

# Sermon: Christmas Eve

The Rev. Mike Wernick

December 24, 2018

Year C  
Isaiah 62:6-12  
Psalm 97  
Titus 3:4-7  
Luke 2:8-20

Merry Christmas... yes... according to ancient tradition... of the new day beginning at sunset... Christmas began at 5:11 this afternoon... and so as we begin Christmastide... let us pray... Holy God... may the light of this night shine around us... and not only shine around us... but percolate through us... infuse our bodies and our being with its luster... that we become so steeped in the light of Christ... that it cannot help but shine forth from us... and guide our way into grace... and peace... perfecting us... making us whole... and making us increasingly real... in Jesus' name... Amen...

That's a lot to ask for... but it's not asking for more than God already has waiting for us... we already sing *this little light of mine*... we know that one candle loses nothing of its own light by lighting another... we know that lamps don't go under bushel baskets but on lamp stands... we know that the light shines in the darkness and darkness does not overcome it... we associate darkness with a heavy heart... and light with being lighthearted and emotionally available... not taking ourselves too seriously... and we know that being vulnerable... is disarming... that being real with others... endears us to them...

When Bp. Whyne kids around... and acts not the way our heads tell us a bishop ought to act... we feel captivated... when we let go of the heaviness of ego... when we share our stories of not quite having it all together... when we're the first to say I'm sorry... it becomes easier to be forgiven... and to forgive... when my dad used to come home... and my brother and I would rush to tell him how we had gotten into trouble that day... it always went better than if our mom told him...

Even so... even though the angels... and Jesus... say... Do Not be Afraid... we are too often... so afraid... of disappointing... of not measuring up... of not being enough... of being weak... of being exposed... of being found out... that in order to not risk feeling that... we move from here [heart] to here [head]... we minimize or discount our feelings... we conclude that since our emotions... have little currency... since they can't make us money... why bother with them... and we substitute our true thoughts with what we believe to be politically correct...

David Keck... Chaplain at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University writes... and someone's harsh words can stick with us... with disproportionate power... particularly after a breakup or a divorce... someone who loved us... got to know us... ultimately found some way to justify that we're not worth living with... we remember the criticism and assume that the other person must be correct... forgetting all the other appreciative words that friends and family have spoken over the years... or... if we receive too much boundless praise... we come to think that we can do no wrong... there may or may not be... any truth whatsoever... in what other people say about us... but we take their words as gospel... so learning how to filter what others say... to accept accurate criticism... and recognize baseless flattery... requires hard work and the capacity for honest self-reflection... we need the patient strength to sort through our feelings... and bring sober judgment to assess what's accurate and what's not...

*Do not be afraid*... and words like these... appear over three hundred times in the Bible... and the most frequent time is when a divine being... speaks to a human being... but far too often... we are fearful... afraid that God will judge us for thinking what we think... for being who we are... for feeling how we feel... but our emotions are not our weakness... our emotions are our strength... they are our strength...

Jesus had feelings... Jesus expressed emotions... he wept... he got angry... and no one ever called Jesus weak... God emptied God-self into a fragile human body... God incarnated as a one of us... and no human being was ever as powerful... as real...

probably because no human being ever knew themselves as fully... as perfectly... as Jesus did...

*Do not be afraid... I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people... to you is born... this day... in the city of David... a Savior... who is the Messiah... this day... in the birth of Jesus... which the angels announced to the outcasts of society... we move from *chronos*... human time... to *kairos*... God's time... the eternal now emerges into the here and now...*

Charles Campbell writes... the political powers... in both Jesus' day and our own... play on fear to get their way... whether it be the fear of the Emperor... the fear of terrorists... the fear of the other... the immigrant... or the fear of death... but those days are over... this day... the day of light... is here...

I know a CRC pastor... who is letting go of some inherited denominational judgment... who is becoming what we might call more inclusive... more welcoming... and he is afraid that his colleagues will find him out... that he will be rejected by his tribe... I know of some LGBT college students who won't come out to their parents until after they graduate... afraid their parents will stop paying their tuition and reject them... I know some Presbyterians who have become Lutheran... and some Catholics who have become Episcopalian... who have been rejected by their families... but we know that this kind of rejection is unfounded and myopic... and all of these fears... are the same fear... because we all desire to be accepted... by those we love... and by those who love us... for who we are... and by God...

And God does... but it's only when... in our brokenness... we project our own conditional love... onto God... that we sell God short... because Isaiah 66 tells us that God will comfort us like a mother... Ps. 139 tells us that God was there when we were knit together in our mother's womb... Ps. 56 tells us that God collects our tears in a bottle... Luke 12 tells us that God knows how many hairs are on our heads... and

Proverbs 9:10 tells us that... *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom*... but the Hebrew word that's translated as fear... also means reverence... and knowledge... so knowing God... knowing who God is... is to know God's immeasurable love... radical grace... and unmerited forgiveness...

We are loved so completely and unconditionally by God... that there is nothing we could possibly do that could evoke more of God's love... and there is nothing we could possibly not do that would diminish God's love... but although God loves us just exactly... precisely... the way we are now... in this day... God is not finished with us yet... and these are words that... like Mary... we might treasure... and ponder in our hearts... Do not be afraid... and Merry Christmas!

Mike+