

“What Is So Great About Christmas?”

The Rev. S. Shane Nanney ~ December 24 2024

Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-20

Edna Hong's book, Bright Valley of Love, is the true story of a physically challenged child who found a haven of love. Gunther was born near the end of World War I. His father was away at war. His mother would not care for him because he was deformed suffering from a severe case of Rickets. His grandmother, who begrudgingly took him in, hated him and was embarrassed by his deformity. Finally, they left him at Bethel, a Christian home for epileptics as well as physically and mentally challenged youth.

With the loving care of the staff and with the help of an epileptic roommate, named Kurt, Gunther began to learn how to talk and thus began to learn about life. It was Kurt who told Gunther about Christmas. The story of Jesus' birth and the love of God filled Gunther with joy. But there was something else that filled him with fear - little Kurt was getting worse. In fact, he told Gunther one night that he would soon be going to his heavenly home, maybe as early as Christmas time.

On the first Sunday of Advent, when Pastor Fritz began their Advent service, the joy and excitement of the day wiped out his fear. When the moment came for the Advent candle to be lit, little Kurt was chosen to do the honors. The children watched expectantly as Kurt took the small lighted candle and leaned toward the unlighted candle of the Advent wreath. But suddenly, the burning candle dropped. A moan burst from Kurt's lips and his body writhed in spasm after spasm of an epileptic seizure. One of the nurses quickly took him in her arms and left the room. Pastor Fritz rescued the cracked, but still burning candle and lit the wreath, singing as he did so. The staff and children joined in until a shrill cry emerged from the heart of Gunther's fear. The song stopped and Gunther screamed, "There's a crack in everything."

Every face in the room turned and looked at Gunther, but Gunther looked only at one face, the face of Pastor Fritz. Once again, he flung his wild desperate complaint against that face saying, "There is a crack in everything!" And then he added, "What is so great about Christmas?"

The silence of the room ached with Gunther's pain. Finally, Pastor Fritz turned from Gunther and appealed to the children saying, "Gunther needs to know what is so great about Christmas. Will you help me tell him please?"

Manford, a child with a mind for mathematics said, “Christmas comes in December. December is the 12th Month. Christmas comes on the 25th day. The 25th day of the 12th month.” “So, it does,” said Pastor Fritz. “Thank you, Manford.”

Monica jumped to her feet, beamed at Pastor Fritz and spoke the only words in her vocabulary, “Alleluia, Oh Susanna!” And then she sat down.

“Thank you, Monica.” Said the pastor. “Can anyone else tell Gunther what is so great about Christmas?”

Petra, the oldest of the patients there, but with a mental age of only five said, “Christmas is so great ‘cause then God sent his son, Jesus our Savior.”

Pastor Fritz said, “That’s true, Petra. Thank you. But why? Children, why did God send his son to be our Savior?”

Finally, Leni climbed from her chair and shouted, “Because. because everything has a crack!”

Pastor Fritz said, “It is true, Gunther, that there is a crack in everything. God sees the crack better than we do, and the crack is ever so much worse than we think it is. That is why God sent his son. Not to patch up the crack. But to make everything new. That is why Christmas is so great!”

I know some of you have experienced the cracks in life and when they occur at Christmas those cracks can shatter us. Some of you have shared your pain with me and part of that pain comes from the same source as Gunther’s. And we may ask with Gunther, “What is so great about Christmas?” Or “What is so great about God, if this awful thing can happen to me?”

Gunther was losing his friend, Kurt, to death.

Some of you have loved ones who are dying.

Others have friends and relatives who are seriously ill.

Others feel they are losing their relationship with their spouse or their child.

Still others are having personal problems. They are struggling with depression or lack of direction or feelings of low self-esteem.

When those problems pervade our lives there does seem to be a crack in everything and nothing seems whole and good.

Even if we aren't experiencing personal problems, we can't help but see the crevices.

Here in Ohio, sixteen thousand people are homeless and 1000 of them will sleep outside in the cold tonight.

There is a crack between the rich and the poor in this nation, but even more so in the world. And the gap grows, and with it, the threat that the world may crumble from those kinds of cracks.

Some of us may ask with Gunther, "What is so great about Christmas?" And the answer remains the same. Christmas is great because that is when Christ came to be our savior, and he came precisely because there is a crack in everything. He doesn't cover over our cracks and make things look OK. He comes to make everything new. Without him we would eventually fall apart. The cracks would grow and spread until we and our world literally crumbled. But with Christ we can keep it together. With Christ we know there is comfort and strength. With Christ our relationships can be reconciled.

That is what is so great about Christmas. Our question is answered, our painful cry is quelled, our fear is comforted by the good news of Christ born at Christmas. He doesn't come to eliminate all our pain, solve all our problems, heal all our diseases or put an end to death.

But he comes to be God with us.

He comes to share our pain and ease it with his presence.

He comes to us in the midst of our problems and gives us the strength to deal with them.

He comes to help us endure our illnesses and to know wholeness in him.

He comes to overcome death and to give us new life.

Gunther overcame the cracks. He learned to walk and talk and communicate. He became a poet and shared the love that was shown to him by the people at Bethel.

With the love of Christ, we can overcome the cracks too. For Christ, who came at Christmas, brings us the comfort, joy, and peace that is found in knowing there is a God who loves us enough to be one of us and to be with us. God, through Christ, is powerful enough to conquer all the cracks. Amen.