

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, December 1, 2019
Rev. Dr. David McKane

Jesus, Santa and Us!

Isaiah 40: 1-11.

Psalms 87.

Mark 1: 1-8.

Thank you for the break last Sunday. What was supposed to be a service of Confirmation turned into a service of mourning for the sudden death of our organist and Choir Director Terry Head. It was good for me, as Minister Emeritus, to be present.

Prayer. O come, O come Emmanuel. We sing the words. Let us open our hearts and lives to welcome him. Amen.

Don't you love Christmas? The malls are decked out in their Christmas decorations. The trees in Victoria Park are dressed in light. The Salvation Army have their kettles in every mall and parents are taking their children to visit Santa and have their photos taken and Christmas wishes made known. People are generally more friendly, more generous, more forgiving this time of year.

Just twenty-two more sleeps until Santa climbs down the chimney and fills our stockings with wonderful treats. Just twenty-two more sleeps.

What's that, you say, there's no Santa Claus. What do you mean there's no Santa Claus? No Santa Claus!

When did you stop believing? When your older siblings spilled the beans? When you found your presents wrapped and hidden in your parent's bedroom? When the kids on the school playground teased you for believing in such things? When at the tender age of six or seven you were forced to put away such childish things and "grow up"? When did you stop believing? When you could no longer accept the things you could not see or touch or prove? Is that when you stopped believing?

And what was your parent's reaction when you announced that you no longer believed in Santa Claus? Shock? Disappointment? Delight that you were finally growing up? Filled with joy that such fairy tales and faith in such things unseen were a thing of the past? Or did they simply smile, that telling smile that said nothing but spoke volumes, and left you wondering and waiting to see.

And did no one ever tell you that in time your heart would figure out what your head could not explain? Did no one ever help you make the connection between Santa Claus and love expressed, love Incarnate, love that “comes down at Christmas”? Did you fail to see for yourself that loving is the key, that loving is the bridge, that loving, like the wind, blows where it wills, loves how it chooses, embraces whom it desires, climbs down every chimney, hovers at the foot of every bed, rejoices in the delight of the other and fills us, fills our lives like stockings on Christmas morning?

No Santa Claus! Oh dear, I hate to spoil your assumptions or dearly held beliefs because I have met him, on many occasions and not only at Christmas. I’m the one, you see, who on your behalf, gets to deliver Christmas hampers and benevolent fund cheques to families in need, like David Thompson and Andrew Reid and Ed File before me. I’m the one who sees the questioning eyes when the door is first opened then watches them fill with tears of thanksgiving as their face lights up like the Christmas trees in Victoria Park and the dawning reality of a Christmas meal they were prepared to go without. I’m the one, who on your behalf, visits Nursing Homes and listens to those whose lives have been reduced to a twelve by twelve room with family photos on the bedside table but whose hearts contain a lifetime filled with more memories and more love than their little rooms could ever contain. I’m the one, who on your behalf, sits by a hospital bed and listens to a life hemmed in by illness and discovers at the heart of each, and of all, the gifts left by the magi, the grace that has touched their lives, the “knowing” that they are not alone and never will be as long as this place stands and your ministry continues. I’m the one who, on your behalf, leans across the bed and sings, “Jesus loves you, this I know, for the Bible tells me so...”

This community, you see, in addition to all the other things that it does, is here to comfort God’s children, regardless of age, to make the rough places plain, to help feed God’s flock, to walk with one another through the dark valleys of life, to encourage and help one another to tackle the mountains that confront us, to accompany one another through the wilderness, to prepare, like John the Baptizer, the way of the Lord.

We are Santa Claus, you see, all year round for the children of Malawi.

We are Santa Claus all year long through our gifts to The Presbyterian World Service and Development and its work in places such as Afghanistan and Ghana and India and Central and South America.

We are Santa Claus all year long for the families who depend upon our support of the London Food Bank and The Salvation Army's Christmas kettles. And I could speak to you of L'Arche London, My Sister's Place, Beth Emmanuel's tents for the homeless and Southdale Chaplaincy. The list goes on.

The bread we share around this table is but a symbol that those around us in this sanctuary and those around us in this community are the Body of Christ, broken and fragile and very human but nonetheless the Bread of Life. It reminds us that you and I and all of us together are the very life blood of Christ poured out in service for the sake of others.

Who is Santa Claus but a synonym for love and what is love but a sign of the presence of the living God, the One whose name is Love?

Who and what are we but instruments of God's grace, stocking-stuffers if you will, little human packages wrapped up in God's love and "dropped down the chimney" into the lives of others? And when opened, ah, when opened, what do people find but love, affirmation, acceptance, joy, friendship and delight.

No Santa Claus? Don't you believe it! Just look around you and smile, that telling smile that says nothing yet speaks volumes, and leaves others wondering and waiting to see. Wondering and waiting. That's Advent. Just twenty-two more sleeps!

Amen! And to God be the glory!