

Sermon for December 24, 2017 - "Saving with Love"

Christmas Eve 2017
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus who is God's love made flesh.

The angel said, "Do not be afraid for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." Those words have been repeated for centuries now in houses of worship, in religious settings. They have taken on a churchy, spiritualized feel. But this message bringing "good news of great joy" came first to ordinary people who were just going about their business - to shepherds keeping watch over their fields by night. Good news showed up right where they were.

Where has good news shown up for you recently? For me, it was last weekend as I was watching the new Star Wars movie with my daughter, Abby. Many people approach Star Wars with religious fervor. I'm not that devoted but I do enjoy the stories and movie theater popcorn; and Abby and I wanted a break from Christmas preparations. But then all of a sudden there was one powerful line that spoke such good news to me: "That's how we're gonna win. Not fighting what we hate, saving what we love." Not fighting what we hate, saving what we love.

That line spoke such good news to me that tears just started streaming down my face in the middle of the movie theater. Abby was a little surprised but, I decided to just let the tears flow and ponder those words. I realized that is what God does for our world in Jesus. God doesn't fight all that is wrong; God saves us with love. God saves us from despair, anger and hatred. God sets us free to hope, to love and to be part of God's work of saving this beautiful world. In the midst of what is wrong, God comes to us in Jesus to save us.

And God knows there is so much that is so wrong with the world - these days and back in those days when Jesus first came.

In those days, Luke tells us, a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. Which is to say, in those days there was an Emperor with a huge ego who ruled one area but made decrees about "all the world." He decreed that all should be registered, not only to count them, but so that he could tax them heavily. This registration involved grueling travel for ordinary people like

Mary and Joseph. Daily life under the oppressive Roman Empire was already difficult enough and the unjust new taxation added insult to injury.

Much has changed, but in these days we too are thinking about taxation and the challenges it poses. We too live in a time when so many world leaders have huge egos, when oppression and injustice are still so present. These days are shaped by events that do affect “all the world”- climate change, nuclear weapons, mass migration on a scale the world has never seen. And even with so many advancements in technology and health care, still there is so much heartache in daily life.

God could choose to fight all this. Scripture shows us that God hates injustice and oppression. God hates arrogance and greed and disregard for any part of God’s creation.

God could choose to fight all this and all that is wrong in our world. And there are times that we would prefer a god who would come with power and might to crush everything that is wrong, forgetting that all of that lives within each of us as well.

Instead, God comes as a vulnerable baby in a manger so that hope can be born among us, so that love can grow. God comes as one of us, to live among us, so that we might know that God is present in every aspect of our lives, in all of what it means to be human.

God is present in this world of taxes and weapons, global threats and daily toils. God is present in the movie theater, the meeting, the kitchen, the classroom, in the challenges of bedtime with small children. God is present in all of life. God is present in Jesus who chooses always to love, who cannot be stopped from loving even when we fight that love, even when we would crucify that love. Nothing can stop Jesus from being present to us in his word, in his body and blood, in the gathered community, in all of creation.

This ever-present love without end frees us from despair. It frees us to join God’s work of loving and saving this beautiful world. This is how God wins. This is how love wins, how hope prevails. This is how God saves us and all that God loves.

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”

Good news has arrived - Good news that invites us to see, with wide-open eyes, that God has come.

So, share in the wonder of this night. Let a song of joy arise in you. Love is here.

Thanks be to God.