

John Sampson
"Love Is Born B"
Preached at KVCC
December 24, 2018

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Merry Christmas!

Tonight we come together to celebrate and remember the birth of Jesus, the one we call the Christ. But we also come together to celebrate and acknowledge how this birth still has the possibility of changing our hearts, and our lives, in the here and the now.

When Jesus is older he will tell us a parable of a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, that grows to become an enormous tree, and all the birds come to live and nest in its branches.

Isn't this also the story of Christmas?

It starts out small and seemingly insignificant.

It starts out far away from the centers of power, far from the palaces of Rome, out on the edges of the empire, in a town called Bethlehem.

It starts out in a place just like Keene Valley, a small town in a rural part of the country.

And its main characters are two ordinary people named Mary and Joseph. Joseph is a carpenter, a tradesman. Mary is his soon to be bride, who is very, very pregnant. They're not rich; they're not overly educated; and they don't even have any relatives who are

powerful or politically connected. Mary and Joseph are like many of us here tonight.

But it's within the unremarkable space of Bethlehem, and within the ordinary lives of Mary and Joseph, that God chooses to make her presence known to their world. And it is within our ordinary lives, and within our ordinary hearts, that God wishes to make her presence known again to our world, on this night.

Because God takes the seed of Mary and Joseph's lives and plants it within the rich soil of her love, and something sprouts, and begins to grow. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, is born right there, in an out of the way place, in a broken barn, to two unremarkable people.

And our spiritual ancestors tell us how this seed that starts out so small, so ordinary, will grow into a great tree, a tree that will shelter all of God's children.

Because Jesus will grow to become our greatest teacher. He won't teach us about mathematics, or physics, or philosophy, or politics.

He will teach us about love.

He will teach us about the mechanics of God's love for her children.

He will teach us about the geometry of our hearts, and the hearts of our neighbors. He will teach us about the limits of love, how love breaks, how love heals, and how love can be resurrected even after all hope is lost.

He will teach us with his words, and his stories, by the way he lives his life, and by the way he dies.

He will offer us nothing less than the salvation that only love can deliver.

Tonight we celebrate the birth of Jesus because out of an ordinary and unremarkable seed, out of an ordinary and unremarkable birth, the great revelation of love is born. Out of the smallest seed, grows the strongest and most nourishing of all trees. And Jesus will invite all of us to come and live in love's branches, and learn from its healing leaves.

We celebrate Christmas because we remember the birth of our great teacher Jesus. But Christmas isn't only a story of something that happened long ago, in a galaxy far, far away. It is also a holy moment that reveals the sacred possibility of today.

Keene is like Bethlehem not just because it's a small town in a rural area far from the centers of power of New York City, and Washington, DC. Our town is like Bethlehem because it can be the site where love is born in our world.

We are like Mary and Joseph not because we may be ordinary and regular people, but because we can birth holy love right in our own lives, right in our own hearts.

Because God's love for all her children, and for the world itself, wants and needs to be born over and over again, across all time, and across all space.

We celebrate Christmas in the darkest part of the year, and at the darkest part of the day because we live within a time of darkness.

We live in a time of national and global division and of disunity, we live in a time of personal addiction and illness, we live a time of environmental collapse. We live in a time when the love of our neighbors, and ourselves and our world seems like it is slipping away.

But in this darkness we hear the words:

Merry Christmas!

Alleluia!

The Christ is born!

These are words of love, and of promise. They tell us that the darkness that surrounds us does not have ultimate power. And these words are calling us not simply to remember events of long ago, but also to participate in God's plan right here and right now. They are asking us to plant the small seed of love again within the soil of our hearts, within the soil of our world. Because our world needs our love so desperately. Because our world so critically needs to come out of the darkness that surrounds it.

On this Christmas Eve, when we remember how the story of the birth of the Christ begins small and quietly, it is my prayer that we all open our hearts to love, that we will invite love to be born among us this night and in this darkness, that we will leave this place with hymns of love on our lips, and that we will commit to sharing love with all of those we meet today, and tomorrow and always.

In this way the love that starts small and unremarkably tonight will grow tall and strong, and become a tree whose branches will be a place of safety and refuge for all of God's children.

Merry Christmas!

Alleluia!

The Christ is born!

Amen.