



# Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

DECEMBER 4, 2016  
THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
COMPLETELY FOREVER: CHANGED BY THE COMING OF CHRIST

## Completely Forever: The Mystery of Redeeming Love Isaiah 11:1-10

Earlier this year, Christine Valters Painter wrote:

We live in an era of unraveling: wars, financial breakdown, gun violence, unemployment, racial discrimination, gender inequality, poverty rising, and the poisoning of our ecosystems. Even as I write this litany, I am sure I have forgotten other concerns; and certainly there are the smaller issues of daily life wherever we live—the uncertainties of money, health, and love; trust broken; decisions based on the bottom line rather than human dignity.

If our spirits are not being challenged, undone, or unraveled, then we are not paying attention.<sup>1</sup>

Except for the mention of violence by guns, Isaiah could have written the same statement several thousand years ago. Judah was threatened with annihilation. All of the social ills that Ms. Painter mentioned were a reality. Nothing worked right anymore. And sadly, the people were not paying attention. God turned to Isaiah to speak for him, but what could he say? What hopeful word could he pronounce?

As if reading Isaiah's eighth century B.C. mind, Christine Painter offers this advice:

We don't come to understand the great suffering of the world by thinking our way through it. Discussion is good, and conversations and reflection are worthy. Certainly analysis is often necessary. And yet, what nourishes the heart most are the moments of radical humility when we step beyond words and into the space between. We listen. We tend. We wait.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christine Valters Painter, "The Unraveling Toward Love," *Weavings* (August/September/October 2016): 5.

<sup>2</sup>Painter.

I do not think Isaiah could have imagined and then expressed so eloquently his vision of the peaceable kingdom if he had not taken time to listen, to tend, to wait.

First century Palestine had the same concerns and people were desperate for the long-awaited Messiah to come, but Joseph would not have had the courage to do the right thing and cleave to his fiancée Mary rather than divorce and shame her if he had not taken the time to listen, to tend, to wait.

Mary could not have withstood the ridicule and the fear, much less the holy gravity of her pregnancy, if she had not taken the time to listen, to tend, to wait.

Facing the same concerns and asking the same questions, we cannot make sense of our world and what God is doing in it unless we take time to listen, to tend, and to wait.

Five years ago, Ashley-Anne Masters was waiting in a grocery store checkout line when the person ahead of her asked the cashier if she had any Christmas stamps for sale. The clerk answered, "No. We just have Liberty Bell and some lady holding a baby."<sup>3</sup>

The image on the stamp of "some lady holding a baby" happened to be Raphael's painting of the Madonna and Child--Mary and the infant Jesus.

If we don't listen, tend, and wait during this season of the year, then every image of Mary and the Christ-child will be nothing more to us than a picture of some lady holding a baby. Everything else God does in and through Christ will seem rather mundane, unimportant, and routine. If we listen, tend, and wait, however, we will sense the mystery of redeeming love that is pulsing through everything God does around us.

A book of anecdotes published in 1859 references a letter from a Dr. Beattie to a Rev. Dr. Laing in which the former discusses Georg Frederic Handel and his popular oratorio, *Messiah*. He wrote:

Some days after the first exhibition of the same divine oratorio, Mr. Handel came to pay his respects to Lord Kinnoul,

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<sup>3</sup>Ashley-Anne Masters, "Some Lady Holding a Baby," *revaam.org* (December 20, 2013); available online at: <http://revaam.org/2013/12/20/some-lady-holding-a-baby/>.

with whom he was particularly acquainted. His Lordship, as was natural, paid him some compliments on the noble entertainment which he had lately given the town. "My Lord," said Handel, "I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wish to make them better."<sup>4</sup>

Handel gave us a gift, an opportunity to listen, to tend, to wait as the story of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ emerge from his glorious music. He gave this gift, not to entertain us, but to make us better, to change us. It obviously changed him for from the first performance in Dublin, Handel gave proceeds from performances of *Messiah* to prisons and to his favorite charity, Foundling Hospital, a home for orphaned children in London. Over the course of Handel's life and beyond, millions of dollars in today's economy were given to care for children who had no other home.

This morning as we receive the Christmas portion of Handel's *Messiah*, let us listen, tend, and wait for the mystery of redeeming love which will change us forever . . . completely forever. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup>*Cyclopædia of Literary and Scientific Anecdote: Illustrative of the Characters, Habits, and Conversation of Men of Letters and Science*, edited by William Keddie, Secretary to the Philosophical Society of Glasgow (Columbus, Ohio: Follett, Foster and Company, 1859 - from the London Edition), 45.

December 4, 2016

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

The birth of a baby comes with excitement and gratitude, O God, for a new life has come into the world and a soul has begun a new journey. But today we celebrate the birth of a child who brought new life to us all, a child none other than yourself come to live among us as one of us.

We are excited and grateful and filled with love. We pray that we will be worthy of this great gift and, if we are not, then we ask that you open our hearts to the mystery of your redeeming love. Thank you, O God, for loving us enough to live with us.

There are so many needs among us that we hardly know where to begin to pray. There are medical concerns that call for treatment and cure and miracle. There are personal concerns that long for a change we have not the courage to make. There are private needs that we dare not even whisper and then there are the matters of poverty, hunger, education, health care, and equality that require intervention. We beg for your help with violence and terror and war that will not go away. If the birth of another child would bring the world to its knees, then we would ask for that gift. If you are calling us to stand up with him on behalf of the weak and vulnerable, then grant us the courage to do so in your name.

New life comes as a grace and with a cost, O God, and we pray that we will be willing to offer up what our new life requires of us. We are grateful for our Messiah, now help us to live as thankful people. Receive all that we have to offer and use us to sing the Good News to a weary world. Amen.