Christmas Eve, December 24, 2016

“I bring you tidings of great joy.”

Amen.

Please be seated.

Merry Christmas, St. Paul’s!!

Who’s excited????

I am!! It’s Christmas EVE!! The night before. The time of greatest anticipation. We’ve prepared; we’ve waited; we’ve shopped and planned, and now, tonight, we sit in great excitement for the joy that tomorrow will bring. I, for one, cannot wait!

December has always had a special magic for me; from the time I was very young. I still get quite giddy with excitement this time of year. I imagine being a Decemberchild has something to do with it. Parties and presents, lights and laughter all blended together into one month-long celebration. In spite of the chaos that ruled the rest of the year, December was held separate, like a precious, sacred time in space. I think somehow my parents connected and had a common goal of bringing joy to their children. No matter what the financial picture, and some Christmas’ were pretty bleak, my dad and mom always found ways to ensure there were gifts under the tree and good food on the table. In spite of their failings, they loved each of us deeply.

And then there’s Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. I have a vivid memory of sitting next to my dad, flickering candles, Latin words swirling around me, the Choir voices raised in song. I think this is when my love of church began. I must have been very young, probably 4 years old. Certain sounds and smells can trigger this memory to full bloom. I don’t think we went to Midnight Mass again until I was a teen. You see, 3 more siblings came along soon after that remembered Christmas, and Christmas Eve became a time of toy construction and putting out cookies and milk. But that Midnight Mass stands out in my memory as another part of Christmas magic.

“I bring you tidings of great joy.”

Of course, there’s the Nativity stories – all that amazing imagery. Angels singing, and a brilliant star, and shepherds and kings, and mangers and oh so very young parents. Each image draws us into the story until we become a part of it, observers standing to the side watching and wondering at the tableau before us. Who isn’t a sucker for a baby lying in a manger or a singing angel declaring, “Glory to God in the highest”?

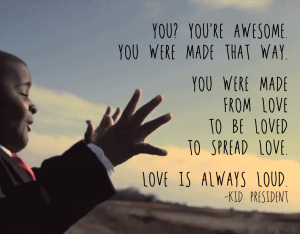
Let’s talk about angels for a minute. Who here believes in angels? Perhaps not a mystical being as in stories (although, I would a bit nervous to insult an angel by saying they don’t exist.) Angels come in all shapes, sizes, and beings. I’ve had angels show up when my arms are full and I’m struggling to get a shop door open. What about those angels that made sure the needed oven door hinges arrived 30 minutes before the repair tech? Oh, yes. That was yesterday. I bet If you think back over the last 5 days, you can find several examples of angels in your midst – a student who thanked you for your support, a stranger who smiled and called Merry Christmas, a child who made you grin from ear to ear. Even those mysterious events that happen that have no logical reason, the synchronicity that makes us gasp – all definitely part of angel power!

As much fun as it is to experience angel presence, it is even more appealing to be an angel. Be the angel who opens the door, or smiles at the stranger, or offers a hand of help. There are so very many ways to offer your angel hands and heart everywhere you go. I have to say that being angel to the community is St. Paul’s greatest gift. We provide outreach through a variety of arenas, our food pantry, our fundraising for Alliance, our office staff who offer support and help to all who ask, our inclusive atmosphere where the LGBT community knows they will be warmly welcomed and embraced, our clothes closet for new foster parents to clothe foster kids. Really these are just a few of the quiet angels around here that spread their wings and shelter others. Please know that you are always welcome to join us in spreading angel cheer. Maybe you’d like to start small to take time to get to know us. We have 2 adult education programs coming up in 2017 that you might enjoy – and here’s a shameless plug – I am facilitating one of them during Lent.

But all that’s off topic – Let’s get back to talking about tonight – about a birth, a birth of such magnitude that millions of people rejoice in its remembrance, a birth that is offered as a gift, a gift of love, a gift that asks nothing in return, a gift we didn’t even know we needed. I like to think of this night as an opportunity for my own rebirth, my rebirth into love. I know many of us are nervous about the upcoming month and year. Life feels rather uncertain right now as we wonder how a change in policy will affect our lives and livelihoods.

So let’s start looking for angels that appear to lighten your burden. Let’s smile at that stranger, say yes to this Divine gift. But I think it’s also time for us to put on our angel power. The birth we celebrate tonight and tomorrow reminds us that love triumphs. Divine love, the love that surrounds us, upholds us, comforts us, sends angels to protect and guide us, love beyond our comprehension, and beyond our understanding. You are that love. I am that love. Together, we can express love to a height no one has experienced before. Together, we can be the angels in our own midst. Now is the time for us to put on our angel power, to hold the center, to embrace those with whom we disagree, to be the beacon, the light of hope.

I saw a great meme the other day, one that quoted Kid President. If you don’t know about Kid President, check it out.



“You? You’re awesome.

You were made that way.

You were made from love to be loved to spread love.

Love is always loud.”

So let’s be loud. Let’s embrace the joy of the birth we celebrate, the birth that reminds us that love, Divine love is all around us, waiting for us to just say hello.

I’d like to end with a prayer from James Dillet Freeman, a Unity minister. He calls it

“The Prayer for Protection.”

The light of God surrounds us;

The love of God enfolds us;

The power of God protects us;

The presence of God watches over us;

Wherever we are, God is!”

Merry Christmas, everyone.

Amen.