First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

The Light of the World

12-24-23

Let me start out by giving y’all a heads up about tonight’s sermon. If you’re a Catholic, you may find this one just a bit too long. If you’re a Baptist, this is going to seem really, really short. If you’re a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, this will probably seem just about right. But if you’re a member of my congregation, I’ll simply say this; don’t get used to me preaching short sermons.

This is my third Christmas as pastor of this church, and some of you may remember the title of the first Christmas Eve sermon I preached from this pulpit, which was “Nothing More to Say.” Well, as it turns out, I have quite a bit more to say, but I’ll try to get you out of here tonight before it gets too late.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who, until his death in 2020, was the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, wrote the following: *“For though my faith is not yours and your faith is not mine, if we each are free to light our own flame, together we can banish some of the darkness of the world.”* While Rabbi Sacks intended this to be a call for understanding and acceptance between Christians and Jews, I believe that it is equally applicable to the different iterations of Christianity gathered here tonight.

As I look out at all of you, I see Baptists and Catholics, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a few Presbyterians and even one or two stray Lutherans. We have gathered together in this historic sanctuary, as this community has done for the past 128 years, united in the celebration of the birth of the Christ child. And I can’t help but think that God is smiling down on us tonight.

One of the things I most enjoy about living here, is the fact that we don’t let our religious differences keep us from being a true community. We share our joys, we share our sorrows, and we support and care for each other in ways that are simply not found in other areas of the country. If you’ve had the opportunity to live anywhere else, you know how unique this is, and I give thanks to God that I get to be a part of such a special place.

As we unite in this celebration, I’m struck by the fact that while our theologies; our worship styles, and our beliefs may differ, and while those differences may be quite significant, by setting aside those things that separate us, we are left with a shared core belief in the divinity of this little child, who God has sent to be the light of the world. This core belief gives us hope and joy and it also unites us in our shared Christian faith. At the same time, it raises a few questions: Do we simply sit back, basking in the hope that is manifested in the birth of Jesus? Do we hoard the joy that this season brings? Or are we willing to be the bearers of Christs’ light to worn and weary world.

It’s really easy to share the joy of the Savior’s birth, at this time of the year. The excitement, the decorations, the presents, the massive amounts of cookies, along with all of the other traditions that make this time of the year special. (By the way, my personal motto is *no cookie left uneaten.*) But what about the rest of the year? Is the Christmas spirit only meant for one particular time of the year? Anyone who knows me will not be surprised to hear my answer to that question is a resounding “no.”

I believe the birth of the Christ child, invites us to become the bearers of Christ’s light to a world that desperately needs it not just during the Christmas season, but beyond it as well. And I think how we do that is best found in what’s often referred to as the Micah Mandate, which is found in Micah 6:8, which reads; *“And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* Justice, mercy and humility; that’s all God requires and, at the same time, that’s everything God requires. By living out this mandate, by living into what the Lord requires; this is how we become partners in sharing Christ’s light with our world.

Howard Thurman, a noted African American theologian and civil rights pioneer, sums it up this way, in his poem, “The Work of Christmas”:

*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 flocks,*

*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 the people,*

*to make music in the heart.*

The joy, the peace, the goodwill towards all, that we experience this time of year, is not something that should be limited to one season, or one time of the year. It is something that we are called by God to share with everyone, each and every day.

So, what are we doing to answer God’s call to be the light of the world to those who are lost, to those who are broken, to those who are hungry, or to those who are captives? The answers to these questions will look different for each of us, but if we are to truly be followers of the Christ child whose birth we celebrate tonight, these questions must not go unanswered.

Siblings in Christ, your charge is this: go from this place tonight being the bearers of Christ’s light to a world sorely in need of it and, in doing so, may you ignite a healing flame that banishes the darkness for all we meet, AMEN