

“Let Christmas Soak In”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – January 2, 2022

John 1:10-18

This is an odd Sunday, this Second Sunday after Christmas. According to the business world, the Christmas season is in the past. In fact, the stores are already stocking up for Valentine’s Day! But, according to our liturgical calendar, we still are in the season of Christmas.

But I like this odd Sunday! With the feverish activity of the holiday season over and the new year begun, today is a day in which we can ponder again the glory of Christmas. Today is a day in which we can let Christmas soak into our souls.

Did any of you experience the post-Christmas blues? For a long time, we anxiously and excitedly prepared for Christmas Day. Then, the day finally came and our expectations were met with varying success.

A perfect example of this was a commercial that was running a few years ago. The car is broken down and the husband is looking under the hood. The wife comes around and offers to call for help on her new phone, but she pulls out the waffle iron that she received as a present and sarcastically remarks that if he had only gotten what she wanted, she could have helped with a phone call.

And if the stress of not buying just the right present was not bad enough; for many of us, it is time to go back to the routine. For some, this cycle of emotions can be depressing. And that is why today we need to let Christmas soak into our souls.

How was your New Year? Many of us desired that this would be a time to step out with the right foot. But for some of us our feet got switched. I stopped making New Year’s resolutions, so I won’t feel guilt for breaking them. For some, the realization that much has changed since COVID emerged can be frustrating. And that is why today we need to let Christmas soak into our souls.

What is this message of Christmas? Basically, this is the ultimate love story. This is not like the passionate flings of the soap operas or the easy romance in a Harlequin book. It is not temporary, here today and gone tomorrow. It is not transparent, shallow, or self-absorbed. This is something different. Scott Peck, author of *A Road Less Traveled*, once commented, “Love is not spontaneous and

easy; love is not a feeling, but a sustained pattern of action. Love is always either work or courage.”

Jesus Christ, born in a manger and crucified on a cross, is indeed the ultimate love story. It is the ultimate love story because it is a sustained pattern of action from God to his people. The introduction of the Christ child was not simply a frivolous, last-minute idea of God. Our Gospel clearly reminds us of this. “IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD AND THE WORD WAS GOD ... AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.”

For those of us who are depressed or frustrated, today is a time to hear this message. Today is a time to hear that God’s love toward humanity is not just THE ultimate love story, but also YOUR ultimate love story. God wants you to BE. God created you; he loved you into existence. In Christ, God redeemed you; his love will keep you going. God wants you and me to BE. As we hear this message, Christmas soaks into our souls. As we hear this message, we remember these words of the Psalmist: “THIS IS THE DAY WHICH THE LORD HAS MADE; LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT.”

God loves us in Christ so that we may be, but God also loves us in Christ so that we may see. Through Jesus Christ, we are enlightened to see what is true and good. As it says in our Gospel lesson, “IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN.”

Unfortunately, we make excuses and play games so as to hide from the light. We seek darkness instead. One way that we do this is when we allow what is good to get in the way of what is best for us. These situations are easy to rationalize, easy to justify. But, because these subtle situations are so dangerous, we need to see them in our lives.

How does this take place in our lives? For example, staying home with the family on a Sunday morning might have its benefits -- like needed sleep or catching up on important conversations or just being with one another. Every family needs to spend time together, just being together. That is where family values, traditions, and history are shared. But, when a pattern of missing worship develops, then what is good prevents what is best. So many people have allowed family to become the excuse that interferes with an ongoing, faithful relationship with Christ and his church. There are some who will say that you don’t need a church in order to worship God. And that is true. But will you

worship if you are not in the fellowship of other believers? It's not very likely that most would. And in this day and time of COVID, we now have the opportunity to be in person and online. We can and are in fellowship with other believers when we watch online just as much as we are when we are in person.

And another thing, some of my best and worst memories of church, many that I have used as sermon illustrations over the years, are from being in church with family. So, using family as an excuse not to be in church or online is missing out on some of the best memories that you can make with your family. You cheat yourself and them of what they can look back on with fondness and humor in the years to come. What is good keeps us from what is best.

Santa Claus and the giving of presents is good. I know how much I enjoy giving and receiving gifts. (And I do mean receiving gifts!) But problems arise when materialism takes precedence over the joy and wonder over the birth of God's only Son. There is a problem when children know all the reindeer by name and stumble over the different people in the nativity. Here again, what is good thwarts what is best for us.

Finally, another example occurs when we choose to deal with a difficult situation by stepping back from it. We ignore the people involved with the problem and assure ourselves that there is nothing we can do about it anyway. But this coping mechanism for the moment keeps us from dealing with the pain so that there may be healing and reconciliation. God wants us to see, when what is good for us, thwarts what is best for us. "THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS AND THE DARKNESS HAS NOT OVERCOME IT." God wants the best for us!

As you end this holiday season and start a new year, let Christmas soak into your souls. And on this Second Sunday after Christmas, know that the ultimate love story is also your story. For in Christ, God wants you to BE, and God wants you to see. Amen.