

Pastor Jon's Christmas Eve Sermon 2022

Merry Christmas!

If I were to sum up Christmas in one word, it would be "Love".

Jesus, our Immanuel, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, came to earth as a human out of love.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Lutheran Pastor and conscientious objector to Hitler's Nazi Germany, summed up Christmas this way in his *Ethics*, "behold God became human, the unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world. God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world."

Jesus came for us as we are and for our world as it is out of love. Even amidst empires and wars, unfair taxes, natural disasters, famine and disease, Christ came to be one of us.

Bonhoeffer also wrote in *Ethics*, "There is no part of the world, no matter how lost, no matter how godless, that has not been accepted by God in Jesus Christ and reconciled to God."

This is truly the "good news of great joy for all the people" just as the Angels told the shepherds when Jesus was born in the manger.

This love that God has for the world changes everything.

I have been doing a little baking with our 6 year old. She loves hanging around the kitchen and helping me out. While we make something she always whispers to me, "Dad, don't forget the secret ingredient." I respond, "And what's the secret ingredient?" She whispers, "Love." Oh yes, we can't forget the love... let me add that now.

Speaking of love, I re-watched the Charlie Brown Christmas this year. There are many scenes that hit harder than I remember after losing my dad this year. Charlie Brown is confused about the meaning of Christmas and everybody's take on it. Even his dog, Snoopy, has gone commercial. Charlie Brown admits he is depressed so he goes to Lucy for some 5 cent advice. Lucy tells him to volunteer... to direct the Christmas play. Charlie agrees, but it doesn't go well.

The last scene is filled with hurt and disappointment after the Peanuts gang made fun of Charlie Brown's Christmas tree and called him names. Charlie Brown, who

is already feeling down about the whole Christmas thing says, “Everything I do turns into a disaster. I guess I really don’t know what Christmas is all about.” He throws up his hands, raises his voice, and says, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?”

Linus steps on stage into the spotlight, drops his blanket that Lucy teased him about earlier, and recites Luke 2:8-14, the story of Jesus’ Birth as told to the shepherds. This story freed Linus from his fear of dropping his blanket, even if for a moment, into a herald of good tidings.

After hearing about Jesus, Charlie Brown picks up his tree, walks off stage with a smile on his face, and goes home. He heard the true meaning of Christmas. He won’t let commercialism or anything else ruin his Christmas. While walking, he hears the words of Jesus’ birth again in Linus’ voice.

He then grabs an ornament off Snoopy’s dog house, and puts it on his tree. It droops down to the ground. Charlie Brown, dejected again said, “I killed it. Everything I touch gets ruined.” Then he walks off.

But Linus and the gang follow Charlie Brown home.

Linus sees the droopy branch. He lifts it up saying, “I never thought it was a bad little tree. Maybe it just needs a little love.” There it is. Love. So he ties his blanket around it to hold it up. Then all the peanuts gang and decorate the tree and start humming “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”. Charlie Brown comes out to see what racket is all about. Then he sees the tree all decorated and upright. A big smile comes across his face and they all sing Hark the Herald Angels sing to end the show.

Just as the Christmas story transformed Charlie Brown and the Peanuts gang, the story of Jesus’ birth transforms our world, still today. God’s love in Jesus Christ is for you and me just as we are. We don’t deserve this love. It is a gift from God. In the midst of our own disappointments and fears, God comes, and we are reminded to let go of our fears for the sake of love... to drop our blankets... order to share Jesus’ love with others.

We, the church, are the body of Jesus’ Christ in the world today. We are a community that shouldn’t tear people down, but lift them up. Amen