

Christmas Eve  
Year B - 24/12/2020

Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-14

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

Thom Shuman is an American Pastor and poet who recently wrote this offering, which I reflected on during Advent, as I prepared for this Christmas celebration.

Maybe it is in the waiting for God,  
not in the wandering from store to store,  
that we find our way.

Maybe it is in the giving of God,  
not in the frenzy of crowds,  
that we are led towards the manger.

Maybe it is in the steadfast love of God,  
and not in the pile of stuff under the tree,  
that we find what we have been searching for all our lives.

Maybe, just maybe, God,  
this year will be different.

Maybe, just maybe,  
we will let you lead us to Bethlehem.

As I say, these words struck a chord with me - and perhaps it is partly because of the year we have just experienced, but they resonated so strongly with me.

One of the things I have heard time and time again in 2020, or at least in the last 9 months, is that people have actually in some ways appreciated the opportunity to live a little more simply; that somehow to have restrictions placed on them has almost forced them to re-evaluate their lives and think about priorities.

The outbreak of the Coronavirus in March this year certainly changed the way we lived. Office workers found themselves at home more. Business owners who worked long hours suddenly found that they had an opportunity to relate more to their family, and to be more involved in their children's lives. People who spent much of their time interacting in person with others were forced to become more insular, or at least their interactions became less, or conducted in a virtual sense.

In no way am I trying to minimize or dismiss the overwhelmingly negative aspects of the pandemic here - after all, almost 77M people around the world have been infected, and more than 1.7M people have died as a result this disease. The global impact on a personal and financial level will be felt for years, perhaps decades to come. As a community, we have been forced to completely re-think the ways in which we lived and interacted with one another.

Church communities are certainly not immune to the changes either. Our Easter celebrations took on a different tone, as this faith community worshipped apart, while remaining connected in different ways, and always held together by our common faith in a God who will not be overcome. And we notice it, every week, as we look around us and recognize gaps in our pews where familiar faces were before - people still not able to be back and worshipping with us, even now.

There has been much sadness this year - no question.

Our Archbishop, in his Christmas message just recently said this: "Maybe this year has been something of a wake-up call. Maybe the addition of the pandemic to all the other challenges we face has been enough to make us realize just how much we need God. That's why this is the right time for Christmas, because we are in much the same situation as the people were who greeted Jesus birth with such joy.

They knew that only God could save them. Only God could set them free from the hardships and difficulties they faced. And there at Christmas was proof that God hadn't forgotten them. They were not god forsaken but God cherished.”

In some ways, this is exactly the sentiment that Thom Shuman's poem suggests - our search for meaning and purpose often takes us down a certain path, confident in ourselves and our own resources to achieve what it is we think we need or want. And sometimes there is a limited success in this course of action. But somewhere along the way, it is most common for people to realise that something is missing.

Even in the most self-sufficient, apparently content and successful people there lurks this nagging feeling of doubt - is this really what life is all about? Isn't there something else?

This feast of Christmas answers that question with a resounding “yes”! Yes - there is something deeper and greater and central to our lives. And so tonight we remember that this God who created us loves us so much that God made the intentional choice to come among us - born as a helpless child, so that we might realise that God truly knows - knows what it is like for us to live amidst the uncertainty of a pandemic - knows the pain that we feel when a loved one dies - knows the hurt of a failed relationship or a betrayal - truly understands what loneliness and isolation feels like.

And just as Christ, in his adult ministry, reached out in love and compassion to those around him in need, so we are called to be part of God's plan for healing. Again, to quote my Archbishop: “Christmas is not just a sign of God's love. It is certainly that, but it is also a sign of God's love doing something, heading somewhere, making a difference, beginning the healing of all things, the healing of the planet, the healing of the people, the healing of the whole creation. God's love is not passive but full of action.”

God's action is what we remember this night - the action of being born - yes, once, in Bethlehem, but also born again and again as people like you and I take up God's call to heart, and be aware of the ways that God is leading us - to Bethlehem; to the Manger; to peace; to love.

To you, and to your families and your loved ones I extend the blessing of the Word made Flesh - may Christ be born anew in you, and his light guide you in your lives ahead. May the Lord be with you on this most Holy Night. And may you become an active partner, with God, in the healing of our creation... Amen

Amen