

Greetings to all those who are anticipating the greatest gift ever,

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 2:15 (MSG) – Larger reading: Luke 2:1-21

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us."

STORY:

Many years ago the Puritans thought that they were ruining Christmas with all their pagan rituals. They especially objected to the fact that the holiday usually came on a weekday, therefore distracting people, they thought, from the Lord's Day of Sunday. But they did more than annually complain about it as we do. They took action and got rid of Christmas altogether. In Puritan settlements across 17th century America a law was passed outlawing the celebration of Christmas. The marketplace was ordered to stay open for business as though it was no special occasion and all violators were prosecuted. It was against the law to make plum pudding on December 25th. The celebration was not referred to as Yuletide but as fooltide. ^[L T L]_[SEP SEP]So we want to reform Christmas and clean it up do we? Well, is this how far we want to go? Do we really want to be rid of it altogether? Then will Christmas, as the Puritans thought, be saved from us and our sinful ways. So what if we spend \$40 billion annually on presents. Can you think of a better way of spending all that money than on gifts of love? And most of them are just that. And so what are all the lights and tinsel does create a fairy tale setting that soon disappears, as does the so-called Christmas spirit. At least it lets us know, if only for a brief time, what life can be like if we only try. ^[L]_[SEP]So let the message ring out this day, not that we are destroying this holy day, but rather, that we can never destroy this day. Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be for all generations. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord.

REFLECTION:

A conclusion has come to mind and that being, God is going to do what God is going to do. It was while I was contemplating the popular and overused phrase during the Christmas season, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season." I don't know about anyone else, but it is fast becoming an irritant in my spiritual saddle, so to speak.

Individuals wear it as a pin, they place yard signs up in front of their businesses and/or homes, they send it out in Christmas cards, but ... and that is a very large "but" ... what else happens? Come on, let's get serious now.

The conversation was heading towards the "reason for the season" stuff when I simply looked at the individual doing the sharing and asked, "When was the last time you introduced someone to Jesus Christ?" He began to choke on his words ... but I didn't stop. I continued, "When was the last time you feed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, cared for the widows and orphaned, or visited those in prison?" Again, choking.

It is one thing to proclaim the “reason” phrase, but is quite another matter to actually do something with the person of the reason. We become contributors to “fooltide,” in the story above, than in the true celebration of Yuletide. Puritans missed the mark in their attempt to “rescue” Christmas from the pagan and non-believers. And we too can miss the mark by just proclaiming the “reason for the season” stuff without following through by doing what he has instructed us to do. Could the real celebration of his birth be found in more practical, down to earth matters? Probably, if we would but look long enough at life’s situations and begin to respond to those problems. Like the little girl in one story that I like to tell when assured that Jesus was right here with her, “But I want someone with flesh on.”

From this old preacher’s perspective Christmas and the gift of Jesus is not about getting us into heaven, but getting heaven into us. It is not about getting our heavenly train pass punched. It is not about our salvation, but it is about salvation working in us for all people. It is not about feeling good and at peace (the warm and fuzzy feeling stuff), but it is about being agents of peace within a world that has gone a little mad. It is about us fulfilling the call to be changed agents for the Kingdom here on earth. Anything beyond this earth is but the icing on the eternal cake!

QUOTE:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” - [Margaret Mead](#)

PRAYER:

Lord, help us to find the true meaning of this season and guide us towards a deeper commitment to the work – the labor – of being part of the Kingdom. Amen.

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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Anticipate the Joy of Christmas during tonight’s Christmas Eve Service that will be LIVE STREAMED – no waiting – at 6:00 PM. You can reach it either from our Web Page through our FaceBook (Manatee United Methodist Church).

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