

Greetings to all the Saints both near and far,

SCRIPTURE:

Judges 2:18-19 (MSG) – Larger reading: Judges 2:7-19

"When God was setting up judges for them, he would be right there with the judge: He would save them from their enemies' oppression as long as the judge was alive, for God was moved to compassion when he heard their groaning because of those who afflicted and beat them. But when the judge died, the people went right back to their old ways—but even worse than their parents!—running after other gods, serving and worshiping them. Stubborn as mules, they didn't drop a single evil practice."

STORY:

Hudson Taylor once said: "I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help him. I ended up by asking him to do his work through me."

REFLECTION:

Three simple words that will strike fear in the heart of anyone trying to fulfill the role of Santa Claus ... "Some Assembly Required." Our two children were young when we decided that Santa should give them a swing set for Christmas. The plan was to assemble as much as possible of the set in the garage during the week leading up to Christmas and then on Christmas Eve, between the two services, the senior pastor and me would put the three pieces together while Margaret got Tim and Tracy ready for bed. At least that was the plan ... "Some Assembly Required."

So there we were in the backyard, flashlights in hand, the three pieces laid out on the ground ... and, no matter what we did the three pieces just won't go together. After spending too much time, too much effort, and working up a little sweat it was time for us to return to church and hold the midnight service. After the service we returned to the scene of the crime and tried to do it again, but with less success this go around. At about 3:30am we called it quits. "Some assembly required" ... stupid words ... a silly concept.

And before anyone jumps to the conclusion ... YES, I did read the instructions first! So, there!

It would be the last Christmas that I lived with the foolish idea that Santa brought presents already assembled. Where did I can came up with that crazy idea is beyond me. From that Christmas on our Christmas' became a lot simpler and much less stress filled.

With the help of my two brothers, in the afternoon of that fate-filled Christmas, we were able to finish what Santa wasn't able to do. It is amazing what can be seen and accomplished when you are not trying to complete a task with a small flashlight. That swing set would be taken apart and moved three more times until it was finally abandoned in Jacksonville.

Some assembly required ... it is amazing to this old preacher how often people have shared with me that they would start attending church or get involved or start believing once they got their life in order, as in getting their life put together, assembled. Each of us thinks that we are the ones who “assemble” the various parts of our lives and put them together. We miss the point of God’s grace and the message of the Emmanuel – God with us. We miss the power of Christmas. We are called to surrender our hearts, spirits and desires and God assembles the life. All we are required to do is make ourselves available. Some assembly required? Not with God thanks to Jesus Christ, the babe of Bethlehem.

The faith, as understood by the men and women of the Old Testament, was a “do-it-yourself” project. It is how they came to understand their relationship with God. The rules and regulations spelled out the requirements of how to “assemble” ones life ... but the assembly was placed upon our shoulders. Reading the instructions, the Torah, made it understandable, but still almost impossible. Like trying to put together a swing set in the dark. But, when the Sun (or should I say, Son) came, shedding light upon what God really was trying to communicate so many years earlier, the “task” became so much easier because the “task” wasn’t of our doing. All that was required was surrendering ourselves over to God through Christ.

So, this Christmas, each of us can try to play “Santa” with our own lives with “some assembly required” or we can enjoy the celebration of the workmanship of God’s perfect plan as he puts the pieces together.

QUOTE: *God is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded to Him.* - Andrew Murray

PRAYER:

Lord, I’m the greatest of fools to think that my life is a “do-it-yourself” project. Every time I take control, I create a royal mess of the job. Forgive me for being so foolish. Gently remind me that I need to let go and surrender myself into your hands. In the name of him who makes it all possible, Jesus Christ. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
Jmartin450@tampabay.rr.com
386-795-5323

***Worship today either in person in the sanctuary
OR via FaceBook (Manatee United Methodist Church)
OR YouTube link for Sunday with this link: <https://youtu.be/DgqtreOhUC4>***