

“This Is The Work of Christmas”

December 25, 2016

Dr. R. Scott Colglazier
Senior Minister

First Congregational Church
Los Angeles, CA

Scripture Reading – Matthew 1:18-25

I am so glad to be with you on this Christmas morning and I bring you greetings of love and peace and joy on this very special day. Is it just me or were we just here a few hours ago? Well, we had such a wonderful Christmas Eve at First Church last night, but to be here this morning on the actual day of Christmas means everything to me! Honestly, there's no place I would rather be than right here with you. And so thank you for sharing in this service with us.

That said, I must admit I'm feeling a little talked out today, and so I'm going to follow some advice an old minister gave me early on in my career when he said: "Son, there's no such thing as a bad short sermon!" Agreed. Here it is . . . a short sermon . . .

Christmas is not merely about a day; it's about the work of God that should happen all year long inside our souls. What is the work of Christmas? What is God trying to do through this natal story that touches us so deeply year after year? And what do you need today – on this Christmas Day – what do you need to hear and feel and think this morning?

I want to try to answer these questions in a personal way this morning, not a bunch of religious clichés, but what I'm really feeling as a human being. First and foremost I hope the manger becomes a place of personal transformation within myself this year. Within the depths of my heart I want to feel God. I hope it's true for you, too. That is to say, there is always something trying to be born within all of us. Some of us need patience for a changing world. Some of us need courage for new challenges. Some of us need reassurance as we struggle with doubts and uncertainties. Some of us just need to feel again that God is with us and that we are not alone. Regardless, Christmas reminds us that God journeys with us, and to feel that, to know that and believe that is the essence of faith. Personal transformation is everything.

You see this in some of the folklore around the Christmas story, and for me at least, one of those stories that I love the most is captured in the song "The Little Drummer Boy." I know, you might think it's a little cheesy, but I like it because it's a reminder that in a personal way God doesn't ask for us to be something we are not. We don't have to be better. We don't have to be more religious. We don't have to be more spiritual. We simply give what we can give, love the way we can love, and share what we have to share, and all of it is enough. You know the song and you know the story . . .

*Come, they told me pa-rum pum pum pum
Our newborn King to see, pa-rum pum pum pum
Our finest gifts we bring pa-rum pum pum pum
To set before the King pa-rum pum pum pum
Rum pum pum pum. rum pum pum pum
So to honor him pa-rum pum pum pum
When we come.*

*Little Baby pa-rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too, pa-rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring pa-rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give our King pa-rum pum pum pum
Rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum
Shall I play for you, pa-rum pum pum pum
On my drum?*

*Mary nodded pa-rum pum pum pum
The Ox and Lamb kept time pa-rum pum pum pum
I played my drum for Him pa-rum pum pum pum
I played my best for Him pa-rum pum pum pum
Rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum
Then He smiled at me pa-rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum*

The great poet W.H. Auden once wrote, "If on Christmas Day God invites you to dance, then you dance." I think God is asking each of us to dance. In a real way. In a personal way. God doesn't ask you to become something you are not; God invites you to become who you really are. Do what you can to make the world a better place. Do what you can to make your church a better church. Do what you can to make the human family a richer, more beautiful experience for others. This is the work of Christmas.

And if you don't think you matter, then you should consider one of the greatest Christmas movies ever made – "It's a Wonderful Life" by Frank Capra. You know the premise of the movie. George Bailey wants to get out of his hometown. He wants to see the world and have adventures. But then he is slowly drawn into the family Savings and Loan Business. And he hates it. And he pushes against it. He feels like he is settling. And yet without the Bailey Savings and Alone the people in that town will never have a life and will be held captive by mean old Mr. Potter.

Through a series of events George is granted a gift . . . and it's the gift of looking at the world had he never been born. And over and over again, through the one life of George Bailey, he helped person after person and person. He thought he had wasted his life. He wanted adventure. And he wanted to be famous. And he wanted to see the world. But again and again George Bailey touched people. That's the work of Christmas. You matter. You matter to someone this morning. You may not even know it, but you do.

A few weeks ago we had a gentleman pass away here at our church. He was someone I would see every Sunday. He was a fashion designer and a writer and a scholar. And he would show up at church wearing bright yellow pants and yellow shoes and a yellow shirt. Or some Sundays he would be dressed in blue. Had he been here today, he would have been in resplendent in red. I know he would have been in red! I didn't know him well, but he mattered to me. I loved it that he was himself inside this church. That's what I want for everyone – to be himself or herself inside this church. I love that about this congregation. No one is making anyone become like anyone else! I've wanted a church like that my whole life! And now here it is. He was important to me. He was here on a Sunday. He passed away the next day on a Monday. I always told him, "Friend, you're rocking the blues today! You're rocking the yellows today!" He smiled. I smiled. He brought something of the presence of God to me. Maybe I brought a little of it to him too. I don't know.

Everyone has something they can do to make this world a better place: the little drummer boy playing out of his poverty for the Christ child; George Bailey helping the citizens of Bedford Falls; or David Chirrechetti bringing happiness to a dark gray Gothic Cathedral every Sunday. The work of Christmas is to believe that something greater than ourselves is born in us and flows through us to the world.

What do I want for Christmas today? That Christ can be born in enough hearts that it will be a world with less fear and more hope, less hate and more love, less darkness and more light, fewer walls and more bridges, not more nuclear weapons, but no nuclear weapons, and that Christ – the embodiment of divine love – might become real within me, and within you, and within all of us this day. Friends, it's Christmas. If God is inviting you dance, then dance. I love you all. Let's love one another. Amen.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH of LOS ANGELES

Wilshire Center • 540 S. Commonwealth Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90020 • Tel 213.385.1341

www.FCCLA.org