

Christmas Eve Trinity Episcopal Grand Ledge  
December 24, 2018  
Year C

Fear not.

Remember little Linus explaining to Charlie Brown what the meaning of Christmas was all about. The voice of a small child has been telling television audiences for decades about the birth of Jesus. Linus stood in the middle of the stage, the spot light shone on him and he recited: "Fear not: for I bring tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David, a savior which is Christ the Lord. "

On that night, two thousand years ago, tremendous things were happening.

Angels were once again bringing tidings from God. First to Elizabeth and Zachariah, then to Mary, and to Joseph. Angels filled the skies over the shepherd's flocks. They appeared to wise men warning them to return to their own lands avoiding King Herod. Each time they began their encounters with words of comfort, and assurance.

Don't be afraid.

So many times, when the angels reach out to us, they open the conversation with those words. They bring us to the very brink of eternity – as we gaze into the chasm, they offer comfort and protection.

When I think of the way the beauty of the night of His birth is described, stars shining brightly, illuminating the clear sky. The way that Mary and Joseph found shelter, and found help in their great need. The way the angels made sure that this momentous birth was known in the farthest reaches of the world. I believe that God sent his Son to us, not to suffer and die, though He knew that was part of being human; but to live among us. To love and be loved. To preach, and model, and practice - deep, unrelenting, unfathomable love.

I believe that God sent Jesus with the expectation that he would be treated as a King who would bring the good news to all people that God is Love. At the moment of Christ's birth, which we remember tonight, I believe all of heaven was filled with the hope of reconciliation. Victory over darkness.

The angels had to tell somebody!

So, they told the shepherds. Not in a whisper, or in a dream, but filling the heavens with choruses, praising God and singing "Glory to God in the Highest heaven, and on Earth, Peace to all people of Good Will. "

Living into God's expectation isn't easy. It means we have to love those who don't love us. Luckily it doesn't say we have to like them, but we have to love them.

What can that mean?

Acceptance. Welcoming all to the feast despite our differences of opinion, life style, national identity, race, or religion. Loving those that are now called "the Other". People we don't understand, either because of their language or because of the way they live. Its so much easier to hold onto the familiar and reject those who are different.

It's really hard to think about loving someone who has done harm to you, or your family. And yet that is the commandment. There are instances in the news, examples in movies and TV shows, where there has been forgiveness despite the most difficult of circumstances. Can you think of times in your own life that apply?  
I can.

It means taking no revenge. Letting the past be the past. Letting go. I don't know if I could do that myself under all circumstances. But I know that it hurts the one who cannot forgive, as much or more that the one who needs forgiveness.

Families who are separated by misunderstanding, or intolerance cannot be whole without forgiveness.

When I told my theology to one of my mentors, that God wouldn't have sent His son with the expectation of persecution, and tortuous death. I was told I am a creationist. And so, it is.

When He sent Jesus to live among us, God gave us our second chance to live in the garden. Our opportunity to put away pride, selfishness, jealousy, and all the evil those sins bring. The chance to live according to God's law – Love God, and Love one another. Closing the circle begun by Adam and Eve.

As you share the love you have for your family and friends, remember that we are God's gift to them, and they to us. Embrace each other with thanksgiving.

Treasure the true gift of Christmas, God's love among us.

Amen