

Christmas Eve 11:00 pm; 2/24/2014

Rev. Ken Wratten

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

Meaning from the Manger

We began this year's journey through Advent with a few prompts to look for; reminders of the focus we would use for Advent season this year. The first prompt we agreed to look out for was the lights of Christmas, whether in a Nativity Scene or on a reindeer's nose: From whatever source, we would use the lights to remember the refrain from the Great Easter Vigil service: The light of Christ: Thanks be to God. Christ is the light of the world: bringing light to overcome darkness (not to eliminate it).

The second prompt I suggested was a road sign for Route 82: El Camino Real, running through Santa Clara Valley, and actually continuing along the West Coast. El Camino Real means: The King's Highway. I suggested that we use the road sign for The King's Highway to remind us of the Way that Jesus taught; it is to be the life for us who follow him: it is the life of Grace.

Let's take a closer look at these two qualities of our faith journey, because they are fundamental to the celebration we make tonight of Christ's birth.

John the Baptist prophesied that the one to come was the light of the world. In the beginning God brought light into darkness and void, and brought life to creation. The crowning step in the process was for God to speak, and for the power of God's Word to bring forth Adam and Eve. It was a calculated risk for God to take, giving them the free will to worship God, but also the choice to not respond to God's love.

Adam and Eve's choice placed a chasm between the Loving God and humans who turned from that divine love. Through the millennia God reached out to His beloved people, through Law and prophets and sages; but to no avail. God never gave up on us. Love never left. Then, ultimately, God chose to take the ultimate risk. There, in the darkness of the cave that was a stable for sheep and cattle, in an obscure Judean village, to a peasant couple, on a date that the West finally settled on as December 25, and the East settled on as January 6, God spoke again. Where God's calling forth of Adam had been high risk, empowering humankind with the choice to worship God or not, the revealing of Jesus was God's most subtle and powerful move of all. The "Second Adam had come: he was the Firstborn of the New Creation; bringing light into the darkness of separation from God.

Jesus said that we are to reflect the light of God's presence that he brought to the world. Our job is to REFLECT that light.

This reminds me of a lesson I learned early in Boy Scouts. When camping, we would work at night by moonlight and starlight. We would put amber lenses on our flashlights, to keep our night vision. If new scouts were joining us, you could plan that at least one of them would shine their flashlight in our eyes. The yell that came back was "Greenie!!" Our blasting a beacon of light on other people is not always helpful. That is true as well in the spiritual realm.

We reflect Christ's light with pastoral strength; it does not take the threat of God's wrath, it takes sharing Christ's compassion; like offering a lighted candle for someone whose parent or best friend just passed away; or being a thoughtful, 'non-anxious presence' when life around us gets tense.

Our second Advent prompt is to remember our calling to walk the Way. This reminds me of the Thomas Bros. maps I always kept in my car (30 years ago). They provided me no help at all when I accidentally left them in the trunk of the car. Then maps were on smart phones. But when I was reading the map, I was not keeping my eyes on the road, which could get me lost, or in a wreck. Now we finally have directions that can talk to us from our phone or our GPS. Jesus is our talking GPS for the Way to live in God's grace. The shepherds were guided by angels; the wise men were guided by a star; WE are guided by our spiritual discernment of walking in the path of God's grace.

Jesus' birth was specifically intended to show us and model for us how to walk the Way; on the King's Highway. So Christmas celebration is not about the presents we get tomorrow morning (but of course who doesn't like presents?). The presents convey the love that is being expressed by the giver of the gift. And the love that is expressed should serve as a reminder of the love that our God has for us – the love that was expressed by God becoming a human being through the birth of the baby Jesus.

The birth of this Child confirms what our hearts already know: God is with us. And for that truth we share the message -
Merry Christmas!!