

Sermon: Everyone, Everywhere

Year A, Christmas Eve

[Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14,\(15-20\)](#)

Offered December 24, 2016 to Brookline Community Church, Brookline, NH

Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. The time of preparation is over. And even as I say that, someone in here is calculating in their head when the turkey needs to go into the oven in the morning. And someone else has just realized that if she doesn't throw in a load of wash after church tonight, she's going to spend Christmas day in her prom dress. Be of good heart, my brothers and sisters, the reading from the Gospel of Luke assures us that they weren't really ready for the first Christmas either.

Joseph was in Bethlehem for a census registration. He was obeying the law, doing what a responsible citizen, husband and father would do. When he gets to Bethlehem, there was no place for his growing family at the inn (Luke 2:7). So no, they weren't really prepared for that first Christmas. But that is how God's work comes into this world, not when everything is done and ready, in but in the middle of all the stuff we have to do to be good citizens and spouses and parents. Part of the Christmas message is that even when things do not go as planned, new life breaks forth, God arrives, and the lives of regular people are forever changed.¹

When we really look at this story we have heard so many times about the birth of the Child of God, all we see are regular people. In this story of the beginning of the life of Jesus, God is everywhere, talking to anyone who will listen. Mary and Joseph get individual briefings. The shepherds get called to a meeting and then they start right in on the action items they've been assigned (a: go find baby, b: share good news with all the town, c: get back to work). God is speaking to everyone, to anyone who will listen.

Think of that scene for a minute. It's dark and cold. Everything is in an uproar because of a rule that got laid out by some bureaucrat miles away. Even the people who are going to profit from all the upheaval are probably worn out from all the extra work. Everyone's exhausted and just trying to do the right thing, get through this stupid census so they can back to their regular lives.

There is God in the middle of all of that, letting them know that the prophesy of Isaiah has been fulfilled. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2), their burdens have been laid aside (Isaiah 9:4), war and bloodshed shall cease (Isaiah 9:5), all because a child has been born for us (Isaiah 9:5), to uphold justice and righteousness forever. What great good news!

And yet there had to be people who missed it. They were asleep, or drinking with some of the other travelers, or their baby had croup and needed comforting. When I first came to this church, the fire siren sounded at noon and I jumped out my skin. It's so loud. How could anyone miss it? And yet we do. Maybe because we're used to it, maybe because we know what it means, maybe because we're busy with other things, we don't hear it even when we hear it.

How loud must the angels have been that night? You've got to figure that the shepherds were spread out over the hills, so to get a critical mass of shepherds, the angels had to be pretty loud. And then how loud must the shepherds have been when they came into town? Think of the message they're bringing, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

¹ Klink, 118.

Peace (Isaiah 9:6) is in the world. The one we have waited for for so long is here. And yet there had to be people who missed it.

God is still everywhere, speaking to anyone who will listen, still arriving in the middle of our daily lives to remind us that the Kingdom of God is upon us, is opening to us. We miss that reality all the time because we're so caught up with all the other stuff of the world that is falling away, all the political squabbles and thoughtless crime and hopeless addictions. All the loneliness and isolation and struggle to make ends meet are real, but they are not the only thing that is real. There are also really neighbors who swing by to tighten up a clothesline, there are casseroles that appear on porches, there are gift cards for back to school haircuts so middle school isn't any tougher than it needs to be. There are veterans who are helped to find the services *they* want and need, not what other people think they should want.

We think that God would never speak to us because we know how flawed and sinful we are. We think that God would never speak to us because our lives are less than holy. We think that God would never speak to us because a church or a minister or some self-appointed busy body has told us so in the past.² We think that God would never speak to us because we don't have enough power to change anything anyway. This one story tells us plainly that is not true, God speaks to everyone, everywhere.

This one story that almost every Christian hears every year, even if it's the only story we hear the whole year, even if we only hear because we caught the *Charlie Brown Christmas Special*, this one story says so clearly: God appears to the less than perfect and the less than powerful.³ God is everywhere speaking to anyone who will listen. And yet we miss it, we miss the siren and the trucks roaring out and the scanner lighting up and we don't hear the message until someone asks us what all the hullabaloo is about.

For me to let this Christmas Eve pass and not reassure you that God is speaking to you every day, that God is with you every day, is to fail in my job. I fail to do my job if I let this Christmas Eve pass and not reassure you that every single one of us, regular church goer or not, misses almost all of the messages God sends, is to fail in my job. The church will be here whether you are here every year, every month, every week. The church will continue to do its work in the world based on what we understand is God's message for our community. The church would be more effective if we had more people sharing the light they have seen, acknowledging the darkness that surrounds them, speaking of the joys that have changed them and the terrors which have held them back.

On January 8th at 10:00am, we're going to have a sweet service looking at the Baptism of Jesus. We are baptized because he was; it changed his life in a way that might give us some insight on how it will might change ours. We'll have some nice hymns to sing and great treats at coffee hour, which I can promise because this is a cooking church. Come and share what you are. If you want to be in touch with the church, there are cards in the pews that let us loop you in as frequently as you're interested. And if we don't see you until next Christmas, we're blessed because of your presence here tonight.

So come to church not because you must, but because you may. Come not because you are sinless, God forgives sin. Come not because you are perfect, God is perfecting us all. Come to

² Klink, 120.

³ Klink, 120.

testify not that you are righteous but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ and desire to see his Kingdom emerging with all your heart. Come and take comfort from the common fire and be the warmth and light for others. Come in faith and see what God has shared with all, then go out and live as a child of God. On this night when we celebrate the birth of the child of God, know with absolute faith that we are all born as Children of God.