

Gifts of Love

Micah 5:2-5a 12-24-06

This past week I have been surprised by the number of people who have asked me if we were having a Sunday morning service this morning. I think many believe that being in church twice on one day is one time too many. But, I was surprised, I guess, because there are always four Sundays of Advent and this one was the Fourth. The journey to Christmas Eve could hardly be completed if we did not light the fourth of our candles, perhaps the most important of all.

The past three Sundays we have lit the candles of hope, forgiveness and joy. Sue and Alison lit the last on our Advent journey, that of love. Tonight we will light all of them and the Christ candle and we will share the light that came into the world that first Christmas so long ago.

While hope, forgiveness, joy and love are all qualities that are important for well-balanced lives, we would have to agree with the apostle Paul who told us that “the greatest of these is love.” And it is. If we live lives with loving hearts we will exhibit the qualities of hope, forgiveness and joy. If we live lives in love we cannot avoid all the other positive qualities. We can’t. Think about it. If we love God, our selves and those we come in contact with—our neighbors—we cannot help but have hope for our present and future, we cannot avoid offering forgiveness to others and accepting it when it is given us and we will always have within our beings a deep center of joy that remains unperturbed no matter how difficult the life becomes that moves around us. When we live from a center of love we give wonderful gifts to others. It simply goes against our nature to do anything else.

However, there are times when we come in contact with negative people and we find ourselves slipping into becoming negative our selves. When we begin to think our negative thoughts we discover that we love less, forgive less and hope far less. Joy becomes an emotion that is foreign to us. We become exhausted dealing with people who only want to bring us down to their level of disappointment and miserable-ness. We learn, through these times when we are side-tracked from what should be our true pathway in life, that “misery does, indeed, love company.”

I realize this is happening to me when I lose my sense of humor. If I cannot laugh at most of life, I know I am slipping. So, I need to retrench to see just what it is that is bothering me. Often I calm my soul and center myself through prayer and meditation. I am not sure what I would do without times of quiet for reflection. Some people are afraid of quiet times spent with them selves, I am not. Those times help me sort things out and get back on the right path. They help me recognize if I am being pulled down by others or by myself. Once I understand what is going on, I can find my way back to being the person I like to be. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “No one can do to you anything you won’t let them do.” She was right. If I determine to keep myself above thoughts that are negative, I can do so. No one else can determine how I view life or respond to it. I am responsible for myself.

Our reading from the prophet Micah, foretells the coming of a Messiah for the nation Israel. A man of peace will come to tend to the sheep of the Lord. For us, as Christians, this person was Jesus, the one who came to help us find our way through life. As we know, Micah was not the only prophet who strengthened Israel’s hope for a brighter

future with the promise of a savior. Many did. But Micah went a little farther later in this book when he says, “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”

Jesus tried to tell us this through his life and teachings, didn't he? He told people that they needed to move through life with healthy attitudes toward others, themselves and God. He told them and us about our worthiness and the great value we all have in God's eyes. He came to tell us that God treasures each of us no matter whom we are or where we are in life. What a great gift of love this is. It is one we are meant to open again and again and to share with others. As an old song sings, “Love isn't love, 'til you give it away.” The best thing any of us can give or receive this season of the year is the assurance of love.

As we make ready for Christmas Eve, the silent and holy night, we need to remember that love pierced the world with a baby's cry those many years ago. The love of God came down at Christmas as a new hope for a world in turmoil. We are no less in turmoil now. Let us hope that we will be able to hear the angels sing and that the star will finally light the way toward peace and love for all humankind. Amen