

"Walk or Fly"

Luke 2:1-20

December 24, 2006

The Christmas plans had been made and the preparations had begun at one small church. It was a magical time of the year. I suspect that, as usual, it was the kids that were most aware of the special quality of the season. We adults miss it too often. We get busy with the preparations and all of the concerns that seem so very important [will the turkey be thawed in time, will the tree stay upright when the kids and dogs start playing around it - you know, the important things]. Yes, too often we miss the magic of the light, the gifts, the trees and festive decor - we see it all around us but it is not given a chance to stir in our souls.

At that church that I mentioned there was a young girl that did not miss it. The Sunday School had been planning and getting ready for their annual Christmas program. They had sung the songs a dozen time and each person had memorized their lines. The Saturday before the performance was set for dress rehearsal and the gathered young people were more animated and 'alive' than ever [to put the best construction on the extra energy that they were exhibiting]. That particular young girl had been assigned the role of an angel and had been helped into her costume, complete with halo and feathery wings. Now she stood at the entrance to the sanctuary, ready to make her big entrance. She was to make the big announcement to shepherds who were supposed to be sleeping in the field [actually the chancel]. As she stood ready to enter, she turned to her teacher and asked the simple question, "When I go in, should I walk or fly?"

The Rev. Peter Marshall, who is considered by many to be one of the greatest preachers of our time, once said: "When Christmas doesn't make your heart swell up until it nearly bursts and fill your eyes with tears and make you all soft and warm inside then you will know that something inside of you is dead." That is a pretty strong statement - but I find myself wondering how we are receiving Christmas this year. Does the season stir your soul? Do you feel the softening and the warmth beginning to melt the cold corners of your life? Can you even begin to imagine that maybe - just maybe, you could fly?

I suspect that the season with all of the 'warm and fuzzy' sentiments attached to it would be enough to do something to even the most deeply entrenched 'Scrooges' among us. Add to that, the decorations and the light and joyful music and you have a winning combination. And somewhere in there we have to throw in the story of the birth of a baby. That should get everyone. Baby's have a way of doing that - all soft and beautiful and incredibly amazing.

But if that is the summation of what Christmas is about, you may get to warm and fuzzy - but you will never fly.

There is a poem entitled "Praise God for Christmas" written by Joseph Bayly. In part it says:

*I will not sing of shepherds
watching flocks on frosty nights,
or angel choristers.
I will not sing of a stable bare in Bethlehem,
or lowing oxen,
wise men trailing star with gold,
frankincense, and myrrh.
Tonight I will sing praise to the Father
who stood on heaven's threshold
and said farewell to his Son
as he stepped across the stars
to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.
And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son,
who became most finite, a baby
who would one day be executed for my crime.
Praise him in the heavens,
Praise him in the stable,
Praise him in my heart.*

If you want to fly this Christmas, I believe that we must consider that Christmas is really about love and sacrifice. Christmas is about God! Shepherds and angels are not the starring roles. The evergreen trees and sparkling lights, together with the beautiful songs always point beyond themselves to the only one who is truly eternal, to only one who is light, the very one to whom the song is sung.

If you want to fly this Christmas it will happen only when this God of love stoops down to find the manger of your heart and the brokenness, despair, loneliness, the hardened heart, the fears about the future, the emptiness and scars of past pains are all washed away in the forgiving and life giving love of a God who comes to us and is born in us.

Do you want to walk or fly. God has come to lift you up. Tonight we proclaim the new life of Christmas. A birth is announced and life comes to us. Let the babe of Bethlehem soften your heart and bring healing to the dark corners of your life. Receive His forgiveness as you soar bind the broken and forgive the unforgivable. Let the darkness of despair, loneliness and emptiness be banished as you welcome the baby into your life again. **And fly!**

AMEN