

Sermon Text for December 24, 2017

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Luke 2:1-7

“God has a heart for you”

I want to welcome you to a subdued, quiet, I hope somewhat humble Christmas Eve morning service. It has been an exciting Advent journey and we have a couple more steps in order to complete the journey until we arrive tomorrow, each one of us in our own settings, to the day of Christmas, the birth of our Savior. Many of us are on the edge of our seats for tomorrow morning when we wake up and find the surprises and the gifts that are laid out before us. I am too. But this time here in church with you reminds me that this is what it is all about. Christmas, I hope we are able to capture its essence if even for a moment this morning.

This morning we hear a Christmas story where Jesus is born without a miracle. Luke spares us the details but we can assume a natural childbirth. Nobody for now in this story at least knew this family or this baby, even though that changes quickly. The quietness and the calmness in which Luke describes the birth helps us this morning to remember that Christmas really isn't about gift-giving, or about who we are, but rather it is about humility and that Jesus came for each one of us, individually.

The other Christmas stories tell us about kings and royalty visiting Jesus, or that Jesus is God and is a tribute to his divinity, or skips his birth altogether like Mark so that we can get to his miracles and his notoriety and his otherness.

Luke has no miracles, nothing out of the ordinary. The bright light is off somewhere else away with the shepherds that Linus spoke about. A child was born, like any other, he was born like any of us were. Today, this morning, take a deep breath, relax and enjoy the ordinariness of Jesus' birth that should remind us that God has a heart for you, personally, as seen in his humble beginning.

READ SCRIPTURE

For me the beauty of Christmas is in its simplicity, white lights, red poinsettias, greeneries, manger scenes, and a child born like any one of us would be born. All over Scripture we are told that the Christ would be humble when he came and would require humility from those who serve him. Let's look at the Old Testament references that speak of this humble servant who was born on Christmas day.

Isaiah 42:3 speaks of one who will come and he will not cry out or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the streets. That's Jesus. Proverbs 15:33 states that humility goes before honor. That's Jesus. In Leviticus we hear God addressing the leaders and the people of Israel stating that if the people will humble themselves then he will forgive them. That's Jesus.

Over and over again God reminds us and calls us to be humble. We see it in the New Testament as well. In Luke 18:14 Jesus says: "all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." Jesus was raised on high. In Matthew 11:29 we are told to take on Jesus' character which is gentle and humble in heart.

In Philippians 2:8-9 Paul tells us that Jesus himself humbled himself even to the point of death on a cross. Colossians tells us to clothe ourselves with humility, just like Jesus did. You see, the humility of the manger is matched with the humility of the cross. The humility of Jesus at the garden where he states: I will do your will, is matched with his mother Mary's humility of saying: I am the handmaiden of the Lord, let it be done as you have said. Steeped in this humility is the realization that Jesus has a heart for each one of us, as people, not just as humanity, but as people. There is nothing that raises our awareness of our humanity than humility.

Stay with me because I know this may sound just like another Christmas sermon on humility and maybe it is. It is encouraging to read in our faith story that our Savior's mother had to travel 100 miles by foot or donkey before giving birth. She's one of us, no special treatment. It is nice to know that Jesus was wrapped in swaddling cloths like any other Palestinian baby of that day would be wrapped. He was laid in a manger like any other poor, unnoticed child would be in that situation. No one respected him or them enough to give them a place to be in this most sensitive and delicate time. No cheers bar here, no one knew their name and it seems like no one was glad they came. You're outside. All of this so that we would be noticed eternally. All of this so that each one of us would be recognized by our savior, the very savior who was not noticed by anyone.

But we love to be noticed, and at times humility comes hard. This Christmas Eve morning we need to hear a sermon on humility, we need to be reminded over and over because God never stops reminding us in his Word. This lesson in humility not only puts us in our place, but reminds us that God has created us as individuals. I know, I stress a lot the fact that we are a family, that we serve as a community in a community. Part of

our identity as Presbyterians is that we are connected and that when we take communion or when we baptize we do it in community. But every now and then it is important to hear that God has a heart for us as individuals where we find ourselves right now.

But it would seem that a lesson on humility just might fall on deaf ears in this time of year. We are called today to be celebratory, and I want to celebrate this morning. We are called to be joyful this morning, and we come with joy and full of anticipation in Advent. We can't wait for the Christmas pageant this evening, I can't wait for the candles and the Silent Night this evening. But none of this should be built around our sense of ability or our confidence in ourselves. You know First Presbyterian is filled with people who are well known and have been successful in so many different ways. We have our share of successful men and women. As individuals this area may be one of our greatest struggles because it is easy to rely on our name notoriety because we think it has gotten us far.

How mistaken and misguided we are. Don't we know that it is God who raises us up and brings us down. Oh, Christmas more than any other time ought to remind us of that because of the humility which is at the core of Jesus' birth. Today is a day, this Christmas Day that we can come and gather as a family and be humbled by the sacrifice for us that God made for us by not only sending Jesus to be Immanuel for us, but also send him on a cross to die for us.

There is nothing more humbling than having someone help you out when you really need it, and Jesus did that for us. But humility is something which we do see not only in Christ but all around us. This church is also filled with people who don't feel worthy and don't think they deserve to be here. That is the Christmas approach. Not a single one of us deserves what God did for us, it was a gift. But our gift to God is to respond with humility as we talk to brothers and sisters in Christ, as we work in the real world as we make a business deal or are at wit's end trying to make ends meet as a young family.

This church is able to come together in these moments because we leave our sources of pride at the door. We leave our pride in our notoriety or lack of it, we leave our money, well, maybe that came out wrong, we leave who we are and who we aren't and redefine ourselves through the eyes of the one born in the manger who has a heart for each of us as individuals.

When you leave today, don't put that stuff back on. Leave today changed by the Christmas story as you put on a mantle of humility that God never wants you to take off. Don't be a humble Christian in here and then something else out there. Jesus requires it of us. Amen.