

Readings

Matthew 1:1-12

Perhaps this is Christmas

“Another Christmas Day has come and gone. We may have bought presents, received cards, baked cookies, and added to our waistlines.

But what now? What do we take away from this December 25th?

Do we return to the normal, the regular, and the everyday?

“The Work of Christmas,” a poem by civil rights leader and theologian Dr. Howard Thurman, reminds us why we stand on the side of love throughout the year: He wrote:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.”¹

This epiphany day is a day when we remember the wise people who followed a star. Who followed and sought out a revelation of the Holy in a way we wouldn't dare to seek in this day. Joyce Rupp says she finds revelations of God hard to trust when they are too ordinary. She says “I like to think that God is mostly revealed in something ‘big’ or outstandingly beautiful, like the Swiss Alps. The truth is however, that God is being revealed to us every day in those, nearest to us, wherever we are. It is how we look for God, and what we expect, that makes the difference.”² She suggests “Let us give up the ‘high mountains and vast oceans’ as our major searching places and come home to our simple lives.” I wonder if this is the truth revealed the wise men when they finally found the Holy Child. Did they receive an epiphany on that night when they found a simple family filled with such love and grace that it radiated great light. What

¹ <http://standingonthesideoflove.org/blog/the-work-of-christmas-begins/>

² Rupp, Joyce “Inviting God In” pg. 42

if we lived that kind of love and radiated that kind of grace. Would people seek us out - would we too be revelations of the most holy God. I wonder...

Oh I know at least for myself it is true that I will never come close to being anyone like Jesus - but I also know that it is my life's purpose to try and offer this kind of grace, love and welcome to all. That is why almost every year I find myself going back to a reflection by Martin Copenhaver who suggests that properly celebrated Christmas should not be a fixed date. Christmas should be more like a surprise party arriving when we least expect it. "After all, no one knew when the Messiah was going to arrive, and we never really know when the spirit of Christ will be made known. It might be on a special holiday circled on our calendars, or it might not. Imagine waking up each morning and thinking, "Perhaps this is the day. Perhaps this is Christmas." Then, perhaps, we would know that the arrival of Christ is not something we plan or arrange. It is a gift. And you never know when it will be given."³

Perhaps we would live more fully that way – that is if we constantly lived in the emerging light. In the birth of fullness. I actually believe that is how we are created to live –in fullness that is or at least in search of it. "We are made for truth. From birth onward, we struggle to emerge into the light. No one could exist outside the light, but our desires rush forward in search of something more. The human soul brims with life and longing." We are always on the search of something more.

Even the bible speaks to life and faith that way. The last chapter of the bible Revelation 22:12; 16 says "*Very soon now, I shall be with you again . . . I am . . . the bright star of the morning.*" Tony Robinson wrote "It's strange—and striking—how the Bible ends. Not like a mystery, with the culprit revealed and the riddle solved. Not like a symphony or a musical with a grand finale. Not like a novel, with the main character or characters finding some resolution.

The Bible ends by not ending. It ends in anticipation. It ends with the faithful still waiting, with Jesus saying, "Very soon now, I shall be with you." What kind of ending is that? In a way it seems unfair. Sixty-seven books and a couple thousand years and still waiting?!

Except that this is what it means to be people of faith—to be still waiting, still watching, still hoping, still listening . . . for God. Fiercely waiting.

If you're still waiting, it means you haven't settled in, insisting that present arrangements are the be-all and end-all just because they happen to suit you.

You're still waiting.

And if you're still waiting, it means you haven't given up. You haven't decided, cynically, that it all amounts to nothing and why bother anyhow? You're still waiting.

³ Copenhaver Martin B. Textweek.com still speaking daily devotional – Stretch Your Mind UCC

Are you still waiting—fiercely waiting?

And here's the great thing . . . if you are still waiting, you stand an excellent chance of seeing Jesus, "the bright morning star," the pre-dawn pulse of promise for those awake and waiting."⁴

And so as we celebrate Epiphany we walk with the wise ones who came in search of the new king. "Like others devoted to knowledge, they did not fear where truth led them. They left home and traveled far from their language, land and familiar beliefs." We are always searching partly because truth is rarely what we figure it will be. And so in faith and life we are called to be willing to embrace the wonder – not just at Christmas but always. Copenhaver suggests "Truth may seem like an ancient idol blocking our way. We are determined to make it purely on our own." What if we were willing to stay curious to learn from history, wisdom, and even revelations of the spirit. What if even in this day and age we allowed ourselves to live into the wonder?

Quinn G. Caldwell asks us frankly "Do you believe this, or don't you? Do you believe that God is working--right now--to bring this world to its fulfillment, or don't you? ... Do you believe that God is--right now--in the process of perfecting all that, or don't you? Look at yourself. Do you, or don't you, believe that God is--right now--perfecting the very self you're looking at?

If not, fine. You're certainly not alone, and there's probably not much harm in living 2014 the same as you lived 2013.

But if you do believe that a new world is coming to pass, then you have your work--and your hope--cut out for you in 2014. It means it's time to start practicing living like you've been made new, as if God has dressed your soul for a wedding. Like God is living next door. Like every person you meet is being molded for glory, and is just a split second from shining like the sun.

Caldwell suggests "Start now. Pick one thing in the room, and imagine what that thing will be like when God's done with it. Pick one person, and imagine that God is--right now--about to reveal the glory of heaven in her; treat her that way all day long. Tomorrow, pick another, and the next day, another...and just see if a new world doesn't emerge."⁵

"The Christian gospel, though rooted in history, is always forward-leaning. We lean like plants lean toward a window, even though they may never have seen the sun. We lean, with longing hearts, toward God's vision of the kingdom to come.

"Thy kingdom come," we pray. It is not here yet. That's why it is still a prayer. But, thank God,

⁴ Robinson, Tony "Fiercely Waiting" United Church of Christ

⁵ Caldwell Quinn "Believe it or Not" United Church of Christ

sometimes we are given a foretaste. And that is just what this season can offer sometimes--a blessed foretaste of what is to come.”⁶

“So I hope you had a wonderful Christmas and that it happened to fall on December 25. That is, I hope that the spirit of the living Christ was palpably present in every way on that day. But if not, do not despair. The presence of Christ may be made known to you today, perhaps in a surprising moment of grace, after the expectation-laden holiday has already passed, just when you least expect it. It could be today. This could be the day when the promise of Christmas is fulfilled.”⁷

So as we enter into this new year I invite us to be alert to God with us – revealing to us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit each and every day. I invite you to invite God in while you fiercely await the arrival of the kingdom and as you wait let the work of Christmas begin in you so that you and all the world around you will see the glory of God bright and present this day.

Amen.

⁶ Copenhagen “Leaning Towards the Future” UCC

⁷ Copenhagen