

Good morning to all those who are anticipating something fantastic to happen this Christmas ... You are, aren't you?,

**SCRIPTURE:**

Galatians 2:20 (CEB) – Larger reading: Galatians 2:11-21

*"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in my body, I live by faith, indeed, by the faithfulness of God's Son, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

**STORY:**

M. Scott Peck's book: The Different Drum – Community Making and Peace ... The story concerns about a monastery that had fallen on hard times. There were only five monks left - all of them over seventy years of age. In the woods near the monastery was a hut visited from time to time by a rabbi from a nearby town. One day, in desperation, the abbot went to the rabbi to ask if he had any advice for their dying monastery.

The rabbi said, "I have no advice to give really. The only thing I can tell you is that one of you could well be the Messiah."

When the old abbot returned to the monastery, the other four monks gathered around him: "Well, what did the rabbi say? Did he have good counsel for us?"

"No, he couldn't help," the abbot answered. "We just wept and prayed and read the Scriptures together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving was something rather cryptic. He said that one of us might be the Messiah. I don't know what he meant by that."

In the months that followed, the old monks pondered the rabbi's words. The Messiah? But if that is so, which one?

- Do you suppose he meant the abbot? Yes, if he meant anyone, surely its Father Abbot.
- On the other hand, maybe he meant Brother Thomas. Thomas is a holy man.
- Certainly he could not have meant Brother James. James gets rather crotchety at times. But he's virtually always right.
- But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive - and yet somehow he is always there when you need him.

As they contemplated, the old monks began to treat one another with extraordinary love and respect - on the off-chance that one of them might be the Messiah.

Because the forest was really quite beautiful, people would come there to picnic and play. Occasionally, some of them would enter the old monastery, and they began to sense the extraordinary love and respect that now surrounded the five old monks - love that bound them together and radiated from them, permeating the atmosphere. The people told their friends, and they came and brought others.

Soon some of the younger men asked if they could join the monks. And then others joined. So within a few years, the once dying monastery had come to life as never before. It became a thriving order and, thanks to the Rabbi's Gift, a vibrant center of light and spirituality.

**REFLECTION:**

It is Christmas. The signs of the season surround us at every turn. People are rushing here and there (or trying to as we practice physical distancing) just trying to get everything done before time runs out. We are making our lists and checking it more than twice not to find out who has been naughty or nice, but just to make sure that we've covered all the bases.

So, what if one of us IS the Messiah? How would our world change? How would the people around us change? How would our interaction with other people change? In our scripture lesson for today Paul adds to this discussion as he states the reality for him ... that it isn't he that lives, but is Christ living in and through him. Actually, the New Testament repeats the phrase that we are "in Christ" 164 times. Sit back and allow that reality sink in. Truly, it is a summons to be more than what we are.

Think about that reality as you think about the changes Paul brought about in his world. The seminary professor, teaching on the theology of Paul shared, "We wouldn't have the Christianity or the Church that we have today without Paul. Paul had the most profound influence in the known world of his day. Next to Christ himself, Paul stands as the central figure in the entire Christian movement." Paul (and Christ living in and through Paul) became the change agents. Thus, Christ changes our world ... changes our relationship ... saves us from ourselves ... saves us for ourselves ... binds us together in love. The message of Christmas is the transformative power of the Messiah's presence.

**QUOTE:**

*"The adventure of new life in Christ begins when the comfortable patterns of the old life are left behind."* - David Roher

**PRAYER:**

Come Lord Jesus, entire my life, change my life, change my world. Help me to become a change agent like Paul. The old world sure could use another Christ centered change agent. In the name of him who changes everything, Jesus Christ. Amen

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***Sermon this Sunday is from Luke 3:15-18 – Waiting with Expectations***