

## God Gets it Right

I hope you noticed, in the readings and in the poem, that something was a little bit off...not quite right. They were meant to display the truth that, as much as we try, we have great difficulty living into the lives we feel we really ought. Our relationships are so often strained by misunderstanding, false assumptions, and haughty stubbornness. Although this truth seems far removed from the colors and the joys of Christmas, it is a necessary truth to confess: we don't get it right, no matter how hard we try.

This truth is not a recent development- we have known it for some time. You heard some very important scripture lessons that reveal the same truths. The book of Isaiah stands in the prophetic tradition at a time when the people of God were challenged to see past the devastation that surrounded them. In their hearts they felt like they as a people were no better than a wasteland,

but God tells them that he is always near, urging them to imagine every promise of God coming true. Only then can they begin to see God, and each other, as part of a much greater plan.

In the little letter to Titus, Paul reminds his friend that once we had no hope because it seemed, no matter how hard we tried, we could never live up to the idealized image of one who is worthy of heaven. Despite our best efforts, we give in to our own pleasures, we enjoy the opportunity to speak ill of others, and we gladly aim our energies to ignite, rather than diffuse, the next argument. But, Paul so quickly adds, in Jesus we have the righteousness of God, and we are saved according to that righteousness.

Even in the Gospel of Luke, in the context of our Christmas story, the world seems heavily tilted away from God's goodness, in the tank as it were for human powers and authorities. The emperor made his decrees, the governors followed suit, and the people obeyed, going out of their way just so Rome could enforce its rule. The wrongness of the world seems not confined to our individual relationships- it is systemic. Even a newborn baby cannot find a place in this world...according to Luke, he was laid in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.

My favorite line from the Luke passage has always been verse 19, "But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." The words Mary hears are from the shepherds who had come to Bethlehem after hearing the angel out in the field. The angel told them the Messiah was born, then a whole host of angels gathered, they broke into song,

praising God with whatever sound angels make, “Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus!” Glory to God is the highest, and on earth peace to every person!”

Messiah is the title given to God’s chosen One- the one who will usher in God’s peaceful kingdom. Any Jew living at the time Mary and Joseph welcomed Jesus into the world knew well that the world was not right, that power and authority rested on those for whom power and authority was not deserved. The world valued terror of the sword over efforts to reconcile. Many teachers taught about the coming Messiah in order to instill hope, and now these shepherds, some of the lowest on the societal and economic totem pole, are the first to receive the birth announcement.

Mary also heard from an angel, he told her that the child will be holy and will be called the Son of God. Then Mary prophesied, saying this child is the one who will make all things right. The lowly will be lifted, the hungry will be filled, and this is all proof that God is keeping his promises from the time of Abraham. The fact that the angels went to the shepherds was the first piece of evidence for Mary that, in Jesus, God gets it right. How many of us can identify with Mary- as someone waiting patiently for something right in the midst of so many wrongs?

Listen, a present is going to get broken tomorrow. The kids are going to get you up earlier than you want to be awake. A recipe isn't going to turn out as planned. A glass of juice will be spilt on a white carpet, and the dog will get into the garbage. You won't get to your destination right on time, and you will have forgotten to pick up the right kind of batteries. Yes, I know, if only these were the kinds of wrongs we were dealing with.

Friends, God gets it right in Jesus- every time. Because in Jesus God makes us right with God, we have the hope of other rights in this world. That grudge can be mended, that sorrow can be soothed. That brokenness can be repaired, and that fear can be managed. Because God came to us, no peace is out of reach. Give thanks to God, and accept the gift of Jesus...the right gift, the right time, making it right.