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| Isaiah 9:2-7Luke 2:1-20 | Can Christmas Change our World? | Pinelands – 9am – 25/12/2024  |

Over the past 4 Weeks – the 4 Sundays in Advent…

 We have focused on the themes of…

 **HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE.**

Most of those Sermons referring to the Bible Readings…

Compared the times of THEN to our Present Day situations

The Context of the OT Prophecies and Communities

The Context of the NT Advent Stories

 Are very Similar to our Modern Day Context.

 ***NOT*** much has ***CHANGED*** over the years

We all Long for… **HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE.**

Our World Needs… **HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE.**

A colleague of mine mentioned that at this time in our world…

 We are in the midst of a Global Epidemic of Institutional Failure.

***Schools that can't teach,***

***Corporations that can't cooperate or compete,***

***Unhealthy health-care systems,***

***Communities without communication,***

***Welfare systems where few fare well,***

***Police that can't enforce the law,***

***Judicial systems without justice,***

***Governments that can't govern, and***

***Economies that can't economize.***

In many ways… If we are honest with ourselves…

**These words echo…**

Our longing for change,

Our frustrations with the current systems at play

Our wish for leaders who will lead

Our desire for a life and world of justice and peace.

**CHRISTMAS** reminds us that in **JESUS…**

 We Can Have…

**HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE.**

***BUT…*** If not much has changed over the years…

 ***HOW can it CHANGE this CHRISTMAS?***

 ***WHAT makes this Christmas DIFFERENT?***

**LUKE** Proclaims…

***“This very day in David's town your Savior was born - Christ***

 ***the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a***

 ***baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”***

The **Angels** sing and claim…

 ***“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth.”***

There is the PROMISE OF…

**NEW…** **HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE**

The **PROMISE of Something RADICAL…**

**The PROMISE of… The *REIGN of GOD***

***BUT…*** **What does *GOD’S REIGN* Looks Like?**

***CHRISTMAS*** is a picture of what happens when…

**GODʼs REIGN IS MANIFESTED in the world.**

The Birth of Christ –

His life, His death and His Resurrection…

And everything that flowed from it…

***CHRISTMAS…*** **Is God’s Glory**

**Reveals God’s Presence and Purpose.**

***THIS…***  **Is what *GOD’S REIGN LOOKS LIKE.***

Angels, Shepherds, Baby in a Manger, Crowded Stable,

 Community and Hospitality, Guests from afar, Friends,

 Shepherds, Holy Chaos, Simplicity, Humility, Inclusivity…

 **JESUS’s** Life, Teachings, Example, Death and Resurrection.

 The body of Christ – the People living out their…

CHRISTIAN FAITH

**ALL OF THIS… Is what *GOD’S REIGN LOOKS LIKE.***

***BUT…*** How can ***GOD’s REIGN CHANGE OUR WORLD?***

**Margret Wheatley,** the author of *Leadership and the New Science*,

offers the following illustration of…

how new orders emerge within old ones.

She explains that in living systems *(Society, Life, Communities, Gangs)*

 once something has emerged,

it is VERY HARD to CHANGE IT.

**BASICALLY…** For ***CHANGE*** to happen…

The big system that has emerged

**NEEDS TO *DISINTEGRATE.***

**She uses this illustration…** *(Slide of Caterpillar and Butterfly)*

When a caterpillar is beginning to transform,

***IMAGINAL CELLS*** from the **butterfly**

start to appear inside the caterpillar ***BUT…***

the **Caterpillar’s** immune system ***destroys them.***

**The first response** of the system to the new work, to the new models,

**is to eat them alive** because they are **A THREAT.**

And this is when the caterpillar eats and eats and eats…

When the caterpillar finally loses the battle,

it turns to goo - a complete mess…

***BUT…*** It is the goo that nourishes the ***IMAGINAL CELLS***

that then ultimately turn into the butterfly.

Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, the Shepherds,

John the Baptist… they were all ***IMAGINAL CELLS***

***IMAGINAL CELLS*** of the new world of ***GODʼs REIGN,***

existing within the old order.

The disciples also became ***IMAGINAL CELLS,***

and the system destroyed them.

**But**, in time the Roman Empire **collapsed** – It TOOK some 300 Years

***GODʼs REIGN…*** Continues – to grow and expand in the world.

As American Theologian **Leonard Sweet** put it…

***“Christians defeated the most powerful empire that ever strode***

***the earth not by violence but by love. It took three centuries to***

***defeat the Roman enemy, but love always wins in the end.”***

In every part of the world, in every realm there have been people…

who have lived as ***IMAGINAL CELLS*** of ***GODʼs REIGN…***

St. Francis of Assisi , Teilhard De Chardin,

Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr.,

Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela,

Desmond Tutu, The list goes on.

Many of them have been abused or executed,

but they have shifted the world and they have revealed,

 a little more clearly, ***WHAT GODʼs REIGN LOOKS LIKE.***

**Now… Today…**

As we are faced with the ***CHRISTMAS STORY*** once again

with the vision of ***GODʼS REIGN,*** **IT IS OUR TURN.**

**We can…** Like those who heard the shepherds, listen with interest…

And then go **back to business as usual.**

**We can…** Leave Church having sung our Carols, done our duty…

 And then go **back to life as usual.**

**We can…** Return to our Homes having had a good holiday…

 And rejoin the **rat race as usual.**

***OR…*** **We can allow the Vision…**

to change us, to capture our hearts,

to lead us into a new way of Being… ***A new way of Living***

We can commit to being ***IMAGINAL CELLS***

***IN GODʼs REIGN…*** Revealing the New.

**When we choose…**

Simplicity over consumption and extravagance,

 we are living as ***IMAGINAL CELLS in Godʼs Reign.***

**When we choose…**

Community over individuality or self-interest,

 or even interest groups…

 we are living as ***IMAGINAL CELLS in Godʼs Reign.***

**When we resist…**

 War and call our leaders to be people of peace,

 we are living as ***IMAGINAL CELLS in Godʼs Reign.***

**When we care…**

For our planet, and serve the least of its inhabitants.

**When we choose…**

Forgiveness over Revenge, Generosity over Hoarding,

Confession over Self-defence,

 we are living as ***IMAGINAL CELLS in GODʼs REIGN.***

**The Problem is…**

***We have…***

Got so used to Christmas being all about the baby,

**Turned Christmas** into a cute festival of buying and giving gifts

**Turned Christmas** into a sentimental celebration that…

slow us down for a while, until next year…

And we will do the same all over again.

***But…*** When we remember that…

the **whole mission and message of JESUS…**

Was focussed on the ***REIGN OF GOD,***

**AND…**  **NOT ONLY about a baby born in a stable.**

***THEN…***

We can ***CHOOSE*** to make **Christmas…**

More than just a cute story of a Baby

A catalyst for us to embrace a radical new Way of Living…

 Being ***IMAGINAL CELLS in GOD’s REIGN***

**Let us *CHOOSE*** to allow **JESUS…**

**to be BORN in us TODAY, and EVERYDAY!!**

**And Let us Choose to be…**

***IMAGINAL CELLS*** in ***GOD’S REIGN.***

**Isaiah 9:2-7**

The people who walked in darkness

 have seen a great light.

They lived in a land of shadows,

 but now light is shining on them.

You have given them great joy, Lord;

 you have made them happy.

They rejoice in what you have done,

 as people rejoice when they harvest grain

 or when they divide captured wealth.

For you have broken the yoke that burdened them

 and the rod that beat their shoulders.

You have defeated the nation

 that oppressed and exploited your people,

 just as you defeated the army of Midian long ago.

The boots of the invading army

 and all their bloodstained clothing

 will be destroyed by fire.

A child is born to us!

 A son is given to us!

 And he will be our ruler.

He will be called, “Wonderful Counselor,”

 “Mighty God,” “Eternal Father,”

 “Prince of Peace.”

His royal power will continue to grow;

 his kingdom will always be at peace.

He will rule as King David's successor,

 basing his power on right and justice,

 from now until the end of time.

The Lord Almighty is determined to do all this.

**Luke 2:1-20 The Birth of Jesus**

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

**The Shepherds and the Angels**

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, “Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,

 and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said. Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.