

## Ocean Shores UMC – Homily – December 22, 2024

**Micah 5:2-5a**

**Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 80:1-7**

**Hebrews 10:5-10**

**Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)**

John Wesley gave a sermon On Love in Savannah in the mid-1700's. I found satisfying what our Founder wrote, in large part because his words cohered with my scribblings On Jesus and Love. I go no farther than to commend Sermon 139—I fit poorly Brother John's homily into today's scripture readings.

Imagine that you are living in a land where it was always winter and never Christmas! Like winter, life would be cold and dark, colorless and drab. Existence would take place on a limited landscape, in colors that were mostly grey and black. There are no parties, no fun meals celebrated with family and friends, no worship services with triumphant music, no anticipation written on the faces of little children, and no mention of Christ. Celebration has no place, and routine and survival take priority over the leisure and luxury of holiday.

The coming of the Christ-Child change all this. All because Jesus volunteered to obey the will of God in his life. *I have come to do your will, O God.*

This time of the year is like a giant mixed salad. Love, Joy, laughter and great food are conjoined with sad memories,

loneliness, depression, and even suicide. Christmas carols, events, and the decorations can produce sadness and cause some to withdraw.

Our readings in Luke describe Mary's visit to Elizabeth during their respective pregnancies, followed by Mary's hymn of praise to God, called the Magnificat. The visitation and praise embody praise and elation: greeting, glorification, rejoicing, blessing, mercy, and uplifting.

John's leaping with joy in utero indicates the good feelings experienced by Mary and Elizabeth. The kicking fetus and filling with Holy Spirit signify divine causation.

Elizabeth's message is one of veneration for Mary. The language suggests that the child in Mary's womb is the work of God's saving grace. Elizabeth knows Mary as "the mother of the Lord," and Jesus' mother epitomizes true faith. She trusts in that which does not yet exist on the basis a God's promise.

The Magnificat includes negativity, for God's judgment of haughtiness and pride is apparent in v.51: He has scattered the proud.

The essence of the Magnificat is in its revolutionary blueprint of divine favor... Not of the proud, but of the powerless; not of just desserts, but of unexpected grace; not

of a world fully controlled and determined by human power, but overturned by divine will.

God is the subject of nearly every verse, and the verbs are all transitive; they do not declare who God is, but what God does as the powerful protector of the needy and oppressed.

The word appears neither in the readings from Luke, nor in the Hebrews. Yet, I see love as the basic theme. Mary shows her feelings when she says My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. When Elizabeth felt John jumping for you, her love for God shows.

Matthew 40:022:037 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

John 43:014:023 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Love of God the naturally extends from Father to the son.

Matthew 40:017:005 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

John 43:017:024 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my

glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

John 43:017:026 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

The defining characteristic of the good person is to love and embrace whatever happens to him on his thread of fate, but to preserve proper allegiance to God, saying only what is true, doing what is just.

Love of God comprises the major factor in finding Faith. The notion of divine instruction suggests faith increases through seeking. Prayer, fasting, and charity strengthen and renew faith. Tests of faith arise throughout one's life, and surmounting the urge to disbelieve sometimes takes time.

Luke 42:017:005 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

The Lord's answer as parable fails to offer a method to the seeker. Is increasing faith the same as seeking to love God more?

Wesley related seeking faith to self-awareness and self-expression. Each of us journey, consciously or unconsciously, to better understand self. One psychologist opined that *the* result of therapy is comprehending the games one runs on

himself or herself. Getting better understanding of one's own mind never ends.

In a group therapy session many years ago I was confident when I opined that all my behaviors were rational. The men nodded, and the women smiled.

The Lord will increase our faith only upon effort. If loving God more increases faith, does more love for our neighbor have similar effect? Martin Luther's prescription may suffice.

"One ought to love one's neighbor with a love as chaste as that of a bridegroom for his bride. In this case, all faults are concealed and covered over and only the virtues are seen."

Lack of neighborly love was the motivation for most animal sacrifices. Sacrifice expiated sin only for those of omission, and more attentiveness to the law increased neighborly love sacrifice by sacrifice. The question of benefits to faith apparently is unattended in Judaism—the word faith hardly appears in the Old Testament.

The Gospel and Epistle writers wrote the word Faith hundreds of times. Would that the Hope, Joy, Love, of the Christmas story grows our faith!

Inner peace and tranquility grows as does faith.

As we worship, we listen for God's voice from above, for ways that we might grow in our love and dedication to God and others. We renew our faith as we allow the Season of Advent and Christmas to call us to a deeper commitment to God, and all God's children. In this sense hearing voices from above is not a bad thing, especially at Christmas.

In Advent, thoughts of family, and peace on earth fill our minds and hearts.

Isaiah tells us

Isaiah 23:002:003 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

God loves everyone, and everyone has value and is worth the time and effort it takes to reach out. When we put our love into action, miracles happen. How does the church, you and I, make such a journey? "Let us walk by the Lord's light." It is possible to exchange our guns and knives for instruments of learning? Let us begin when by allowing the Season of Advent and Christmas to call us to a deeper commitment to God, and all of God's children.

As we ponder the deeper meaning of this season, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Incarnation, and even the cross, several conclusions stand out like the bells of Christmas.

First, God can accomplish anything. If God can shape history, get the Caesar himself involved in the story, start life in the womb of a teenage virgin, and squeeze into a baby's body, imagine what God can do in your life!

Second, God can change anyone. Through the death of Jesus, God obliterated death, hell, and the grave, and brought life to all. Is there anything God can't do in your life?

Third, God can guide anywhere. God led Jesus from heaven to earth and back again. God can lead us if we are willing to be obedient to God's perfect will.

Believers also involve themselves through love. Inner love serves faith in God and outer love attempts to fulfill Jesus' commission.

Self turns inward while fasting, praying, reducing—lowering the unhelpful effects of emotion on one's commitment to love. Outward love—of family, mate, and neighbor describes action. The *state* of love to kin or spouse is unnecessary.

“Love is all we need.”

—Robt Rooe Simpson

December 20, 2024  
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