Christmas Day All Saints’ Church

Year A December 25, 2016

Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)

Psalm 98 John 1:1-14

Light of life, you came in flesh, born into human pain and joy. Grant us faith to see your presence among us, so that we may sing new songs of gladness and walk in the way of peace. AMEN

Merry Christmas! Happy Christmas! Joyful Christmas!

One of my favorite lines in Scripture is this opening line from Isaiah which is always read on Christmas morning: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace.”

I love this poetic image of the majestic mountains as the backdrop to the mundane and vulnerable feet of the messenger.

The messenger has been traveling hard over difficult terrain, traversing valleys and ridges, running to Jerusalem, and like any feet, the messenger’s feet are not his most beautiful feature- with bunions, bruises, aching arches, and flaking skin. Dry and moist in all the wrong places, smelly and unsightly, these feet are blessed, not because of what they are, but because the message they carry is beautiful.

Our own feet are blessed as well, especially when we carry messages of hope, peace, good news and salvation. I am reminded of a hospice nurse who massaged the feet of a patient near the end of her life. The patient was in pain, but was averse to pain medication. Every day her nurse, who walked with a cane and whose feet were crippled with arthritis, would come to massage her patient’s feet with gentle love and care. And the patient trusted her and rested the pain of her whole body into those loving and caressing hands. Even as she laid dying, she spoke daily of the inner glory of God witnessed through those day to day visitations of foot massages and tenderness. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of ***the nurse and her patient*** who made a joyful noise to the Lord.

And so much like the runner racing to Jerusalem with the good news, the Nurse’s caresses spoke this message: Listen, you thought you were dead, the left behind, abandoned to the forces of the world that defeat and destroy, but No. There is good news in your future; salvation is yours; your God reigns.

And so much like the sentinels defending the destroyed city of a body, the Patient lifted up her voice, because in plain sight she saw the return of the Lord. And the whole cosmos burst into new song.

God is the Almighty ***and*** God is the All Vulnerable. It is the All Vulnerable, like a child born in a stable, which we often forget to remember, as we call on our God. God comes to be with us in Our World with feet: fragile, defenseless, hurting, suffering, needing, living and dying.

The poet, Gerald Manley Hopkins reminds us of our vulnerable and almighty world: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God… And for all this, nature is never spent; ***There*** lives the dearest freshness deep down things;”

Oh yes, those deep down things, found in our nature of living and the dying. Death is not a changing of worlds as we often imagine, but rather an expanding. The boundaries drop and we leave the womb of our limitations, and we are born anew knowing more fully a wholeness, a completeness, and full of the same grace and glory as Jesus, as the one who lived among us.

John’s bursting poem in his gospel speaks to this grace and glory as well: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Jesus is Word and Light and Life. And so are we. Just as he was once with us, we are with him at the very beginning of life. The cosmos and everything we know to be true was created through words. God spoke, “Let there be light, and there was Light and there was a world.” And in God’s imagining we were there at the moment of creation. That’s why the psalmist reminds us that God knew us even before the womb; can number every hair on our head. Our very lives have been with God from the moment of Creation.

Jesus creates through the same Word of light and life and salvation. Heaven is not a heavenly distant and distinct place beyond the door of once upon a time, but of now, within the very fabric of life, no matter what is happening. That’s why Jesus keeps repeating, “The Kingdom of God is here in your midst, now and forever.”

And we are here in its midst. The Alpha and the Omega, with no beginning and no ending. We have always been and we will always be.

As Italo Calvino, one of my favorite authors writes, “It is not the voice that commends the story; it is the ear.”

Yes, we have a huge part in this creation story. No wonder. That’s the kind of relational God we have. How will we hear the echo of this story? Linguists tell us that in many languages, the word for savior, deliverer, releaser is closely related to obstetrics.

No wonder. Salvation is birthing. Today, with the birth of the Christ child in his wooden cradle, and later with his death, on the wooden cross, all humanity is set free. With this birth and death, we are liberated from a meaningless, empty life of fear and folly.

We are reminded that we are not a thing; we don’t have a body or a mind; rather we are Spirit, born daily into the Living Word. We are not ending. We are verbs, an integral function of the very universe, to live and die in our own dance, seeking, teaching, affirming, healing, loving, giving and receiving, always and everywhere.

How beautiful upon the mountains are our feet, messengers all, who announce peace, who bring good news, who announce salvation.

A salvation of life and liberty that all the ends of the earth shall see.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy, for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, who is the Living Lord, who is author of your life everlasting.

What a gift we have in our Almighty and All Vulnerable Jesus. Merry Christmas. AMEN

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