

Anticipating the Reign of Christ – Advent & Christmas 2010

The Presence of Love and Compassion

December 26, 2010

**Isaiah 62:7-9, Psalm 148, and Matt 2:13-23
(Hymns –171, 133, 150, 141)**

I am constantly intrigued
by the meaning people attribute to Christmas,
especially in our secular, indifferent culture.

The power of the Christmas spirit
seems to overcome the indifference,
at least for a day or two,
at this time of each year.
People remember the attraction of love and compassion
and how those ways of being can create
nourishing relationships and flourishing lives.

The *Vancouver Sun* editorial on Friday this week
is a case in point.

The editorial writer paid tribute to the power of Christmas
because it throbs, in his or her opinion,
with the universal values that define Canada:
“inclusiveness and generosity,
welcome for strangers,
hospitality and tolerance for the great world family
and for its diverse and wonderful customs,
people who care about one another
and their communities and families, however small.”

But what lies beneath and behind these values,
what supports them when the fear hits,
and the going gets tough,
and real threats raise their ugly heads?

That’s what the celebration of Christmas
in Christian congregations around the world,
in every language imaginable,
with customs adapted from various cultures deepening its impact,
is really all about.

Those celebrations are rooted in the conviction
that the God who created, redeemed, and sustains this vast universe
took flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus Christ,
in an obscure corner of the then Roman Empire,
about 2000 years ago.

In that person's life, we saw and heard grace and peace
in all its fullness.

In the witness to this power left for us by his disciples,
we are invited into a relationship with this person,
who is God in human flesh,
coming to be with us, for us, and in us
through the workings of his Holy Spirit.

This is all language crafted to invite us into a relationship with Jesus Christ.
It is language designed to remind us of who we are
and invite us to claim that identity
as beloved children of God created in God's image,
male and female.

Divine love and compassion didn't really come into human life
as a philosophy or a code of ethics,
but as a person – Jesus Christ.

To enter into a trusting relationship with this person is a leap of faith,
something not seen by our naked eyes
but something felt in our longing hearts.

When that longing finds its satisfaction in the invitation of the Spirit
to be in relationship with God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit,
then love and compassion have an unshakeable foundation in our lives.

We are first and foremost disciples of Jesus Christ,
pioneers of the new humanity inaugurated in him,
servants of God in blessing this whole creation,
friends of a steadfast and trustworthy God
who casts out all our fears through his love.

This is not an easy mission
in a world consumed by constant fear, bitter hatred, and costly conflict.

But it is the only mission I know of that is worth living.