

Christmas Day 2022, The Church of the Good Shepherd, Barre, VT

Prayer: Most loving God, today we gather as the shepherds of old, to adore the new born Christ and live in the hope that his life among us will bring us grace and peace. May this most gracious gift always shine in our hearts and in your world. This we ask in the Holy Name of Jesus our Savior and friend. Amen.

Merry Christmas, my sisters and brothers. Last night, that Holy Night, by candlelight we recalled the birth of the savior, Jesus in the stable, a miracle of God coming into our world, into our lives. This morning we celebrate with Christians around the world the birth of Jesus, the One we know as Immanuel, God with us. This One so looked for and longed for in days of old, as the One to bring salvation and deliverance to the people. We have lit the Christ candle in our Advent wreath, symbolizing the new light we have in Christ in our own day, the illumination for which we have been patiently waiting during these four weeks of Advent, an illumination we might desperately need in our lives and a new light we so greatly need in our world today. So this morning we join with Christians and others all around our world seeking God's peace and the Good Will to All proclaimed by the heavenly hosts.

There are, of course, so many ways to interpret the meaning of the Christmas story, and that is exactly what preachers are doing in front of congregations across the globe at this very minute. As I began to prepare for this sermon a couple of weeks, I began to notice something: time after time I saw an unhesitating generosity in many of the people I encountered and especially among the people here who make up the congregation of the Church of the Good Shepherd here in Barre. Thank God that after the changes we have had to make in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, we have been able to restart an in-person breakfast program once again on Monday mornings. In numerous ways, both great and small, I witnessed an amazing phenomenon: ordinary people ready to give, ready to make a sacrifice of their time, of their resources, ready to give of themselves without a moment's hesitation. The more I encountered it, the more remarkable this was to me; the folks could be so open, so ready to say, "Yes," and even if they were not sure how, they knew they could make it work out some way...just wonderful and unbidden attitude to help out. I saw in this an openness of spirit, and openness of heart, indeed an openness of soul that is just this unhesitating generosity.

As I saw over and over again this spirit of openness and unhesitating generosity, I began to realize God was showing me something: the story we hear at Christmas, the story of the birth of the Savior is God's unhesitating generosity to

us, to you and to me: this is God giving us the fullness of divine Love, and God giving us this love, this great gift, unhesitatingly, a glorious and resounding “Yes” to all. And as the Letter to Titus reminds us, God not only gives to us unhesitatingly, but also, “this Spirit God poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by this grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We see, we see in this child born this night, lying poor and in a manger, God giving God's own self to us that we might be fully reconciled to God and each other in that divine Love.

My sisters and brothers: we are given such a treasure with the birth of our savior and friend Jesus: unbidden and undeserved, God blesses us ever so richly in God's unhesitating generosity, an openness to us. Mary, we are told, ponders this treasure in her heart, a first witness to the amazing grace God brings into our world. As Isaiah says, “‘See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.’ They shall be called, ‘The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord’; and you shall be called, ‘Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.’” and out of this divine and holy generosity we have the blessed hope, the blessed hope of a new and redeemed life by the power of God’s Holy Spirit of Love. No wonder the shepherds head off in haste to see for themselves what this is, to see for themselves of the glad tidings the angels bring. And no wonder the whole angelic host sings to them of the Good News the world so longs to hear: Peace on Earth and Good Will to All. And this is where we come in, you all and me, this is our part in the story of God's unhesitating generosity in the Christmas season: God calls us to a life in this unhesitating generosity – God calls us to share this Good News with others, both in what we say, praising God like the angels and shepherds, singing of God's glory - but we are also called to share the Good News of God's unhesitating generosity in our lives, in our actions to build this community, to seek to be a beloved community, here at the church, here in Barre and literally throughout the world: in those acts of kindness and compassion, both great and small that we do for others, without a moment's thought reaching out to help others in their need, saying “YES” to seeking God’s justice and the fair and humane treatment of others.

This Christmas, by God’s grace, may we all share God’s love in amazing, unhesitating generosity, giving of the blessings in our lives that we might be a blessing to others in need. Today, this Christmas morning and throughout this Christmas season, may you each be filled with the joy of God’s love given to us in the birth of our Savior Jesus the Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen!