

Let Every Home Prepare...

Genesis 12:3c

November 29, 2009

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I trust you all had a good thanksgiving celebration and are now ready for Christmas! No? Good thing we have this time, this season of Advent, for preparation in joyful anticipation. When the worship committee and I began planning for celebration of Advent there was this powerful pull to remember the joy of the season and how it impacts every aspect of our lives. Our Christmas carols are full of the good news of great joy: "Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant...tidings of comfort and joy...joyful all ye nations rise...and of course, Joy to the World!" This Advent, in worship and in our Advent devotional, we will be focusing on different aspects, different "worlds" of our lives, if you will. We will end with our global context on December 20th with a musical celebration of Christmas carols from around the world offered by our chancel choir. Working backwards, on the 13th we will see the joy in our community "world." Next Sunday, we will have members of our church community sharing their joy in the church world represented here at Covenant. And today, we start, with joy in our family and personal lives. To begin let's look at the Biblical context from our scripture lessons.

Mary's Magnificat, that we heard again this morning is her song of joyful praise for the fulfillment of the angel's promise to her that she would carry a Son who would be the Savior of the world. The Magnificat ends with, "God has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of God's mercy, according to the promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever." The promises to Abram were many; the first was shared in what Danealle/Maia read: "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." But we know there were times in Abram's family history that they didn't feel blessed. The Exile in Egypt, the wandering in the wilderness, the struggles for a king, and the glory days of the United Kingdom were blessed but followed by the despair of the divided kingdom and another exile in Babylon. Abraham's descendants were able to return to their homeland to rebuild; but the rebuilding of their lives was interrupted by a Diaspora and the rebuilt Temple was destroyed in 70AD. And of course, this is just goes through the 1st century! Through this thumbnail sketch of Abraham's family history we see, that the blessings are not dependent on the external context; prophets and psalmists helped them to proclaim, their blessing is in the joy of the Lord...the joy of God's salvation. [Nehemiah 8:10 Psalm 51:12].

Our families histories may not be as dramatic or traumatic but like Abraham's family we do face the challenge of not letting the external circumstances define us, define our way of being in the world, especially as we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth. The celebration that the angel's message of good news of great joy is for all people...including us! Sometimes it is easier to show our care and share the world's concerns than it is to care and share in our own homes.

Let me give you a poignant example, and yes, I've asked his permission to share it with you. Years ago, as a young pastor and parent, Bill King, our pastor emeritus was preparing a sermon at home. His daughters were little about 2 and 3 years old. They were laughing and playing outside his door; frustrated, he opens the doors and yells at them, "Can't you be quiet, I'm

writing about the love of God in here!” It was a “heads up” for Bill, and through his humility in sharing the story, a “head’s up” for us as well. For we all have done similar things, whether we’ll admit or not. If we think we’re exempt from doing these kinds of things, just ask our children, parents or spouses!

During Advent, the season of these four weeks in which we prepare for Christmas, it’s easy to get caught and even lost in the pressures of the externals...whether it’s writing a sermon, some other kind of work, jammed packed calendars or the challenges of the economy. Pressures impact our families! The recent struggles in the global economy are shaking the foundation of the last two decades particularly our “consumer mentality.” Black Friday, which was just a couple of days ago, is used as a marker for us; is it going to be a good holiday season or not? But things are shifting...so if it’s not about the externals what is it about? Two weeks ago on our sermon on peace, we heard that we can’t share what we don’t have. Last Sunday, in our sermon on gratitude, we learned that gratitude brings joy. We may not be able to fully define joy...but we do know it is not found in the things around us...the externals. We know it wells up from within us...it’s at the center of our being. It’s one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit within us! Like Abraham’s family, the joy of the Lord is our strength! Joy in our family and personal worlds...joy that is lived day in and day out so that we may be a blessing to each other in our own families and then to others around “the other worlds” of our lives!

There is a new movie out that shows how one family shared their blessings and blessed “other worlds.” It’s not a holiday movie but it sure could be. It’s one of the best movies I have seen in a long time. The movie is Blindside and shares the story of a faithful, wealthy southern family bringing into their home a 6’4” 340 pound, 17 year old street kid, and the experience changes everyone’s life! It is based on the true story of Michael Oher, who now plays for the Baltimore Ravens. It’s a story of faith, hope and blessings shared!

But we don’t need to be wealthy to share our blessings; we do need our families to be strong. The family that took Michael in could not have done that if their own relationships were not strong and well nurtured. When our families are strong and nurtured in the joy of the Lord, we can be truly open to others...whether it’s inviting them into our lives for conversation, a dinner or the duration. We may not be able to take the stranger in but that is doesn’t prevent us from sharing the blessings, the Joy in our family and personal world. Then we will remember that Joy is the marker that it will be a good holiday season. So...

Let every home prepare

Let us clear our calendars

Making time for children laughing and playing.

Talking and sharing with others

Giving and helping those in need

Relaxing and resting for ourselves.

Let every home prepare

Let us change our lists

From lists of things we want to own

To lists of experiences we want to have.

The joy of walking in the snow with a loved one
The joy of receiving warmth from crackling fire
The joy of seeing the mystery of Christmas through the eyes of a child

Let every home prepare

Let us clean out the clutter
Of our souls and minds

Making room for the One the angel's herald
Making room for the One Mary sang
Making room in our families for us to be a blessing.
Making room for Joy!

Let every home prepare

In this Advent season...
For the Good News of Great Joy!

Joy to the World...the whole world
Including our homes...and our hearts!
Amen!