

Sermon 2007 Christmas Eve

Text: Titus 2: 11-14

Theme: "Merry Training Day"

Well here we are, ready or not. Some still have presents to wrap while others have done all the festivities already and can relax. What a big ball of stress this whole season is! Are there piles of dirty dishes in your sink from dinner earlier or is the turkey still wedged precariously into the refrigerator? When I was a kid, Christmas was nothing but fun. I couldn't have cared less how much work it took to make Christmas dinner, it just magically appeared on the table. And who cared what gifts anyone else got or how long they took to wrap? That was not my focus. I only focused on those presents under the tree for me! Then I grew up and had kids of my own and Christmas changed forever.

That's a little how faith is too. When we first came to faith we knew a great gift had been given and that was wonderful but over time all the repercussions of that faith begin to become apparent. Sometimes we long for the days of simple faith the

way we long for the days of a childlike Christmas. For when faith grows in us, it becomes hungry and demanding. St. Paul says,

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

Paul is talking here about the works of faith. An apple tree is a wonderful gift but once that apple tree grows up and starts bearing apples, now what? Either that fruit falls on the ground and rots or it is used to make apple cider and applesauce and apple pies and all the wonderful things apples can make.

Christmas is not just about the gift of the baby Jesus. That’s old news. We’ve known that part of the story since we were

little. Christmas is now far more about the ripples in the pond that His birth is still causing for us. Listen to Paul again.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions....” See that? See what salvation does? “...training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions....” Jesus Christ, our best Christmas gift does not just lie mewing in a manger. He enters us through water and word and body and blood, and he grows within us, giving us the power and courage to live lives that are worthy of being his brothers and sisters. You and I might choose to participate in ungodly behaviors and we might indulge in worldly passions but we don’t have to anymore.

But that’s not all, St. Paul goes on. He says this gift in the manger enables us, “... to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives....” You know that godly person you so admire – that person of amazing faith who is unshaken by everything falling to pieces all around? You can be that person because of the gift of Jesus Christ.

Sorry to disappoint the sentimental types out there, but THERE'S NO BABY IN THE MANGER FOLKS! He grew up, was crucified and rose again on the third day and NOW HE LIVES but not in a manger. HE LIVES IN YOU AND ME! And while that is wonderful, it also changes everything for us.

On my Christmas list this year is new slippers because my old, smelly, ratty ones mysteriously went missing during one of Dánya's cleaning rampages this past summer. So right now, I either have to leave my shoes on, which I hate because I firmly believe that shoes are of the Devil, or my feet freeze. Now if I get my new, warm, comfy slippers, do you think that I'm going to leave them under the tree? Then we can put them away with the Christmas decoration in January and every year we can take them out and place them under the tree and celebrate the year I got new slippers! My feet will still be cold, but what a lovely tradition. And it's simple and predictable that way, the way Christmas is for a little child. And the slippers will never get worn out either.

Ridiculous? Yes, but that's the way we often treat Jesus. We take him out at Christmas and put him in the manger. Look at the precious baby. Then we put him away until Good Friday where we take him out and put him on a cross, wait three days and resurrect him then put him away again and resume our regular lives. It's simpler that way. Jesus is too demanding if you leave him out of the box. He will change our lives if we let him in. Part of us would rather just keep him in the manger, but Jesus was not given on this night to be boxed up and packed away only to be brought out and admired a few times a year. Jesus was given to occupy center stage in our lives each and every moment of our lives.

And Jesus never wears out because he comes not only tonight but every time we remember the Baptismal waters that wash over us, every time we hear his word and every time we receive his body and blood in the Holy Sacrament. He comes tonight and he keeps coming into our lives, filling us up so that we are overflowing with his love and grace.

That's how we find ourselves able to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. That's how we live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. That's how we slowly become the royal priesthood whom the gift of Jesus has made us until that great and glorious day when he returns. That's they day we really celebrate tonight because if all we have to celebrate is that a baby was born 2000 years ago, I'm done and I want to go home. But that's not what we are really celebrating. What we are really celebrating is the repercussions of that gift and the way our lives can change and have changed because of that gift. It makes life a little more complicated when the gift grows up in us, just like Christmas gets a little more complicated when we grow up. We can dismiss worldly passions. We can live godly lives. And we can do it right now and even more as Christ grows bigger and bigger within each of us. AMEN.