

**O Come, Thou Dayspring, Come and Cheer**

**Brentwood - #3 in The Poetry of Christ's Coming Series**

Hymn # 122 – Zephaniah 3:14-20 – Luke 3:7-18

For years now, I've signed most of my e-mails  
"Cheers, Brian."

I hadn't given the deeper reasons for that much thought,  
until I began to work on this sermon.  
At times, it seemed a bit light and superficial,  
one of those words we use  
without much thought,  
just because it is handy and easy to say.

I was a great fan of the comedy *Cheers*  
when it was on the air the first time around.  
I liked the idea of a place where  
everybody knew your name.  
I often thought that small neighbourhood churches,  
like the one I served in Toronto  
prior to coming to St. Andrew's Hall and VST,  
were that kind of place.  
No beer, but lots of the same intriguing human dynamics.  
Maybe that's one of the hidden reasons  
I use the word in my signatures.

But this week I went deeper into the meaning  
that this idea of 'cheer' and 'cheers'  
can have in our lives.

This passage of poetry we are exploring thus morning,  
"Come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer,"  
takes us to a whole new level of meaning of the word  
and ties it firmly to the coming of Christ.

Here's the flow of the logic  
as I've come to understand it.

Jesus Christ comes into this world  
as the dawning of a new day,  
with a brilliance that reveals the true nature and purpose of God –  
in a word as we saw earlier, Love.

That coming of Love incarnate,  
Love in the flesh walking and talking with us in our daily lives,  
permanently bound through the covenant to be with us and for us,  
brings cheer and joy into our lives.

It is the steadfast and unshakeable source true happiness,  
cheer, and joy  
in the lives of all human beings.

We know, or should know,  
from the many references in the Bible to the covenant God has made with us,  
and interpreted for us through the inner work of the Holy Spirit,  
that God has promised to bring true and lasting joy into our lives  
and into the life of the whole world.

Our calling as Christians, should we choose to accept it,  
is to be that cheer and joy  
to all we encounter in our daily lives.

Jesus Christ came that we may go,  
go and be the Body of Christ in the world,  
be the cheer and joy  
Jesus was in his day for the people of his time and place.  
We are continually, day after day,  
the dawning yet again of Christ's coming.

Let's take a minute to recall  
a bit about the world into which Jesus Christ was born.  
It was a world racked by war, oppression, and imperialism.  
Rome ruled with an iron fist.  
Political resistance and protest was brutally suppressed,  
as Jesus would find out all too soon.  
Factions within political and religious groups  
labeled and dismissed each other  
with great regularity,  
accusing each other of all sorts of things.

It was a world in which political puppets  
regularly killed to keep their thrones and privileges.

It was a world in which there were great gaps  
between the rich and the poor.  
Indeed, by the time Jesus began his public ministry,  
he would talk more about the economic implications  
of his preaching of the Reign of God

than any other dimension of God's presence.

It was a world in which many lives were ruled by fear  
- fear of soldiers, tax collectors, scribes and Pharisees,  
foreigners, and demons.

Into the midst of that world came a baby,  
to be named Jesus  
and gradually recognized as the Christ,  
the one whom God promised to send to inaugurate the Kingdom,  
born in an obscure stable in a crowded town  
filled with people paying taxes  
in a humiliating way.  
In that person,  
as he grew in wisdom and stature,  
we would see God in the flesh,  
full of truth and grace,  
walking with and attracting people of all classes and walks of life  
into a community of cheer and joy.  
That community was centred in the deep knowledge  
that this was Emmanuel, God with us,  
and that living in faithful relationship with this person,  
becoming a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ,  
was the way to true joy and cheer.

In Jesus' birth, a new era dawned,  
an era of peace and community,  
an era in which the deepest desires of humans  
were satisfied by God coming to be with them,  
with us.

We know, deep in our souls,  
that there is a longing and a yearning  
for cheer and joy.  
What is often more difficult to grasp,  
perhaps because it is so simple,  
is that God has acted to answer that longing and yearning  
in Jesus Christ.  
Cheer and joy is available to us now,  
with no conditions other than a willingness to accept them  
and practice living them.

I've been preparing a template this week  
to guide us in our conversations  
at the Adult Bible Studies  
we have on Friday evenings here at Brentwood.

The next one is this Friday, Dec. 18, from 5:30 to 7:00.  
We'll be taking a closer look at a piece of poetry  
from 'O little town of Bethlehem',  
"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

At the head of the template I've put the words with which John Calvin,  
a profound intellectual and pastoral influence on the Presbyterian tradition,  
began his great exposition of the Christian faith,  
*The Institutes of the Christian Religion.*

Here they are:

*Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom,  
consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined  
by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to  
discern. In the first place, no one can look upon themselves without immediately  
turning their thoughts to God, in whom they live and move. (Acts 17:28). For,  
quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from  
ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God.*

I was drawn to a phrase in this quote this week  
that I had not really paid attention to before.  
It's the words,  
"the mighty gifts with which we are endowed."

You see, I think that's the true meaning of our cheer and joy.  
It's the way God coming in Jesus Christ  
re-ignites the mighty gifts with which we are endowed  
so that we can experience and share cheer and joy  
with all those whom we meet  
in the course of our daily lives.

They may be the members of our own families,  
colleagues at work,  
the Handy Dart driver,  
the staff at the grocery stores or coffee shops,  
the servers in a restaurant or dining room,  
the kids in our schools and day cares,  
the people in this congregation  
and in Burnaby Taiwanese.

Your 'mighty gift' may be a simple smile,  
a kind word, a helping hand,  
a caring heart, a fervent prayer.  
All these small intentional acts of cheer and kindness

contribute to and build up the Reign of God.  
And we are all capable of doing them day after day.

Wherever we go and whoever we meet,  
God has given us mighty gifts with which to spread cheer and joy,  
with which to let people know a new day has dawned  
that will bring people together in peace and community.  
And God has called us – everyone one of us –  
to spread that cheer and joy wherever we go.

Jill and I are keen to see the new movie about Nelson Mandela  
that just came out this week – *Invictus*.  
The title of the movie comes from a poem  
written by William Earnest Henley from a hospital bed in 1875,  
the year he had his foot amputated as a result of tuberculosis.

The first stanza ends with these lines:

*I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.*

Well, our God came to be with us and for us in Jesus Christ  
and thus reminded each of us of our an unconquerable soul.  
The question for us in this time of reflective waiting we call Advent  
is how we will use that soul in the service of God's beloved children.

And there is a passage from one of Mandela speeches  
that I think captures these connections  
among the mighty gifts with which God has endowed us,  
our desire for cheer and joy,  
the dawning of a new day in Jesus Christ,  
and the opportunities we enjoy as a result to spread that cheer  
among our families, friends, and neighbours.  
It was written originally by Marianne Williamson,  
but made famous by Mandela:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves,  
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?*

*You are a child of God.*

*Your playing small doesn't serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*You are born to manifest the glory of God that is within you.*

*It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we're liberated from our own fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others.*

May these reflections on your Word, O God,  
deepen our awareness and practice of your grace.

Amen