

Christmas Eve Meditation

12-24-2011

One of the greatest theologians that ever lived, Karl Barth, was asked to be a guest lecturer at the University Of Chicago Divinity School. At the end of a captivating closing lecture, the president of the seminary announced that Dr. Barth was not feeling well and was very tired, and though he thought that Dr. Barth would like to be open for questions, he shouldn't be expected to handle the strain. Then he said, "Therefore, I will ask just one question on behalf of all of us."

He turned to the renowned theologian and asked, "Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?"

It was the perfect question for a man who had written literally tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put into print. The students were all ears and ready to take down verbatim what one of the greatest theologian of their time had to say.

Karl Barth closed his tired eyes, and he thought for a minute, and then he half smiled, opened his eyes, and said to those young seminarians,

"The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this:

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Friends in Christ, I submit to you that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever written!

So I thank God that Christmas comes around once a year to remind us that God isn't in the business of keeping track of whether we have been "naughty or nice," nor is God concerned about our status or position in life.

If God was concerned about either of those things, then Christ would never have been born into such lowly or disagreeable circumstance as we find in the second chapter of Luke that has just been read this evening.

No. Christmas is the beginning of a classic love story with all the right ingredients: infatuation, pursuit, risk, and relationship...

But in all relationships of love, there does have to be that first meeting doesn't there?

When I was younger, I remember thinking to myself:

"What if I had been born to another set of parents? I would never have known the love that came to me from my Mother and Father."

My wife Meg and I met 42 years ago at Christmas time on a blind date. It was December 27th, 1969 and always at this time of year I find myself asking "what if" questions.

"What if" I had never gone through the difficulties and suffering I experienced in the several years prior to our meeting?

"What if" I had decided NOT to visit my best friend from seminary and his wife over the Christmas holidays in frigid and snowy St. Paul, MN?

"What if" Betty had decide NOT to ask Meg to go out on a blind date with their friend who was coming to visit them?

"What if" Meg would have said, "No thank you, no more blind dates."

Our paths would have never crossed ... we would have never known the deep love we have shared all these years."

Do you ever find yourself asking those kinds of questions?

Christmas is a crossing of paths... Christmas is where we find the Christ child, the Son of God, intersecting with our humanity! Christmas is our first best meeting with the God who has desired us from the very beginning.

If it weren't for that first Christmas we would have never known the intensity of the love that God has for us.

Mary and Joseph, far from home because of imperial rule, a young peasant mother giving birth in the barn out back...

There was no fanfare, no royal delegation. They just laid him in that manger and they watched his little face, and they listened for his breathing, just like every new parent does.

No... This couldn't be anything but true love!

True love accepts the beloved ones in your life for who they really are; God chooses to love us precisely because we are subjects of the human condition... not because of a favorable bottom line on our social and moral profit and loss statement. Mary and Joseph had nothing going for them except their humanity.

God had waited ever so patiently for One to be born into our world, the person who was willing to embody the love that God has for each one of us... not just some of the time, not just when it was convenient, but in every waking, breathing minute of every single day... It is the birth of that love into our world that we celebrate at Christmas!

Who would have ever guessed that this crossing of paths, this intersection of the divine and the human, would take place so long ago in a remote, small village, called Bethlehem of Judea?

Who would have guessed that in that time and place One would be born into our world who would one day fill his life so much with the experience of God, so much with the love of God, that in him thousands upon thousands would be moved to make the incredible claim that they had actually met their God in person.

This is the night when God sent out a love letter of cosmic proportions. This is the night in the little town of Bethlehem when God and humanity were joined as a bride and groom are joined together on their wedding day.

And as Jesus grew and went out into the world, so did our understanding grow of just how much God loves us.

We find in Jesus that God's love doesn't demand perfection, that forgiveness isn't given away sparingly but recklessly and

indiscriminately, that unconditional really means unconditional, and that God's love is completely and thoroughly inclusive.

We find that even the likes of us gathered here this evening, we all fall within the embrace of that love, and

“That neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of God’s creation, will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹

Peace begins with the knowledge that God loves and accepts us just that much.

It all begins with Christmas!

My dear friends that baby in the manger is the light of our world, even when our world is in shambles...For in that baby the Divine and the human cross paths.

The infant Jesus is our living, breathing sign of the immeasurable love that God has had for all of us from the very beginning.

Christmas is the living promise that we are never ever alone. No matter where we are in life, no matter in what condition we find ourselves, no matter how far we might stray away, or how unfaithful we are, God, the supreme lover, will pursue us in love for eternity!

As you come forward and as we share the sacrament of Holy Communion, we are reminded that God’s love for us is not only contained in the manger, but also on the cross. God’s son was born to live among us to show us how to live and to love, and his Son, Jesus Christ, died for us on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, for our salvation both now and forever more, for all of eternity.

Therefore, fear not, receive the good news of great joy, for this day is born, a savior, and his name is Christ the Lord. You will find the babe

¹ Romans 8: 38-39)

in a manger, you will find him on the cross, and you will find him at the very center and core of your being.

Tonight, I urge you, go to the manger, find the babe, be present there, and be moved and touched by the love and the light shining there.

Feel it; accept it; enjoy it; bathe in it; respond to it; share and pass on the gift you have been given – the gift of God's love.

“Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so...
Yes, Jesus loves me.”

And It is a love that never stops shining.

May God bless each and every one of us this Christmas Eve!

Amen!