

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Christmas Eve: December 24, 2022

“Christmas is the Good News”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Welcome to Christ the Lord Church this Christmas Eve. “I bring you good news of great joy for all people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord.” This is what the Gospel is, the Good News. The readings we listen to and base a good deal of our liturgy on is based on bringing good news to everyone who hears it. Such a quaint idea. I can make pictures in my mind of being a good evangelist and then of course, I wake up to reality. Following Jesus is hard.

So what is the good news? Well of course it’s the time we celebrate Jesus’ birthday. Last Sunday I spoke about John the Baptist being the last of the Old Testament prophets, and if you look at the writings of those prophets, they foretold of a savior, and of a time when God would reveal itself to us. And Jesus’ birth is that time, the breaking in of the new.

And, as becomes the pattern throughout the Gospels, those prophets spoke the truth, however the human mind made expectations that were never promised by God. Yes, a Messiah, yes, a son of David, but an unwed girl without royalty or heritage? A small town that had no place for a young expectant couple to stay? Probably not the usual thoughts that come with the words King of Kings or Messiah.

And this is the Good News. God can use anyone, from anywhere, to do anything, no exceptions. After this eve, after Jesus is born, his lifetime is spent defying the

powers that be, especially when it came to religious authority, and kingly/Messiah behavior.

Someone said to me once, why doesn't someone preach on the beatitudes for Christmas? And I thought about that, and I think that Jesus would appreciate preaching on an example of why he was born. To explain the difference between God's grace, and human judgment.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

These are my people; the meek, those that want justice, those that want mercy, those that are honest and true to a fault. These are my people, they are God's people. Nothing in there about being rich, famous, or having an easy life. These traits go deeper than this, and this is more good news.

Jesus shows us that through faith, hope and love anything is possible. And this gives us meaning, and gives us strength when things are difficult. I was listening to something the other day and was inspired.

The subject was anxiety. We all experience it, but there is a healthy anxiety, and an unhealthy anxiety. When you are anxious with hope, you are anticipating – expecting, this is healthy, when you are anxious in fear, you are panicking – dreading, unhealthy. Christmas, or shall I say Jesus, comes during winter time, a time with short days and long nights, with lots of darkness, never mind the problems of mother nature and her weather.

Christmas/Jesus comes when we need hope the most. He comes to strengthen the meek, to lift up the righteous, to make people want to be forgiving and merciful, to remind people to cleanse their hearts of anger.

There is no better proof, at least for me, than when I go shopping for Christmas, not because I want to, but because I need to get that last present, I am tired, overspent financially, dreading the traffic, crowds and everything that goes with it, and then I enter the store, hear the music, think about the smiling face of the person receiving the gift, I take a moment to just take in the lights, colors and festive things around, I breathe and look down the extra aisle and buy another gift, even if it is for myself, and the burden lightens a bit. As doctor Suess would describe it, my heart grew bigger and bigger that day.

Or maybe for me and you it is just tonight, coming here, to a place to soak in the beauty, the songs, and have Communion.

Maybe this is the year you don't have a tree or decorations, maybe you don't have the physical abilities you used to, maybe you don't have the family members in your personal presence this year, may those you love watch from above. This also is Christmas.

But I beg to take a moment and release the anxiety of fear, dread, grief and sadness and exchange it for the anxiety of hope – or rather anticipation **because** this is Christmas, the time of light in the darkness, the perfect babe in the manger, a moment to feel as if God is smiling right at you.

We, here this evening are the New Testament people, the ones who cherish the babe that will show us a God that is kind and loving, a God that is merciful and patient, a God that can be present in the high places as well as the low. A God that is with us in the good times and the bad. A babe that will grow up to show us to closely reflect on our greed and division, on our tendency to speak for God as if we had authority, as he yet reveals our human pride that gets in the way of truly communing with God.

This babe will grow to show us that death is just another process in our spiritual lives back to God. That the fear of our mortality should not outweigh our desire to do good - even at physical cost, as Jesus sacrificed his own life. But tonight, we have in Jesus, in that babe in the manger a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This is the good news. Merry Christmas,
Amen