

Christmas Sermon
Isaiah 62:6-12
Titus 3:4-7
Luke 2:(1-7)8-20
Psalm 97

SERMON

I welcome everyone who is here today. It is a glorious day to be in church. We come here today because it is where we Belong.

In this room, in this community, we are a worshiping family. All who are here belong—not because we believe exactly the same things or worship in exactly the same way. We, here, belong because we have all been invited by God.

Of late I have been rereading Brené Brown's book, *Braving the Wilderness*. Brown suggests that in seeking to belong we are expressing our spiritual nature. She distinguishes this spiritual quest from that of a religious struggle which can get wrapped up in dogma and domination. Rather, she describes this spiritual quest to Belong as an effort to stay connected to what binds us together in the human family.

And we do this while navigating a cynical world, a world that tends to separate us or isolate us from one another. A world that tries to show us that we do not Belong.

But Brené Brown goes on to write that no matter how much we think we are separated by politics, group memberships, or ideology, we are in fact connected by the human spirit. No matter how separated we think we are, we are a part of the same spiritual story.

On this Christmas Eve, our gospel story from Luke is a story about Belonging. In this much-beloved story, Luke offers the account of the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem, where Jesus will be born. It is a deeply rich story, where the complexities of being pulled in different directions by various obligations to social norms, governmental edicts, and basic human needs are played out in a deceptively simple pastoral narrative. But, too, Luke takes us as his readers on a journey that explores how we, as mortal earthly beings and children of God, navigate the obligations of the world while simultaneously living into our spiritual natures. Luke asks us to explore our understanding of how we belong to God.

We read: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David."

Through a covenant of love, Mary belongs to Joseph, and Joseph belongs to the city of David. Thus, together they travel to Bethlehem because they belong to Emperor Augustus. Mary is pregnant with Jesus. Jesus belongs to Mary. But Jesus belongs to God as well.

When there is no place for Mary and Joseph to stay, Mary gives birth to Jesus in a stable. Jesus begins his life, by being birthed into a world that makes no place for him. A world that does not see worth in the birth of a lowly, impoverished child born to an unwed mother. He does not belong.

This simple narrative continues with shepherds being visited by an Angel of the Lord.

The angel says to them, "Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: The angel says "You are my people. You are God's people." To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. The angel says, "You are part of this child's people."

So, the shepherds we are told, went with haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, with the child lying in the manger. The shepherds made known what had been told them by the Angel of the Lord. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

And then we hear Mary's response. "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."

I think for me this is one of the most profound moments in this story. Mary has been through quite a number of remarkable events by this time in her life and she has had a number of otherworldly communications with the divine realm. But here in this humble place, far from her family of origin, far from the city in which she has lived, in this sacred moment of giving birth, all of these incomprehensible prophetic messages are beginning to come together.

In this simple statement, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." she appears to understand that she is part of this Earthly world, but too, she is part of the divine world. She and her son belong to this world, and they belong to God. I wonder if Mary in this profound moment, realizes that while she and her son will live and breathe in this Earthly world, they will never fully belong in it from this moment forward.

Before the birth of her child, Mary could not fully see their future. It is in looking back now that Jesus has been born she understands where and how she and he Belong.

We go forward in our lives; we plan and pursue. But as we go forward, even with the best of strategies it is hard to see how the events of our lives will form a cohesive journey. It is the gift of old age to be given this vantage point. To look back and to see how our life experiences have been interwoven.

In our youth, it is hard to know where we Belong. As members of the human family, we struggle with belonging. We can feel that if we belong in one place or one group, we cannot belong in

another. We limit the openness of our hearts, and then we limit the breadth of how much we can love.

In this stable, in Bethlehem, with the humility of saying Yes to God, Mary transcended the limitations of the human heart. Mary showed us that by saying Yes to God, we can heal the divisions that separate us. In saying Yes to God, we are welcomed into Belonging.

On this Christmas, may we in spirit join with Mary, Joseph, and the Christ child. May the gifts that we bring to this story be our prayers and actions for peace in God's human family. May we bring unity rather than Uniformity as we strive to live together. May we bring justice through respect for one another. And, with humility, may we be instruments of service, that show compassion to those in need.

Today, as in ancient Bethlehem, we rejoice.

- **Isaiah 9:6:** "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"

Amen