

Sermon Text for December 17, 2017

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Genesis 1:1-5, Mark 1:1

“A heart for us from beginning to end”

We have been preparing ourselves this Advent Season by understanding the heart of Christ through hearing each of the Christmas stories as told by the 4 different Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We've heard the most powerful and significant prologue in John which told us the why of Christmas. Jesus, God himself became flesh and lived in us, in our very hearts. God through Jesus the Word has a heart for our salvation.

We heard the wonderful story of the wise men and how they show us the true meaning of Christmas, that God has a heart for all of us, regardless of who we are, where we are from, or what other people think of us.

All of this in an attempt through the activity and frenetic business that we are experiencing, trying desperately to get ready. When you come here you expect to be able to hear some good news, find this place a sanctuary, a place of refuge, a place where Jesus is able to be proclaimed and then you leave not just with some understanding of how Jesus is alive, but how we can become more alive as a result. When the kids were younger and we lived in Florida we used to fly out every year to Seattle to visit Stacy's family for Christmas. They would love to go out, not just to see the family but to see snow as well. There was one year when Naomi, was getting ready in a different way for Seattle that we didn't realize until Stacy went in to wash her hair in the bath. The water was ice cold. What in the world? I've been taking cold baths to get ready for Seattle. As Christmas rolls around we all get ready in different ways.

Is this year any different for you from other years. I mean your preparedness, and of course I mean specifically your spiritual preparedness? Are you preparing yourself for the imminent coming of Christ this Advent season or is it like any other year. Has each one of you had happy feet as a part of your preparation and your seasonal activity? Is each one of you sacrificially giving to understand the completeness of God's blessings? Do you have a heart for Christ this year that you've never had before? I sure hope so.

Because God has a heart for us, from beginning to end. That heart is found in Jesus Christ, and this heart that God has for us in Christ is seen in the Christmas story

according to Mark. And according to Mark he has had a heart for you from the very beginning.

READ SCRIPTURE

There really isn't much to go on with Mark is there? I know many of you are encouraged because you're thinking only one verse which means we're going to get out early. Oh, don't you wish. Since we preach from God's word, there isn't much to go on today. We could talk about the beginning, where we see God at work in Genesis, also in John when we understand God the Son to be at work from the very beginning, not just 2,000 years ago.

We could talk about the Good News that Mark alludes to in this first verse. We see this good news found in Jesus Christ from when the angels in Luke promise Good News of Great Joy because of the birth of Jesus. But it isn't limited to just the birth. Here later in mark John the Baptist speaks of the Good news not only that Jesus brings, but that he is.

Some Greek here would be important to see. The term Gospel comes from this verse here in Mark. Gospel comes from the term euagellion which means literally Good News. So it could really be read: the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which indeed it is both the Gospel and the good news of Jesus Christ. You know when you come to church I hope you expect to hear some good news, for many of you it is after a week of bad news. But what we find here is that anytime that Jesus is part of the story and part of your life no matter what the situation in our life, Good News is bound to be the result, even in the most tragic of circumstances.

This first verse names Jesus Christ specifically. Jesus is his proper name which means salvation and Christ is the title for whom he is, the Messiah, or the anointed one. Finally, we read Son of God, the 2nd part of the Trinity found when Jesus is baptized and God's voice from heaven proclaims: This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased.

You know Matthew and Luke take us on a Christmas adventure. They help us see the gifts of gold and smell the frankincense and myrrh, and hear the angel voices and choruses, and feel the warmth of the livestock standing in the corner of the stable. They put Jesus and his birth in a very specific time and place.

Not Mark. If it were up to him we wouldn't know a thing about the birth of Jesus. He doesn't have time for that stuff because this story of our Savior transcends time and certainly should not be held hostage by those of us who only want the Christmas story of

Hallmark. Mark gets down to business right away. He gives us one verse, and even that is probably more than he would take credit for.

For Mark Jesus didn't visit this earth as a divine tourist. No as Mark 10:45 states: The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, not to be admired, not to be adored, not to be worshipped, not to be gawked at or pointed at: Jesus came to serve, the world. Jesus came to give his life, for the world. Jesus came to save, the world.

The Gospel of Mark more than any other Christmas story calls us to activity. A social reformer once said: "Philosophers seek to understand the world, the point, however, is to change it." That is what Jesus came to do one person at a time. The activity that Mark calls us to is not this schedule-filled activity that exhausts us and gets nothing done. Mark calls us to holy activity which is very different from we normally find ourselves engaged in in this time of year. Mark calls us to engagement. Mark wants action, he doesn't want mere spectators and consumers, he wants players and producers, doers. He doesn't want visitors, he wants servants. He calls us to do something about what we see and hear, especially at this time of year.

So what we find is a Gospel without fluff, without Christmas stories, The Gospel that reminds us that God has had a heart for us from beginning to end, all along through Jesus Christ in his action and his service.

There is no season in the church that invites tourism like Christmas. Folks who may not come to church any time of year will come now. To listen to the beautiful music and see the children's programs and light candles and sing "Silent Night". Maybe you are one of those people. I am glad you are here. Because our life in Christ always begins as spectators. We walk into a strange place and watch and listen to things that we may not understand but that interest us nonetheless.

But Mark says, don't stay there, don't stay a tourist. Do something about what you have seen. Do something with what you have learned. Take a risk. Give yourself away. Do something for those who need your help as Jesus laid his life down to save us.

What might transform you from a tourist to a servant this season? Is there a lonely person you can visit? That you can invite to your Christmas dinner? Is there money that you could give away to a cause that will last longer than your children's interest in yet another toy? Is there a widow who needs some help around the house? Is there a kid in your child's classroom who won't have much of a Christmas? Is there a

neighbor you can reach who might welcome an invitation to a service or a concert? What would it take to move you from the role of spectator to participant in the Christmas story?

When I went to Israel some years back I went to Yad Vashen, the Holocaust memorial to the six million Jews who died under the Nazis in World War II. One of the most powerful scenes for me was a statue of Janus Korczak. Korczak was a renowned Polish author and educator who was placed in charge of a Jewish orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto. After some months the day came when the Nazis arrived to transport the children to one of the 22 concentration camps. Witnesses tell how Korczak led 200 kids down the street carrying their backpacks toward the rail yard. AS the soldiers loaded the children onto a cattle car, one of the soldiers recognized Korczak, he had read one of his books. He offered Korczak a chance to escape. Korczak looked up at the 200 frightened faces and told the soldier: "I cannot leave my children". He climbed up into the railroad car with them and they were transported to Treblinka where every one of them died in the gas chamber, including Korczak himself.

Jesus looked upon the face of billions of his children on this earth, and his heart ached because these children were headed toward destruction and death. He couldn't bear it. Something had to be done. He didn't just join us in our march toward death. No, he took our place. The divine tourist who journeyed from eternity to time and from heaven to earth was not content to visit us and gawk at our hopeless condition. He decided to do something about it. He pulled us off the train.

That is the Gospel, the good news, that is the story of Christmas according to Mark. Amen.