

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 1:1-18

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalms 147

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

December 26, 2021

The First Sunday after Christmas

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:23-28

This is typically a Sunday many clergy take off. Because as any priest will tell you – our brains are pretty much fried after all of the planning and teaching and preaching that mark the Advent season. We pour our hearts into each and every detail so that hopefully the folks who come through our doors will experience a moment of joy and peace. And so, we stay up late, wake up early, pray we don't forget something important and cross our fingers that everything comes off without a hitch.

But after all of the preparation, after all of the preaching and the anticipation and the celebration, does faith really matter?

Maybe you think that is a silly question. But think about it...when life gets busy, when we are pulled in different directions, where do we prioritize our faith? Does it matter if we live in a world defined by the values of our faith, values that we actively put into practice...or...is it more convenient to let the world say...I have an easier way?

With that being said, as we enter the new year, I don't want you to make a New Year's resolution to come to church more frequently (although that would be great). What I do want you to do is take time to reflect on why faith matters to you. And, I want you to reflect on how Christmas might move your heart into a deeper commitment to your faith.

Because there is big difference between saying we have faith and truly living our faith. Saying you have faith is like making a claim that others can understand. They can identify you in a category that makes sense. Growing up in South Carolina, often the first question you would get is, "Where do you go to church?" Who you were was defined by what church you claimed.

But, that question didn't get at the heart of the matter...where you went to church was simply a location. Maybe we should have been asking, how do you live your faith? Does faith matter to you?

C.S. Lewis wrote in his book *Mere Christianity*:

“To trust Jesus means, of course, trying to do all that He says....Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you.”

We live into our faith, we participate actively in our faith because a gleam of heaven is already in us. God is with us. And when we start to actively bring faith to the forefront of our lives we quickly realize we can't live without it.

Why does faith matter?

I recently read a poem by Allan Boesak called *Advent Credo* that gets at the heart of this question. In the poem he juxtaposes two ways of the world...one without faith and one with faith. As you listen to his poem, you can imagine a dialogue between the two perspectives. Here are a few of his words...

*It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—
This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;*

*It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction—
This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that have it abundantly.*

*It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—
This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.*

In other words, he is saying that faith matters because there is another way, a better way that rises above the sins of this world. It is the way given to us by God through the birth of Jesus Christ.

Take a look at Paul's letter to the Galatians that we read a moment ago. New Testament theologian John Frederick, restates Paul's charge this way...

Now, clothed in Christ, we are no longer meant to function as autonomous individuals separated along party lines, but as integrated co-communicants knit together in love by the Spirit who

makes us one (Galatians 3:28). Our identity is no longer informed and governed by the characteristics of our individual selves in separation from one another. Rather, we are transformed as persons in communion with one another, and we are guided by the characteristics of the Christ in whom we have been clothed (Galatians 3:27).

Faith matters because God sent his son so that you might live and not just have life but have abundant life. You do not have to be defined by the things this world throws at you. You don't have to live in turmoil or strife. You don't have to face each day with uncertainty or fear. We can grow not only our own life of faith but we can be transformative agents in our families, in our communities and in the world. Paul understood this transformative reality.

It's a reality that does away with all of the division we are facing. It's a reality that ensures everyone is fed and cared for. Where things like discrimination and hate are abolished. Where poverty and greed are no more. Where love leads our lives in ways of peace and goodwill. Where Christ is our teacher and our savior...our king and our redeemer. Faith matters.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.