



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

December 20, 2009

Last Advent

This past Tuesday night we shared our 2nd Blue Christmas service. It was deeply moving as we reflected on the not so joyous memories of our lives. The loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship.

During the service there is a time when you write down the names of people you have lost.

In my reflection I obviously wrote down the names of my Rachel and my dad. And as I looked at the window of Jesus knocking at the door, I reflected on my time here at St. Johns. For several years on a Monday I used to have a set trip. I would take communions and would first go to midway and see Richard Miller, swing over to Frankfort and see Tim Oliver, then head to Versailles to see Pat Martin. On Tuesday I would make my Versailles run and see Helen Sanford, Steve Hawkins and Margaret Reid.

My Wednesday run to Clifton was to see Frank and Jean Watts and then on to see Jim Glenn. Sacred times for sacred moments with the sacred elements.

And as I thought of that on Tuesday night I began to add names to my card. Richard, Tim, Frank, Jim, Helen, Steve, Margaret and then I added Shelby, Hunter, Jimmie, Roger, Geoffrey.

The cards were prayerfully collected and then the names reverently named at the altar.

This year we had a magnificent cross that holds 100 votive candles. Each person at the service was invited to light a candle on that cross to honor whatever loss they were remembering. Very slowly as people brought their hurting to the cross, this big chunk of wood began to glow with an incredibly beautiful light. A light that glowed with warmth, glowed with hope, glowed with an affirmation that God is with us in all of our living.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

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We are told in the gospel of Matthew that in a dream Joseph was told of the prophecy of Isaiah – a virgin will bear a son and his name will be Emmanuel.

Which means god with us.

The prophecy of Isaiah –fulfilled 2000 years ago in the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. An event that has changed lives, changed families, changed communities, and has changed the world.

God with us. The living Christ. The word made flesh. The hope of the world. The one to whom all hearts are open all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid. The alpha and omega the beginning and the end. The one who shares our joys yet invites us to come to him when heavy laden. The one who directs our living yet is quick to forgive our trespasses.

The one who our soul should have no trouble in magnifying, because when we follow his footsteps of living we see the magnificent.

Much of which we find in simplicity. The magnificence of simplicity.

An act of kindness, a smile, a shoulder to lean on, a kind word, even just a hello to someone you do not know that simply acknowledges their existence. When we move from our self centeredness to a place of self giving. When we move to a place that cares for the needs of others rather than demand our own desires. When we look towards the good of a community and not to our own whims and fancies.

When we open our hands to welcome instead of tightening the fist for conflict,

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When we show any of these things as visible acts of love, I believe we light a candle on the cross of Christ that helps this world glow with his hope and his love.

The gift to all of us this week is the gift of Christ. But it is a gift that we cannot leave unopened. We have to open it. It did not come in a fancy box. It came in straw from a stable, and wrapped in swaddling cloths. It comes from god.

Open it, and open your heart to the life it offers.

A life of hope, a life of forgiveness a life of joy in others and for others, a life of giving, a life of love.

A life that lights candles with the gentle kindnesses that are made.

God's gift to you this week and always is the gift of Christ. Open it. Live it. Be who god has called you to be. Love freely. Love unconditionally, for the ultimate test in all of our lives is not how we are loved, but how we have loved.

Amen.

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