

Good morning people of grace and mercy,

SCRIPTURE:

Ephesians 5:15-16 (CEB) – Larger reading: Ephesians 5:1-20

“So be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly. Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil times.”

STORY:

Harry Emerson Fosdick tells this story: “A woman now distinguished in public life complained to her mother of the many hardships which she had to face in her early years. ‘See here,’ the mother said, ‘I have given you life; that is about all I will ever be able to give you – life. Now you stop complaining and do something with it.’”

REFLECTIONS:

In 2010 the temperature plummeted earlier than normal, freeze warning were issued and winter wrapped its icy fingers around our hearts. My thoughts then as now was taken back to that first day of November when Margaret and me were just entering our third month of marital bliss. Well, it was bliss for me, I am not sure what it was for Margaret considering the level of immaturity that she had to deal with in her young naïve, self-centered husband. Our 55-years of marriage is a testimony to her level of forgiveness and tolerance of my painful stupidity. Anyway, that is a subject matter for another day and beside the point in what I am trying to say today.

On that first day of November, 1965 a freaky winter storm blew through Nashville dumping a heavy, wet snow on the city. It caught the trees still wearing their fall foliage in splendid display. It was my first snow storm that I could remember because my formative years in Cleveland had long been lost and it was beautiful. What a thrilling experience. It brought out the kid in all of us. Harry, who would later become a Rhodes scholar, was running around campus in his bathing suit and a pair of sneakers having a ball. He was soon joined by some other slightly insane students in their bathing suits. The president of our college, Dr. D.D. Holt, stood off in the near distance laughing at the antics of his beloved “children”. And, as it could be expected, we made the front page of the newspaper with our large snow sculpture of the character Kanga from “Winnie the Pooh” – the drama department’s fall production that year.

When unusual and/or different occurrence's take place I normally associate them with music of some sort. And so, with the temperature low and the freeze warning in effect while we attempt to finish out our Christmas preparations I think of a little used Christmas carol, “In the bleak midwinter”:

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

*Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.*

*Enough for him, whom Cherubim worship night and day
A breast full of milk and a manger full of hay.
Enough for him, whom angels fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel which adore.*

When our souls are gripped by the bleakness of life; when our lives seem meaningless and empty; when our hearts have grown cold for the lack of an embrace; when our vision has dulled to hope and possibilities; when our future seems miserable because it has been mired in the muck of bad decisions; when it takes all of our strength and fortitude to simply get through another day ... in the bleak midwinter of our existence, God comes when least expected in a surprisingly simple way ... our world is turned upside down ... our lives are forever transformed ... we mount up on eagle's wings ... and the truth of the Bethlehem child born to two very young teenagers thousands of years ago becomes a pivotal point for us once again ... and the celebration of Christmas, a celebration of life, of hope, of possibility, of promise, of God's grace and forgiveness takes on new meaning for each of us even when the world is in the grips of the bleakness of a midwinter's storm.

QUOTE:

"There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them." ~ Clare Boothe Luce

PRAYER:

We must confess, Father and Mother of us all, that in the midst of this Pandemic it is too easy to lose hope; to look at the bleakness of our situation; to hunger for human contact again; to be weighted down by the fear that grips our daily existence. Help us to discover once again the joy of the promised child of Bethlehem so that our spirits can once again sing, "Joy to the World" ... in the name of that child, Jesus, we ask this.
Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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Christmas Eve Service is by RESERVATION ONLY. There is limited seating so, please call the church office soon.