

Sermon: A Christmas Reflection**Scripture: Luke 2****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: December 24, 2024**

Folks, we've got a problem. In case you haven't noticed, we've got a problem with being divided, cleaved, pulled asunder, fractionalized or maybe the problem is that we simply believe we are.

It's not just a problem with our politics - Republicans here, Democrats there - it's a problem with our economies - the poor here, the rich there. It's a problem with our societies - citizens here, illegals there. It's a problem with our psyches - my body here, my mind there. It's a problem with our sciences - us humans here observing a mechanistic world out there. It's a problem with our religion - Christians here, other religions there. It's a problem with our spiritualities - the material world here seen, the spiritual world there and unseen. It's a problem with our nations - Israelis here, Palestinians there. It's a racial problem - Whites here, blacks there. On almost every level we are - or believe ourselves to be - divided, cleaved, pulled asunder.

But what we celebrate together tonight, at Christmas, the incarnation of the Divine into human life is God's response to the tearing asunder, God's response to our belief that it is all cleaved.

God came "down", we say, at Christmas with a word. God saw the mess we were in, how separate and divided we were and God said "I'm coming so we can be in this together." We thought we were in it alone. But we learn at Christmas that we are not, that we are in this together. It's

God's beautiful and tender response to the suffering and violence of the world. It's not so much a fix, God's response of coming to be with us in it, but don't those of us who are parents know how true it is that often the only response when our children find themselves in a difficult situation to offer ourselves to be with them in it. "You know what, I am going to be with you in this. I can't take it away but I'm here with you."

That's what God said at Christmas - "we are in this together" - and Jesus was born.

We mistakenly believed God was somewhere else, separate from us in the first place. Of course it wasn't true because the created world itself of which we are a part and not separate is an incarnation of God Godself. So how could we ever be separate from God? But somehow we lost sight of it, came not to believe it, thinking ourselves into knots that cleaved and pulled asunder and anguished us - body against spirit, mind against nature, earth against heaven, us against them, insiders against outsiders! And into all this tension and pulling apart, God stepped in, in a new way, as a baby, vulnerable and small and backwoods - there is no place too small or too dark for God apparently - and in the midst of all the tearing asunder, we looked down and said "awww!" Cause that's what you say when you encounter a baby and what is elicited in us, as a result, is love.

So love was God's solution to our problem of being divided and torn asunder. Love, which will permit itself to be torn asunder before tearing others apart. It's a harrowing proposition that God made, a costly calculation. Love incarnated in a world of hate. Light enfleshed in a realm of shadows. Goodness embodied where evil runs amok. But that's the way God chose to come and God asks us to come that way too. To relinquish

the projects of separation and division and realize finally and fully that we are in this together.

We will soon light candles this night. And it's a beautiful metaphor for the being together that is Christmas, because while there are a bunch of individual candles that we will each be holding, the light that begins to emerge is one light, it represents the truer unity that is you and me... and not just you and me but you and me and air and fire and dust and light and all in God Godself. There's no delineating in that light, the light that our separate lights shed. It's all one light, our individual lights part of the Great Light of God.

We are not divided, we are one. We are not separate, we are a part of one another. We are not cleaved, we are in this together. God stretches out and is the One within whom we live, move, and have our being and God enfolds into the womb of a woman and emerges from the depths of us dripping with amniotic fluid and crying with a first breath of life and eventually a last dying breath as well. And in it all God says to us "we are in this together. We are in this together."

And the Christ Child will lead us, the Good Shepherd feed us
And with us abide till his day. Then hatred he'll banish
Then sorrow will vanish and death and despair flee away.
And he shall reign ever and nothing shall sever
From us the great love of our King.
His peace and his pity shall bless his fair city,
His praises we ever shall sing.