

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year A
12/24/16
Christmas Eve
Luke 2:1-20, Titus 2:11-14

I'm going to make a bold statement. I know why you're here tonight. Yes, I do. Sure, on the surface, there are as many hundred reasons why you might be here tonight as there are hundreds of folks sitting here. Some of us are here tonight because this is our church home, our community, and we can't imagine being anywhere else tonight. Some of us are here because we're visiting family or friends and, well, it's Christmas Eve and we go to church. Some of us are here because our mothers asked us – or told us - that us that it's Christmas Eve and we're going to Church. Some of us are here joyfully. Some of us are here reluctantly. Some of us are here wondering. Regardless of the presenting reason you're here- and let me hasten to add, I'm delighted you are and hope you'll return again and again -we all share one reason in common for being here on this night. Each of us- whether consciously, semi consciously, or sub-consciously – is here tonight because we are looking for something larger than ourselves. We are looking to be connected to something beyond our small selves. We are looking to be connected to a larger life. We are looking to be lifted out of our everydayness – which can be mundane or chaotic and sometimes both at once.- into something transcendent. That ineffable, transcendent experience of grace which we have all experienced at some time in our lives and perhaps never known what to call. On this night that's what we come here searching for. And I'm going to be so bold as to say that on this night that's exactly what we get.

Because on this night there is born unto us a Savior. Listen carefully to what the angel says – and remember angels by definition are messengers of grace, “Do not be afraid.” There it is. Right up front. Do not be afraid. In this time of darkness and conflict. In this time of sickness and loss and death. In this time of confusion and uncertainty. Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. For to you is born this day a Savior. And this child wrapped in yards of cloth will be a **sign** for you.

I want us to listen very carefully to that. This Savior that we celebrate on this night is come among us as a **sign**. That's really important and needs our closest attention. The Hand whose story we will follow and tell all those, has come to us as a **sign**.

That sign, the meaning of that sign, the wonder of that sign, that's why we're here tonight. So where does this sign point us?

First, the sign tells us, that God has come into the world and is in the midst of everything. In the midst of the good, the bad, the ugly. God is there. Transforming even the very worst. God is there. God can be trusted. Like a loving parent. Like a loving sister or brother. So do not be afraid.

God has come into the world as a crying baby who grows into a grown-up human being. This human being lives a life that seems to be extraordinary – and it is – and the **sign** that this extraordinary life offers to us is that we can live such an extraordinary life ourselves. Jesus whom we also will call Christ becomes the pattern for our lives. When we live our lives following that pattern, we discover the Christ that lives within each of us. As the Apostle Paul says over and over again, “You are hidden with Christ.” “You have been crucified with Christ.” “You are in Christ.” This sign has been given to us so that we can understand our true natures. Our true selves. As we pattern our lives on Jesus’ life, we discover this hidden Christ within each of us.

But what does that mean? What did Jesus do that we should do? Well, he was a compassionate healer. He included the ones his culture wanted to exclude. He even loved the ones who wanted to judge him and kill him. He forgave them. He unapologetically gave himself in devotion and service to God. He didn’t worship idols. You know, the idols of money, power, and control, success, being thought well of by others. He wouldn’t make a good celebrity, that is to say. We can do the same thing. We can let go of the idols we worship. And this one who is a sign for us, listened deeply and intently to understand God’s will for him. And then he did it. In faith and in trust. Among the most profound prayer ever prayed happened in Gethsemane the night before Jesus’ death. Knowing what was to come, Jesus prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. But not my will, yours be done”. He told God what he wanted and hoped for. But then in faith and trust he placed himself in God’s hands. He surrendered his will to God’s will. He walked the road of powerlessness all the way to death. But that wasn’t the end of the story. No, the story continued.

God took this trust, God took this surrender, God took this powerlessness and turned new life. Out of complete darkness and chaos and defeat, new life was born. Resurrection happened.

Do you know how this is a sign for us? The best and most hopeful and most joyful sign we could ever imagine in the midst of the darkness and the chaos? When we choose to walk the way of compassion, when we choose to walk the way of including and embracing and healing everyone – and I mean everyone – not just the ones who look and talk and act like us – I mean everyone, when we choose the way complete surrender to Divine love, it won’t mean we’ll avoid the pain of life. It won’t mean we’ll avoid the

chaos and darkness. It means that chaos and darkness aren't the final answer. Love is the final answer.

So here's the last thing I want to say about this sign we've received on this night. This sign is God's gift of love to us. And we choose whether or not we receive it and we choose whether or not we pass it on. If we choose to ignore it or avoid it, our souls will stay small and selfish and focused only on ourselves. That's a pretty good definition of hell. If we still need to grow in love and to trust love, God will make plenty of space for us to do that, even in death itself. Why would the exhaustion of our physical bodies mean the end of our experience of God? God and our true selves, our Christ selves, live in the Eternal Now. And finally, if you're already at home in love, meaning your life is following the pattern of Jesus life, when your physical body becomes exhausted, you'll find you're already in the home of Love and that's got to be what we mean by Heaven.

Life with God, which means life lived in Divine Love, is all about growth and wonder that never ends. Infinite life with God is all about infinite growth in love. Forever.

The sign we've been given tonight is a path to follow, A pattern living. But it's your choice. You can choose tonight right now – to live in love – to follow the divine pattern – or to live in selfishness and isolation and fear. The sign points us toward deeper Love and away from chaos and despair.

But it's up to us. The decision is ours. What will you choose on this night? Will you choose selfishness or fear? Or will you choose hope and love and peace in your soul? It's a choice we make everyday. And these choices really do live in to eternity.

So bless you on this night, my dear sisters and brothers. Bless you and all those you love. For on this night we have each been given a sign. Do not be afraid. Amen.