

The Rev. Laura Palmer
St. Martin in-the-Fields
Christmas Eve, Year B
December 24th, 2024

We Cannot Wait

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

Merry Christmas! Rejoice! Rejoice! “We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,” poet Madeline L’Engle reminds us because Christmas is here. Christ has come.

This is the moment when we throw open the shutters of our hearts and celebrate God’s greatest gift to humanity; a baby born naked and vulnerable in manger, Jesus Christ, our savior.

Hark, the herald angels sing. O Come, Let us adore him. Glory to our newborn king... the Prince of Peace... born not in a palace but in a cold, dark, and dirty manger because there was no room in the Inn. It will be another 30 years until the baby becomes the Jesus we know, love, trust, serve and rely on. God’s time has never matched our own.

Tonight, heaven and earth become one. Eternity becomes now.

“Tonight is the night we measure all time against,” writes priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor.

Everything that happened yesterday is before Christ and everything that happens tomorrow is after him. Tonight we are living in the eternal now of God’s coming among us. His name is Emmanuel—the God who is with us—who is made out of the same stuff we are and who is made out of the same stuff God is and who will not let either of us go.¹

And God’s great gamble continues to rely on us as it always has. Never in the history of the world has a newborn baby been able to survive on its own. It was the same for Jesus in the manger. God has always risked it all for love.

¹ Taylor, Rev. Barbara Brown, *Bread of Angels*, “Past Perfection,” Cowley Publications, 1999 p.29

We rejoice tonight in a preposterous story because a teenage girl engaged to another man risked it all for the love of God—when she said “Yes” to the Angel Gabriel. Was there ever a greater leap for love?

What reason did she have to say “Yes?” None that I can see. Did she fear being stoned to death for being pregnant by a man not her fiancé? We never know. But Mary’s courage and defiant love was not enough. Joseph had to say “Yes” too. Was it his love, faith, or perhaps utter disbelief that something so crazy was actually going to happen?

God has always been acting in us and through us. Trusting us—against all odds--- to realize his kingdom of love, justice, and peace—that excludes no one, can become a reality in our world.

Are we crazy to believe in the Christmas story? You bet. But we believe in it because we know it’s true. The church is packed tonight not because we doubt, but because we believe. We insist on love knowing as surely as we know our names that it is the only way.

God’s unshakable love for all of us is as defiant as Mary’s “Yes.” Year after year, through the millennia, God’s own have no doubt disappointed him and broken the heart that sent his vulnerable son into the world. And yet he has never given up on us so how could we?

The Christmas story is a meaningless ancient fable unless we persist in hope and insist in love despite our fears. A mother I know whose son had cancer wore a tee shirt that proclaimed a deep truth: Faith does not make things easy; it makes them possible.

Fear is integral to the story we celebrate tonight. There is no one in the nativity story who had any guarantees which is why the angels’ first message, over and over again is, “Be not afraid.” – Gabriel’s first words to Mary, the angels’ message to Joseph in a dream, and the reassurance frightened shepherds needed from the angels when the dark sky above them was suddenly radiant and bright with a star. The angels – then and now—call us to live beyond our fears. While not a bold message on Christmas cards it is at the heart of the story, writes Rev. Shannon Kerschner:

Be not afraid. Fear not. These are Christmas words for sure, but they are also some of the most powerful words in all of scripture for every day of our lives, not just for Christmas Eve, for this holy call to have courage, to not be afraid, speaks in direct opposition to the growing environment of fear that permeates so much of our lives these weary days.²

² Kerschner, Rev. Shannon, “Angel Words,” sermon preached at Fourth Presbyterian Church, 12.24.15

We live with fear and dread, we pause when we should act, doubt and worry when we should believe, which is exactly the point: we're human and life is hard, the world is very often a terrifying place. But hope can not be taken away from us. It must be surrendered.

But not tonight. Rejoice, rejoice. We have everything we need when we throw open the shutters of our hearts and let the son shine in-- God's beloved son and our savior. Born against all odds in a world that kept slamming doors on his parents who were simply looking for a place for him to be born.

I imagine God was holding his breath, too. Where on earth did his faith in us ever come from? This is both the mystery of faith— and simultaneously the miracle-- and the reality-- of divine love. The angels are calling us to love beyond fear, beyond doubt which we forget over and over again. Although not tonight.

Tonight we celebrate the outpouring of God's great love in his son, Jesus Christ on this, O Holy Night.

Let our hearts be thrilled and our souls, filled, with the life-giving and liberating love of God which we magnify in ourselves and in our world when we give it away, again and again in the name of Jesus.

We cannot wait till the world is sane.. to raise our songs with joyful voice... He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

AMEN