

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 2:1-20

Isaiah 9:2-7

Psalm 96

Titus 2:11-14

December 24, 2022
Christmas Eve

As I was writing my sermon yesterday, the power went out. Not a welcome event with Christmas Eve just around the corner. The cooking stopped. The Christmas music grew quiet. The washing machine came to a halt. There was a collective groan throughout the house.

What about our plans? More importantly...what about my sermon? My computer had only so much charge after all.

But as I sat there, listening to the wind gusts outside, I realized that I had taken a few things for granted. Things like paper and pencil...we can still use those, right? Or, the sunlight coming in through the sliding glass door. I really didn't need overhead light...at least not for a few more hours. Or, the blankets on the back of the sofa...they were perfect for keeping warm...especially with a dog in my lap. And, so I kept writing.

It made me think about the things we all take for granted. The things that we have in our lives every single day that we assume will always be there. Or, the things that faithfully support us in our daily lives but we never take the time to appreciate the blessings they bring.

I wonder if in some ways Christmas is one of those things. I mean we come to church each year because this is THE celebration. We want to sing the carols, light the candles, hear the stories. But do we really appreciate Christmas? Are we grateful for it? Or, will it be like our electricity...we just assume it's there when we need it?

I recently listened to a podcast series by Anderson Cooper called "All There Is." And in each episode he talks to someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one. One of these conversations was with Stephen Colbert. Many of you know him from The Late Show and the Colbert Report, but you may not know that he is a devout Catholic and speaks very openly about his faith. He also tragically lost his father and two of his brothers when he was just 10 years old. And...he happens to have a lot to say about gratitude.

Colbert says that he has learned to love the thing that he most wishes had not happened. Colbert told Anderson Cooper that it's simply a gift to exist and that with existence does come suffering. There's no escaping it. "But if you are grateful for your life. Then you have to be grateful for all of it."

Hmmm. That's hard to stomach especially if you are in the midst of something traumatic or if you are in the midst of despair or doubt. It might even be hard to stomach if you find yourself too busy to appreciate the gift that is your very own life.

So...why do I bring this up on Christmas Eve? I bring it up preciously because it's Christmas Eve.

Because with the birth of Christ comes our reason to have gratitude. Gratitude for the gift that enlivens our life and our death. The gift that brings hope and healing. The gift that promises that we will always be loved and cared for...no matter what we do, who we are, where we are from, or what happens to us. The gift of Jesus Christ is a gift for us all, at all times.

Colbert goes on to say that his suffering gave him a deep and profound understanding of other people and he found that his own experiences had given him the capacity to love others in new and powerful ways. That was what he was grateful for, not for the loss itself, but for the gifts that came to him once he opened himself to God's grace.

As I reflected on his words, and knowing the deep place of faith that they came from, I realized that so much of his gratitude came out of him almost like a prayer. A noticing, a thanking, a blessing for the people that have loved him and guided him. A blessing for his faith that held him. A blessing for the trust he placed in God to continue to use him.

It's really remarkable. In a day and age where we rush through the world, rarely noticing the gifts all around us, where we are stressed and overwhelmed, where we are bombarded with material gain and quick fixes for our happiness, where we often find ourselves feeling alone...Jesus comes as a gift to lift those burdens from our shoulders. To carry us when we get tired. To hold us when we are weak. To remind us that we are loved just as we are.

One of the ways we often think about Christ's birth is that through Jesus, God came to take human form to really and truly know us. To experience this life right alongside of us...all of it. That means to experience not just the good things of who we are but to also experience the places we want to avoid, the things within us we don't want any to know about, the things that have hurt us or the things we have hurt.

And in taking human form...Jesus shows us that no matter what life may bring, we are all living a life of grace with a greater purpose than we can ever imagine. By taking human form, God says...I know...I understand...and I love you.

And once we take that gift as our own, we start to notice how that gift shines all around us. In the people we love and those we don't love so much. In the happiness and in the sadness. We start to see God working in remarkable ways.

We can't take that for granted. We can't take one another for granted. We can't take this life for granted.

I want to close with this beautiful passage from our Gospel reading this evening. After the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and Jesus they told her about the message from the angels...the good news of great joy for ALL people. The Savior, The Messiah. The Lord. As Mary

heard their words, we are told that Mary treasured what she heard and pondered it in her heart. Mary paused.

That's the gratitude. The moment of appreciating all that God had done for her. The moment of recognizing all that God is doing for all of us.

This year, I want to encourage you to slow down and notice. To pause. Notice the things you are grateful for. Notice the things you may have overlooked. Go home this evening and tell the people in your life how much they mean to you. Spend time with them. Thank God for them. Pause.

And, let us all be grateful for the gift of Jesus Christ. Our savior and our redeemer. For each and every one of us. Amen.