Nu‘uanu Congregational Church

December 27, 2020

*“’Twas the Sunday After Christmas”*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Well, here we are a couple of days after Christmas. This is what is known as one of the “low Sundays” in the church year. At home, of course, things are kind of quiet there, too I can imagine—all the presents have been opened and the ribbon and the wrapping paper has been taken out to the garbage. The Christmas dinner has been eaten, and some us have already polished-off the leftovers.

This year, because of the pandemic, there were fewer guests, fewer family members to welcome and then send on their way back home, but the Christmas tree and decorations are probably still up (especially if you have children at home). However, most of the trappings of the big day are over.

Christmas 2020 is now, officially, behind us.

Today is Sunday, and tomorrow is the inevitable Monday that must follow, calling us back to the routine of everyday life.

I cannot help but think that even though this year may not have been as big a celebration as many of us usually experience, tomorrow’s return to the usual weekday world will still bring the yearly feelings of deflation as we return to our regular schedules—whatever that may be.

It’s unavoidable, and I hope you don’t mind my saying so,…but I actually hope tomorrow is a bit of a let down for most of us.

That is, I hope that during the last few days there have been, at least a few moments, that lifted us out of the ordinary and into the presence of the joy, peace, hope, and love that God brought into the world for us.

I hope the world, as it is, dropped away for at least a few moments allowing each of us to be moved by God’s deep desire to bring calm, and joy, and a sense of worth and meaning that life can have.

This is what Jesus’ birth is all about. It’s about looking the future square in the face, and being infused with the feeling that God *is* truly with us, God has come down to dwell among us, that God’s presence in our lives and is not going to leave our side, but is going to continue on with us—even into the routine of everyday life.

I hope we all experienced at least a few moments of pure, unadulterated hope.

And I hope our “after Christmas let-down” is a signal to us that something is missing.

As I read through the passage from the Gospel of Luke we just heard, it dawned on me to give thanks for this passage in a whole new way and for a whole new reason that I had not thought of before. For the first time, I really grasped that this is a story of what happened *after* Christmas.

What seems to have happened for Joseph and Mary is that the angels have gone back into the heavenly realms, and the shepherds—well, there is no telling where they went—back to the fields? Perhaps. (But, perhaps not!) And, of course, the arrival of the Magi are still quite a ways off.

Right now, after Christmas, it is time for Mary and Joseph to go back to their routine—expect, of course, they can’t.

Whatever else may have attended becoming parents of the Savior of the world, like all new parents, what Mary and Joseph have found is that having a newborn means that life is never going to be the same again. Old routines are gone.

So, the story from the Gospel of Luke is a story of both their accommodation to the new life that has come into their lives, as well as a desire to return to “normal.” This visit to the Temple is, after all, what was done for all newborn baby. It was a vital part of Joseph and Mary’s life of faith and obedience.

No matter what else had been happening before—the coming of angels, the shepherds showing up the way they did, and all the other things that must have attended his birth—it was important to his earthly parents that everything be done for Jesus, just as it was for other children.

So, here they are—just eight days after his birth—having traveled (again!) from Nazareth to the Temple in Jerusalem to perform the ritual of purification, and present him to the Lord.

This is such a wonderful blending of the routine and the extraordinary, and it is made even more so by the two people—Simeon and Anna—whom they meet as they enter the Temple.

One of the things that Luke brings back into our lives through them is the experience of “expectation.” For Simeon and Anna, “waiting and watching” had been a way of life for them. They had both been praying for this very moment for many years. They had been waiting and watching all that time for the Messiah, just as we wait every year during Advent.

Unlike many of us, their encounter with the Christ child has not put an end to their feelings of expectation and excitement. It only brought the waiting for his arrival to an end. This was all they needed.

From that moment on, there were *new* expectations to entertain—even if they did not live to see them themselves.

From that moment on, they knew that a new pathway within the life of the world was being forged toward a new life in God. Simeon was fortunate enough to hold in his arms the hope he had been waiting for, and because God had fulfilled that promise, he had faith that the restoration of the world was going to go forward, and even we—all these centuries later—can learn from that.

The wait is over. Our expectations of what God can and will do are still important. Our expectation that hope, peace, joy, and love are still God’s promise that God is still working on is still good. No matter what has happed in our life, or in the life of the world, God is still pursuing a path and a plan for our good. As one writer has expressed it:

*“If we can't literally hold salvation in our arms, we can hold it in our hearts. If we aren't looking for the redemption of Jerusalem per se, we're looking for the redemption of the parts of our lives that aren't working. And Jesus, the Bible tells us, is salvation and redemption for all of us.”*

Yes, December 25,2020 is history now, and if we are feeling “let down”, it is not because God has put it in the past. Rather, it is because we have decided that there is nothing more to expect. To this notion we are asked to remember:

To us a child is given.

To us a child is born…and nothing is ever going to be the same again. Amen.