

Homily for Christmas Eve



These familiar Christmas scripture stories are the same ones we hear year after year after year. Yet, there is always something new—usually a new meaning—that emerges and makes me wonder, “How come I never thought of that before?” I suppose it has something to do with our changing perspective as we age. We see differently at 50 than we did at 30. It only makes sense. Imagine the scriptures as being a diamond.

With each passing year, you move one step clockwise around the diamond and, and with that one step, a different facet of the diamond reveals itself to you. At 56, this diamond--this Christmas story--reveals two things for me: **1)** God has a soft spot for the underdog, and **2)** seeking results in finding God 100% of the time, without fail.

The first facet: God has a soft spot for the underdog. We all like a rags-to-riches story, a story where someone overcomes great odds, a story where someone stands up for the truth even if it is at great sacrifice to themselves. These underdog stories reveal God, but they also reveal his Son Jesus who came to do only one thing—the Father’s will. Everything Jesus does and every parable he speaks are revelations of who God is. Like Father, like Son, they are always seeking the lost, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable, the lepers, the forgotten, the lonely, the “unimportant” ones, the people on the edges.

We started off tonight with, ***“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”*** It comes from the Prophet Isaiah who lived some 700 years before the birth of Jesus. At that time, Israel was defeated by the Assyrians and many of its leading citizens were killed or deported and assimilated. You may have heard them referred to as “The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.” Those who remained surely were living in darkness. Even today, there is an estimated 46 million people displaced, living in their own darkness mostly in refugee camps. It’s not the only

darkness in our world, unfortunately. Isaiah reminded those people, then, that God had not abandoned them. Someone was coming into their darkness--a Prince of Peace, a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God--who would restore them and reign over them forever.

Can you believe that about yourself, about any darkness surrounding you now, that while it is real, it is not ultimate? Can you believe that on you a light has shone that will vanquish the darkness forever? Can you believe that God walks with you when you are the outsider, the overburdened, the misunderstood, the weak, the forgotten, the nobody? Can you believe that Jesus came for you, and that if he could save the entire world but couldn't save you, he never would have come at all because the price would have been too high? Can you believe that when *you* are the lost sheep, there is deep drive in God that foolishly disregards the 99 until *you* are found and rejoiced over? Can we believe the Gospel of Luke, which never lies, where Jesus says, ***"The Son of Man came for one reason--and one reason alone—to seek and save the lost"***? This is the One who came for the underdog.

The second facet of this Christmas story--this diamond, that is revealing itself to me this year--is the idea of "seeking." Apparently, in the spiritual life (which may not be true in secular life) anyone who turns and seeks the Lord always finds. Always. 100% of the time. Another prophet, who also lived about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, a contemporary of Isaiah, was Jeremiah. He tells us that seeking always produces finding, but you have to take that first step and seek; nobody can do it for you. Speaking the words of God, Jeremiah said, ***"When you seek me with all your hearts, I will let you find me."***

You don't even have to be a very good detective when it comes to seeking God. Just start seeking, start following the trail of breadcrumbs, and you are guaranteed to find. In the spiritual life, as with the rest of life, nothing worth having is simply handed to us. If it is, it's easy come, easy go, and we usually don't appreciate it. Isaiah dropped lots of hints about the coming of Jesus and what this Messiah would look like. There is no mention of overthrowing governments, even if they are corrupt. There is no mention of a military coup. There is no mention of a warrior God who will beat nations into submission and finally liberate God's Chosen People. There is none of that. Instead, the clues are these: look for one who embodies justice and righteousness, who lifts burdens off people, who is Wonderful

Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. That's the one you should look for; that's the one coming into your darkness.

The gospel also encourages *us* as seekers, for we, too, will be finders. It is guaranteed. What will the clues be to aid us in our seeking? I think in seeking the Lord, the clues for us are exactly the same clues the shepherds were given 2000 years ago. The Angel of the Lord told them to look for a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Those are our two clues: ***swaddling clothes*** and a ***manger***.

Swaddling clothes is something seen every day. Most, but not all children who come into this world, are wrapped in swaddling clothes. The Messiah is concealed and revealed in ordinary acts of love and tenderness. You do not need four years of theology to find or experience the divine; you just need to be aware of God's presence in the, sometimes, mundane experiences of life. The shepherds are told to look for something that's completely normal—a baby wrapped in love.

The second clue to guide their seeking is completely abnormal—a baby in a manger, a food trough for the animals! This is not the obvious, expected, everyday presence of the divine. No, this is the transcendent one born in our midst. You and I, through little acts of love, consideration and kindness, are food for each other, but this Jesus is food for the world. He transcends all hungers.

So, when you seek Jesus, don't be scandalized, as many were 2000 years ago, at his ordinary appearance. Follow the clues, seek the Lord, and you will find the one who was always seeking you. ***"If you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me."***

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