

Christmas Perspective

Waiting

November 27, 2016

PRELUDE – Shout for Joy

Songs – Shout for Joy

The First Noel

Turn and Greet

Video Announcements

Video “Advent”

Part One

And that’s my hope for today’s service. That we will take time, slow down and open up our hearts to what God wants to do in and through us this Christmas season.

I don’t know about you but I far too often do exactly what that video talks about at the

holidays. I'm busy. I'm distracted. Far too often I get to Christmas day and I have a sinking feeling.

What happened to the season? I didn't even get to enjoy it. I didn't rest enjoying the beauty of the season. I didn't savor time with family. I was too busy running from here to there and everywhere. I didn't really stop to prepare my heart and be mindful of Jesus.

And every November, I think this year... This year it will be different. I'll spend unhurried time with family. I'll spend less money on stuff we don't need. I'll really engage in the moment and enjoy the memories we are making. I'll make Jesus the reason for the season. I'll take time to really reflect on the meaning of Christmas.

Now don't get me wrong, it's not a total bust. Over the years, we have incorporated some great new traditions to our family, mostly

thanks to what we have learned from messages here at NHCC, like spending less on stuff and more on making memories.

Each year before Thanksgiving our family creates a list with input from each person on what we would like to do during the holidays as a family to create memories. Like baking, attending a play, seeing Christmas lights or having a special dinner out together. Our kids know that our Christmas budget for presents is less so we can spend more on making memories.

Another tradition we have added is spending less on ourselves so we can be more generous to those in need. Our Christmas budget includes amounts to be given away to others through purchasing gifts or making donations to those in need. We have done this through a variety of ways including the Clay Platte Foster Family tree (here at NHCC in the entry hall), giving trees at our kids'

schools and the NHCC Christmas Blessing Project that Rick talked about last week and mentioned in the video announcement this morning.

And those are great things and I'm glad we have incorporated them but each December 25th, I still find that more often than not something is missing.

I can honestly say just about every Christmas season I rush through with my list of things to do...things to do for home, things to do for our extended family and friends, things to do for NHCC and for Jesus. I just don't seem to find time to really get quiet, to take time to slow down and open up to what God wants to do in me and through me.

And maybe this year, I'm a little more convicted to make it happen. See it's been a hard year in many ways for so many. I've spent a lot of time this year mourning with

those who mourn, I think more so than usual. In the last several months, I have sat with those who are grieving the loss of their jobs and what that means for them, their family, their insurance, their homes. I have sat with those who are grieving the loss of relationship and what it means to start again after the divorce, the break up, the end of the friendship. I have sat with those who are grieving the loss of someone they love. Death that came far too sudden, far too soon, far too early and left a gaping hole inside them.

And in this last month, I really sense that God has reminded me a lot of what deeply matters most. And that is what gets lost so easily in the distractions, obligations and expectations of the “most wonderful time of the year.”

I think for most of us, ministry types included, really engaging in worship in this season can get so crowded out by the to do list of baking, shopping, wrapping, mailing cards and

packages, attending Christmas parties and celebrating with family. And for those in ministry, add in there the preparations for Christmas Eve and other Christmas events. After all, Christmas is one of the highest attended times in the church. So if you work for the church there is so much work to do.

So it's easy, no matter who you are, to see the reason for the season get squeezed right out or just narrowed to a little plaque we hang on the wall.

So what would it be like if we kept our minds and hearts on the main thing? What if we really lived as if Jesus is the reason for the Season?

What if we spent time really contemplating what it meant for Jesus to come into our world? To be born into human flesh and to live a life that would serve as God's ultimate gift to all of us? What if we really experienced

Joy in our World because Jesus Christ was born?

Perhaps you have this nailed down. Perhaps you go through this season and are fully engaged with exactly how amazing and wonderful it is that Jesus was born to us. A King. A Savior. The Messiah, Christ the Lord. Maybe it is engrained in you to take time, slow down and open up to what the Lord wants to do in and through you.

And if so, then may God continually to richly bless you with a heart of gratitude overflowing as you consider the enormity of it all.

But if you are like me and you have spent too many Christmas seasons distracted by cares of this world, then I hope this morning will help you to reset your compass to point true north to Jesus. That your heart will be prepared to make room for Him and all that

he wants to do.

So whether you are being distracted by the minute details of Christmas cards and shopping lists, the servant hearted list of giving and serving or overwhelmed by the difficulty of life, I want to invite you to join me in bringing Jesus back to the center of our hearts and our Christmas this year by engaging in an age-old practice.

For centuries, Christians around the world and in a variety of denominations have celebrated Advent. Advent is celebrated during the four Sundays leading up to Christmas.

Advent means coming. It is a time used to specifically prepare one's heart for the celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ in to our world. Traditionally each week has a specific focus to reflect on including scriptures and the lighting of a candle in the

Advent wreath.

I personally grew up in a faith tradition that religiously celebrated Advent but honestly it had become so much just “a thing you do” that for most of my life it had little effect on me but as I have grown older and watched the shimmer of the season fade, I come to really appreciate Advent and the ability of this focused time to help reset my heart on things above.

The traditions of Advent can be a purposeful and tangible way to quiet our hearts, to engage with Jesus and to allow Him to overflow in our hearts and life at this hectic time of year.

Obviously you normally would do each week on the Sunday noted but for our time, we are going to get an overview of all four weeks at once.

I've asked our music team to start off this time by singing and playing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and as they do I want to invite you to still your heart and listen to the lyrics. This old familiar song that speaks of a longing and a rejoicing when Emmanuel, God with Us, comes to save us and set us free.

As the song concludes, I will begin readings representing the four Sundays of Advent. Each reading will end with the lighting of a candle in the Advent Wreath. The handout you received on your way in has the scriptures (and some additional ones) for each week as well as some reflection questions you can ponder each week. This handout can serve as a way to bring Jesus into your heart and home as you go through the season.

After the candle is lit, a short video will play.

I want to invite you to sit back, quiet your

mind and engage your heart in this time.

Let me pray for you.

Feature O Come, O Come Emmanuel Part Two

Week One – Hope

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom us from the captivity, the tyranny of the enemy. Save us and give us victory from the death of sin.

Far too often we feel like a captive in this world. Captive to pain, anxiety, worry. Situations and circumstances that feel overwhelming - a diagnosis, a fractured relationship, loss of income, and especially the death of a loved one. In times like these we feel hopeless.

In the Bible, we read:

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come

and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ~ Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV)

God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? ~ Numbers 23:19 (NIV)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ~ Isaiah 9:2 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ~ 1 Peter 1:3 (NIV)

We light the first candle of Advent for Hope. The hope found in Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.
(Shannon lights the candle)

VIDEO-Advent Hope

Week Two – Peace

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel, cheer our spirits by your coming. Banish the darkness and shadows of sin. Give us your peace.

Peace on earth. It is a common saying and a very common longing. Watching and reading the news, our hearts cry out for a world that is no longer filled with struggle, conflict and war. For many, our own homes and hearts feel like a war zone with little rest, little peace. We long for an end to the chaos and for peace that passes all understanding to surround our hearts and minds.

The word of God says,

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. ~ Isaiah 9:6-7 (NLT)

For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm

all your fears. He will sing joyful songs over you. ~ Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. ~ Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. ~ John 14:27 (NLT)

We light the second candle of Advent for Peace. The peace that can be received from Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.

(Shannon lights the candle)

Video-Peace

Week Three – Joy

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel, open the door to heaven and give us a safe path to eternity with You. Turn our misery to joy.

Joy-we seek it in so many things-a new purchase, a new relationship, good food, more money, great friends. And all these blessings can bring moments of joy. But the problem is this joy can be fleeting. When the new purchase breaks or the relationship grows stale and the things that brought us joy no longer do so we are left wanting again. God offers us joy that can be present in all circumstances: good or bad, encouraging or discouraging. He offers us a joy that can permeate every part of our lives from the inside out.

Scripture after scripture encourages us to rejoice, to be filled with Joy in the promises of our God and King,

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ~ Isaiah 65:18 (NIV)

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. ~ Zephaniah 3:14-15 (NIV)

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ~ Luke 2:10-11 (NIV)

In that wonderful day you will sing: “Thank the Lord! Praise his name! Tell the nations what he has done. Let them know how mighty he is! Sing to the Lord, for he has done wonderful things. Make known his praise around the world. Let all the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy! ~ Isaiah 12:1-6 (NLT)

We light the third candle of Advent for Joy. The Joy found in knowing and following Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.

(Shannon lights the candle)

Video-Joy

Week Four – Love

The words of the song cry out, O come, O come Emmanuel, bring your people together in one heart and mind. Teach us to love one another and turn from conflict and discord.

It was because of His great love for us that God the Father sent His one and only son into the world. We look in the mirror and become painfully aware of all the ways we are falling short, all the ways we aren't measuring up and that Jesus said I will come, I will live and I will die for you just as you are. Then we begin to understand what true love is really all about. And because we are loved deeply, we can begin to love others not for what they do for us but simply because they are worthy of love.

Listen to these words from the scriptures:

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ~ John 3:16 (NLT)

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. ~ John 13:34-35 (NLT)

This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ~ 1 John 3:11 (NLT)

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. ~ 1 John 3:16-19 (NLT)

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ~1 John 4:10 (NIV)

We light the fourth candle of Advent for Love. The love poured out on us by Jesus of Nazareth, Emmanuel, God with us.

(Shannon lights the final candle)

Video-Love

Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. These are the four traditional reflection points of Advent. So what about you? Are you looking for those this Christmas season?

Before that night when history changed, when Jesus was born in to our world, things weren't that much different. People were living in a challenging time. They were longing for life to be different. They were looking and waiting for a promise given by the prophets hundreds of years before. At some point, God would send their Messiah, the Chosen One.

They weren't sure who to expect. They

weren't sure what His Kingdom would look like but they knew they needed Him. They needed to be set free... set free from the heaviness of the world.

I think most of us aren't so different. We have a longing in us for the world to be made right. No more war, no more death, no more fractured relationships, no more tears, no more pain, no more suffering.

We hope that Christmas time will be the most wonderful time of the year. Because we need hope that the brokenness of our world will fade away. We long for the peace that we are promised at Christmas time. That feeling that all is right with the world. A sense of hope, peace, joy and love. It's so easy to start searching for those in the temporary promises of "Christmas" instead of the eternal promises of Jesus Christ, the reason for the season.

When I think about that longing for hope, peace, joy and love. That longing for all to be right in the world, I'm reminded of what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8 verses 22-25 (and I really love reading this from The Message translation).

All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

Like the nation of Israel, we too are waiting. Aching to be set free. Looking expectantly for the coming of the Messiah.

Video Advent: God With Us

Glorious Day

Shannon Closing Benediction-Please stand

May the hope of the Lord be yours.

May the Lord's peace permeate every area of your life.

May you have joy knowing the Lord is with you no matter your circumstance and that He will see you through.

And may you know just how wide and how deep the love of God is for you. Never forgetting the price He was willing to pay for you.

May the grace and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you throughout this season and in all the days to come.

Amen.

Closing:

Offering at Door

Tables in commons: buy tickets, give and nominate, volunteer, adopt a foster child