

Let's Ponder That for a Moment....

[Text - Luke 2:15-20]

Pastor Dave Shackle

December 24, 2017

“Are you ready for Christmas?”

I tell you, if I had a wrapped present for every time I've been asked that question this past week, I'd be “ready for Christmas” for the next decade! Of course, that depends on one's definition of “readiness”. It seems that what most people mean when talking about being “ready for Christmas” is that the house is decorated, cards are sent, cookies baked, presents bought-and-wrapped, and family-time figured-out and firmly scheduled. If all those parts are in place, then what more could one possibly need to do? Hummm...it seems there may be one more piece of the Christmas Preparedness Puzzle that I'm missing.... O yeah, something about the birth of a baby, and the rebirth of Humankind.

In all the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it can be easy to overlook this season's primary purpose. Even worse, the hectic pace and the hyper-consumerism of our surrounding culture can actually pull us into focusing on the complete opposite of the Christmas message. Christmas is about peace on earth and goodwill to all. It's about celebrating and honoring the Christ Child, by remembering and emulating the life and message of Jesus Christ: a life of simplicity and service; a message of inclusion, hospitality, and grace.

Therefore, *really* getting ready for Christmas involves making an effort to treat all those around us with compassion and kindness. It means speaking-up for peace and justice in this world, and reaching-out to help those who are hungry or hurting, struggling or searching. It's about remembering and reflecting the light and love that Jesus Christ brings to our tired and troubled world.

Now I realize that for some of us, this can be a difficult time of the year to do these things. The weather is cold and dreary; the nights are long

and dark. Those who face serious illness, loss or hardship often find it difficult to be surrounded by holiday cheer, when their own lives seem so bleak. The rush and pressure to get everything done can become frustrating and even depressing. The chaos and busyness of the holidays can make it difficult for us to really pay attention to those things and people that truly matter; and the genuine meaning of this Season can get lost in the shuffle.

In moments like these, it may be helpful for you and me to consider the example of Mary. She certainly had a hectic and potentially overwhelming 1st Christmas, yet she somehow manages to tune-out the surrounding chaos, and to “ponder in her heart” the profound significance of that sacred event. Her calmness would have had a calming influence on all those around her, including her firstborn son. So perhaps you and I can follow her lead today: by slowing-down, taking a breath, and pondering in our hearts the marvelous things that the Holy One has done and is doing in this world; by putting into perspective what really matters, and what ultimately does not.

Perhaps it is from his *mother*, that Jesus learns to prioritize things in his life - to focus on those seemingly insignificant and often overlooked events and people; and to downplay those overblown problems and overbearing people that often clamor for our attention. Jesus doesn't run with the power-brokers of his day. He isn't particularly impressed with the self-absorbed religious or political leaders. Around him He prefers to associate with the oppressed and the outcast: tax-collectors, prostitutes, and other publically-labeled “sinners”. Jesus actually listens to what *women* have to say [apparently, his mother had taught him well!]. He even enjoys gathering-up those squirmy little *children*, and giving them his undivided attention. Jesus offers a refreshingly different way of looking at Life: boldly proclaiming that those who place themselves first, shall be last; while those who are considered “last” or “least” shall be first in the Divine Realm. And whoever would be the greatest among us, Jesus says, must be a humble *servant* to all!

It's as though Jesus comes to turn this world upside-down; or perhaps, to turn this world "right-side up!" In the Divine Realm which Jesus envisions, little acts of kindness are extremely important; while the grand and showy stuff simply fades away; gaining is achieved through generous giving; and everlasting life is found through compassionate self-sacrifice. In and through Jesus Christ, you and I are shown that the greatest power of all, is the power of self-giving love.

That's what this Season is really all about. It's about the Divine Source of Life coming to life, in a tiny, vulnerable baby - in a small and simple stable - in the little town of Bethlehem. Coming, not to overpower us with force and might, but to overwhelm us with compassion, grace and peace. So this morning, as you and I ponder in our hearts the true significance of this Holy Season, we find that we really are "ready for Christmas!" That's because the love of Christ has already come - and continues to abide - among us all.