

Sunday, November 27, 2016

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 1:39-45

The Touch of Christmas

Just for a moment I would ask you to think back and try to remember Christmas time when you were a child. Some families would not put any presents under the tree until Christmas Eve and other families pile them high as they are purchased, wrapped or received. I know that as children there is a sense of anticipation of what was in those packages all wrapped up in colours and pictures of winter and Christmas. The excitement was to touch them and if they were squishy they were often put under the tree further back, because squishy soft presents meant clothes and even maybe- socks, underwear or mitts. The soft touch of the present meant clothes which are great but not so good if you were looking for the latest toy. Toys of course come in boxes and these boxes are hard to the touch and difficult not to touch or open!

Touching the presents is an important part of Christmas as fingers glide over the parcel, trying to find the taped opening and when what is inside is discovered there is further touching and maybe embracing the gift especially if it was a surprise or something really desired or needed. Then we are also touched in another way- emotionally. Sometimes what touches us emotionally causes us to laugh or cry, to stir up emotions positive or negative or even to become angry or upset. These are also a part of Christmas and what we might call the touch of Christmas.

But wouldn't it be awful if we couldn't not touch? Julie Malloy has a rare form of congenital insensitivity to pain. She has no sensation of touch, temperature, deep pressure or vibrations in her limbs and parts of her chest and back. She does have sensation in her head and portions of her trunk. Her motor nerves work correctly and she can move her arms, legs and turn her head at will. She is now 28 and has not felt the confidence of a firm handshake or the warmth of snuggling beneath covers, nor the feel of dewy grass on her feet. She feels no pain at all and therefore is subject to injury, illnesses and what we might consider helpful indicators. She cannot tell if shoes fit too tightly or feel hot or cold. She gave birth to a healthy baby boy and felt no contractions throughout his delivery and only some minor back pain. But think of this, she cannot feel the touch of her son's head, as parents would to check for a temperature. How important is the sense of touch?

In our reading preparing us for the birth of Jesus, we read the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Elizabeth is from a family of priests and was a godly woman, a faithful follower of God, she was old and could not have children. Yet God intervened and she became pregnant.

Mary was young and betrothed/ engaged to marry Joseph soon. She became pregnant through God's intervention as well, the Holy Spirit and the two women were radiantly happy together. Elizabeth is further along in her pregnancy and what we would consider high risk. Mary goes to visit her and amazing things happen. Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb—not just moved about, but leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and so was her baby in her. This baby she carried we must remember is the one who would years later, baptize the Son of God. Elizabeth also felt the touch of Jesus and blessed Mary and the child she was carrying.

Elizabeth even asked the question, “Why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

How did Elizabeth know that Mary’s baby would become her Lord? She is filled with joy and thanksgiving. She is filled with hope. Elizabeth is excited that the Spirit of God acted in her life in order to become pregnant. She eventually gives birth to the one Zechariah names as John. And it is John who baptizes Jesus and when this baptism occurs, Jesus is recognized by God the Father as the Son sent to save all people. Elizabeth was filled with joy and wonder as she carried John and when she felt the baby leap inside her. She was considered barren – not able to carry or have children yet, she was now pregnant and feeling the wondrous knowledge of the baby who could leap quite strongly! Elizabeth is filled with joy!

We should be too. We should be filled with the hope of our Saviour Jesus Christ because when we think about His coming, there is nothing that can and will turn us away from this hope. Elizabeth felt the touch of Spirit of God within her as Mary came to visit her while pregnant. She felt the touch of God upon her life and her life changed forever.

Have you been touched by God’s Spirit? Maybe this Advent and Christmas instead of touching and feeling the clothes and the toys and candy of Christmas, we should be asking Christ Jesus to touch our hearts with his love. We should be asking Christ Jesus to bring about transformation within so that no matter where we are or wherever we go, Christ’s love will be present as we move with Christ? Maybe we should seek Christ’s touch in our lives so that we might understand the touch of Christmas in a new way.

Imagine Mary and Joseph as new parents in the stable. They are holding this little one and as they do so they must be overwhelmed. Not only did she give birth in a barn, but they are now touching the Son of God with their hands| There is perfection in those blankets they hold close and they are human caring for this baby born to save all people. They are unsure how this dependent infant will become the Saviour but in those early hours of what we call Christmas they touch and cuddle and caress this little one sent to them by God.

There is also hope that this baby, their new born son, would touch the lives of the world then, and bring about change to the world forever. They have hope as they wipe his hunger tears away, as they caress his hands and feet and as they anticipate his growing up in their home.

The touch of Christmas is both physical and spiritual. We can feel each other in the embraces that are shared around the dinner table and we can feel the Spirit within us even when we open up the parcels of socks and underwear. And we can feel the Spirit of Christ touch our hearts if only we open our hearts to Christ and receive Him. Even though we begin to tell his story again during advent, Christ is still our resurrected saviour and the one in whom we place our hope. Let us remember this as we have hope that Christ alone can bring.

Are you looking to experience the touch of Christmas? To do so, let us begin to know Christ Jesus, as the infant king and Saviour of all who believe. Let us experience anew how he has touched your life and brought about transformation in it. Let us look to Jesus as the Christ, the son of God who has brought about hope in Jesus because he still does this with all those who have faith and believe.

This advent and Christmas come and receive the touch of Christmas in Jesus Christ and you will forever be changed.

PRAYER

Holy God, we praise you for Jesus who reached out and touched many people. Reach out and touch everyone where they are this morning with hope so that we might fully experience the Christ of Christmas in a new way.. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.