

Christmas Day

Sunday, Dec. 25, 2015

Gospel Text: John 1:1-14

Pastor Pete Christ

I suspect that if you tracked the dates of every performance over the course of the year by every choir, band, orchestra, ensemble, soloist, pop star, and crooner, you would find that a significant majority of those performances occur during the four weeks leading up to Christmas. In fact, I challenge you to think of any one of the performers I just listed that didn't have at least one performance in the past four weeks. The professionals know that in the run up to the holidays, people's wallets are open. How many pop stars released holiday albums this year? How many new Christmas specials debuted this season? We watched "A very Murray Christmas" with Bill Murray after Thanksgiving and a couple nights ago I caught a little bit of Michael Buble's "Christmas in Hollywood" special. But the amateurs all cram in the concerts too. Every school from kindergarten straight through to colleges and universities puts on their shows. And don't forget about the churches. How many churches like Christ the King put on Christmas pageants and Christmas concerts, showcasing the musical talent of all ages? Not every performance is about Christmas. School and amateur groups are performing because they've been rehearsing for the past 3-4 months and it's just time for a show, before the semester ends or the new year begins.

There are 52 weeks in a year, but every single one of these performers has had at least one show in the past four weeks and many of them have performed multiple times. What an amazing effort. Thinking about all this music and all this effort, I suspect that in addition to celebrating the coming of the infant Jesus, many, in not most, of these performers are even more excited about arriving at the end of the December performance season. If you're one of these performers, congratulations, you've made it. If you're like me, a professional member of the audience, congratulations to you too, your role is not to be down played. Though I'm certain there are more than a few who feel relieved to have the elementary choir, band and orchestra concerts behind them, for now.

Of course, all of this musical effort makes sense. As Christians, it's no surprise that Christmas is a big deal. God is now here. What could be a bigger deal than that? And so we celebrate with all that we have, with heart and soul and voice. We give voice to the majesty and the mystery of this day in ways that attempt to echo the magnitude of the Christmas miracle. Our musical efforts help us climb the mountains, so that when we

tell it, the story can convey that very light that streams from heaven. That light that shines in the darkness and makes the darkness no more.

God is here. The word has become flesh and lives among us. Rejoice!

I'm tempted to stop right there. Or maybe, repeat it one more time. God is here. The word has become flesh and lives among us. Rejoice!

Seems sufficient, doesn't it? David Lose was my seminary advisor and preaching prof and his admonition about Christmas challenged me this week. "Keep it simple," he says. The story is big enough on it's own, and it certainly doesn't need me to make it any bigger. Of course he's right. What a grand story it is. Such amazing characters and settings: suspense and intrigue, the juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, the simple and timeless against the backdrop of complexity and specificity. But I'm talking about Luke's version of the story, the one we heard last night.

This morning we hear from John and to be honest, his story is anything but simple. In fact, one commentary I read suggests that the first chapter of John, "contains all of the most difficult theological assertions Christians ever hear." (Melinda Quivik) I suppose she's right to an extent and it's tempting for me to draw you into these complexities along with me. This God whom we worship this morning is, after all, the God of all creation, a creation about which we seem to hardly understand beyond only a fraction. The skies, the seas, plants, animals, global warming, pollution, deforestation, genetically modified foods, fossil fuels, renewable energy, there's so much to know, so much to understand. As much as we do know, it still seems like we're barely scratching the surface.

John begins his Gospel by drawing us into this same mystery. "In the beginning was the Word." An echo of the very beginning of creation itself is how the story, the good news of Jesus Christ, begins. The Word made flesh that we celebrate today transcends and transports us to the very beginning of time itself.

Martin Luther himself was drawn into the complexity of this incarnational mystery. He wrote, "For how can reason tolerate it that the Divine majesty is so small that it can be substantially present in a grain, on a grain, over a grain, through a grain, within and without, and that, although it is a single Majesty, it nevertheless is entirely in each grain separately, no matter how immeasurably numerous these grains may be? ... His own divine essence can be in all creatures collectively and in each one individually more profoundly, more intimately, more present than the creature is in itself; yet

it can be encompassed nowhere and by no one. It encompasses all things and dwells in all, but not one thing encompasses it and dwells in it.”

So interwoven with this God who dwells in all things, as Luther suggests, is us. Flawed, destructive, broken, selfish. We're charged to care for our neighbor and can not even care for ourselves. This then, is our advent longing for a response to that which the world creates on its own accord. The world that you and I inhabit is filled with both inherent and man-created mid-winter darkness.

The world in this mid-winter truly seems bleak. Wind and earth and water all conspire to keep us from feeling the warmth, seeing the light, hearing the song.

Perhaps then this is why our traditions have brought us all this music, music that warms and illumines and inspires. And more than the music itself, it's those who compose it, arrange it, play it and sing it, those are the ones in whom the Spirit calls us forth. One instrument, one voice is enough but when hundreds and thousands proclaim the melody, the result can be deafening. That noise, that holy noise, that holy Christmas noise has the power to fling wide the prison door, bind up the broken hearted and even make the mountains themselves burst in song!

Yes, today is the day when we celebrate the end of our advent performance season but the concert is not at an end. Musicians your work is not finished, in fact it's hardly begun. Listeners, your work is not finished either. In fact, now it's time that you join the chorus too. We have a story to be told. It's a story that's complex and powerful and grand. But it's also a story that's as simple as one light, shining in the darkness. That light is love. There is a God who loves us so much that he came to us, and lives with us, so that our darkness will be no more.

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Readings

Isaiah 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

⁸Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.
⁹Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
¹⁰The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

L: Word of God. Word of Life. **A: Thanks be to God.**

John 1:1-14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

L: Word of God. Word of Life. **A: Thanks be to God.**