now Pinatas are a rarely "incident-free" as any parent will tell you, and this one particular La Posada pinata I recall with great clarity. A small child, probably about 2 years old, caught up in the general frenzy that comes when the pinata finally breaks, burst into tears. She cried and cried and cried. At last she was picked up by her mother who began soothing her in a language whose words were not understandable to me, but its meaning was crystal clear. "I love you" was being unmistakably communicated from mother to her out of sorts child. "I love you". As the tears gradually slowed and the little girl found her resting place on her

mother's shoulder, it occurred to me what an appropriate note that was for the conclusion of La Posada. It was the meaning of Christmas right there- very simple and cosmically profound – Christmas is God's way of saying "I love you" to the whole human family. God said it first when the world was made. "And it was good". God said it again when God made the human being. "Very Good". God has now supremely spoken "I love you" in Jesus – Jesus who is God's word to us about ourselves. In this baby on this night – child of Mary and child of God – we hear God telling us how much we are loved.

Someone has said that Christmas time is the time when God shows up as a playful child – and it's in the Christ child that we're reminded of our own lost play. But we're more like that tired and frustrated child in her mother's arm. Cranky and self-centered, our hearts need softening again by the "I love you" of God. They're so easily hardened by pain and loss and disappointment and our childish, "I want it my way. You're not the boss of me". There's a sourness that infects us and "I love you" sounds empty. Our hearts need to become young again.

Think of your most dysfunctional relative or the meanest person you know. Then imagine that person as a baby in mom's arms. What happened? What causes us to leave God's gift of love unwrapped?

Here's an invitation. Before you go to bed tonight, unwrap God's Christmas present to you. God's saving word of love means that **each one of us belongs** to the Holy Family – the Holy Family of the woman, the man, and the baby. The miracle under our noses is that we're all family – and not just any family. We are a Holy Family – and every child is a revelation of God's "I love you". And that's why Christmas can be so hard for some people – the ones who feel lonely and unloved and uncared for.

We're so often like the innkeepers of La Posada – turning away the Holy Family because we don't have enough room for them. When we forget our own longing for home- our own need to belong – we forget who we are. And it's so simple. At the heart of every is the woman, the man, the baby – the Christ child, helpless and vulnerable – revealing to us that the poorest and the least among us are special signs of God's presence in the world. Whether you're married or single, or part of an extended family – whether you're alone and feeling isolated – whoever you are and whatever your circumstances – you've got family connections. You were born into God's Holy Family – called into being by God's "I love you".

And so especially on this night, know that you are being called home. You may have to leave your home to find it. Like Joseph and Mary – like the people of San Francisco de Assis – you may have to cross rivers and borders and go to places that at first feel strange and alien – and you may experience some rejection along the way – but God is preparing a place for you – a place deep in God's own heart – the place where there are so many mansions. You were born into God's Holy Family – called into being by God's "I love you".

And it's the baby who shows the way home – the one through whom God tells us how much we're loved. You are part of that Holy Family searching for home. Know what it is on this night and e gifts to one another. The world is healed – hearts are set right – we draw a little closer to our true home – when we say and when we live the words that began it all: "I love you"

Amen