

John Sampson

“A Feast of Love”

Text: Isaiah 52:7 – 10; Luke 2:1 – 7; Luke 2:8 – 20

Preached at KVCC

December 24, 2017 – Christmas Eve

Merry Christmas!

On this Christmas Eve, on this cold and wintry night, in the midst of our celebration of the birth of the Christ child I want to ask you a question.

I want to ask you a question that each one of you will answer differently, and in your own way.

Although I ask you this question, the answer you give isn't for me; it's for you. And you might not be able to answer it tonight. But that's OK, I'll ask it anyway.

Why did you come here this evening?

Why did you come to this place?

What was your heart looking for as you came in through the front doors of this church?

Tonight we've heard a story told through readings and carols, through candlelight and poems. We've heard a story of how God promised to return to a people who lived in the ruins of their country, and of their lives. And in the prophet's visionary words we were given an image of the moment when God returns, and we see the joy and healing that is birthed in her desperate people.

Did you come here this evening to hear this story? Did you come here tonight to believe it might just be possible to end the brokenness of your life, and the life of the world?

We heard the story of Joseph and his soon-to-be wife Mary traveling to Bethlehem for a census count. And in a deep irony, which seems so true of human life, we heard of the birth of Jesus in a manger because all of the hotel rooms in town were full. It's interesting that in this part of the story there is nothing supernatural that occurs. Rather, it seems like a story of ordinary lives, and common challenges.

Did you come here this evening to hear this story? Did you come to hear that something miraculous could happen even in the most ordinary of lives, perhaps in a life as common and unassuming as your life?

We heard the story of shepherds out in the fields dozing, and gossiping with each other when the heavens erupt and the angels come to share great and amazing news. God's messengers tell the shepherds that finally, after centuries of waiting, a great king and

savior has been born who will heal his people, and that they can visit him, and partake in his majesty and blessing. So they go and they find the baby just as the angels said he would be. They share their story with his parents, and everyone is floored by what has just gone down out in the fields. After a night spent with the baby and his parents, the shepherds walk back to their pastures singing and praising God as the sun rises over the fields.

Did you come here this evening to hear this story? Did you come hoping for an angelic eruption within your own heart that would lead you to a salvation from the challenges in your life for which you seem to have no answer?

Or perhaps you didn't come to hear stories at all. Tonight, in this place, we are surrounded by these people, some we know, and some who may be strangers to us. We are bathed in candlelight, and our hearts are moved by the music we hear, and the carols we sing.

Did you come here this evening to forget the loneliness that may haunt your life and be in community? Did you come here to be washed by light, a light that you hope can drive off the darkness from even the distant corners of your life? Did you come tonight wishing your heart would be moved with joy by the music of this service?

Why did you come here this evening?

What was your heart looking for as you came in through the front doors of this church?

Like I said, each one of us will respond to these questions differently.

But although we may provide answers that reflect our individual experience, I think they may all well up from a common desire.

The story of Christmas is a story of love, of God's love for each one of us. It is a story in which God remembers her people even as we hurt ourselves, and each other. But God doesn't just remember us. Love is more than that. Love is more than a thought. It is an action. It is a manifestation. It is an emotion that takes on flesh and lives among us. And it thrives in the ordinary imperfection of our lives.

Our tradition tells us that God doesn't just remember us, she is born among us on Christmas in the child named Jesus.

And what's more, our tradition tells us that God doesn't just remember us, she is born among us in the love we have for ourselves and for one another.

Love is born to regular people, just like you and me.

Love is born in regular people, just like you and me.

When we came through those front doors earlier this Christmas evening did we come to hear stories of Love? Did we come to sing songs of Love? Did we come to be among these people in a spirit of Love? Did we come hoping, against all hope, that we might experience just a little taste of...Love?

Because that is what Christmas is. It is a feast of love.

God comes to us through the baby Jesus. The Holy One comes to us through Jesus' teachings of love and compassion. The Divine comes to us when Jesus shows us how to feed the hungry, and cloth the naked. I Am That I Am comes to us when Jesus models how we can see those who have become invisible in our community, and hear

those we have made mute in our nation. The Creator of the universe comes to us when we love each other, when we show compassion to each other, when we support and nurture each other.

This is Love, and tonight, this joyful Christmas Eve, we celebrate its birth among us. It is the greatest gift we can receive, and it is the greatest gift we can give.

So on this cold dark night, in this place, among these people, I wish all of you a very Merry Christmas. And I pray that the spirit of Love will be born in all of your lives tonight, tomorrow, and every day in the future.

AMEN!