

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/17/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

This may seem an odd time for Christmas stories, but as I was reading Luke's gospel today (I especially enjoy reading Luke), I was struck by something I discovered in Jesus' birth narrative. The thing that I found was the number of significant three-letter words in a single verse: Luke 2:10. *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. Bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."* These little words carry some powerful messages that can touch us deeply as we seek to grow in our faith and discipleship of Jesus. They also invite us to become more intentional in noticing God's presence in the world around us and in our very lives.

- "But" – *But the angel said to them.* The shepherds were overcome with fear at the appearance of the angel. But...but the angel says, "Do not be afraid." How often do we become fearful over the events in our lives or the world around us? We may feel overwhelmed by circumstances, *but* then we can turn to God, recognize God's presence now and promises for the future and find comfort and strength from the One who says, "Do not be afraid."
- "You" – *"I bring you good news."* The message of love that comes at Christmas and throughout the year is for us. Each of us. For you. Even when you believe you do not deserve it. Because you don't. But (there's that word again) God's love overflows to us. God knows all that has and is happening in your life, and all that will happen for that matter. And God wants us—wants you to know that there is nothing that can separate you from the love of God. And that's the good news.
- "Joy" – *"great joy."* The coming of Jesus should bring us tremendous joy. To know that this is how much God loves us—that God would come to us and live with us and die for us should bring us incredible joy every day. When we wake up, we should do so joyfully knowing that God loves us and blesses us and will be with us and for us in every moment of our day.
- "All" – *"all the people."* The good news that God sends into the world is not just for some; it is for all the people, for everyone. Jesus comes into the world for us and for everybody. And the blessings of God spill into our lives and are available to all. The world may distinguish between those who are deserving and those who are not. (Last night, I heard a woman describe her son who had been killed by a hit-and-run driver this way: "He wasn't just some homeless person or street person. He had a family who loved him." And while I grieve for that woman and her family over the loss of her son, I couldn't help but notice that she, probably unintentionally, made him of greater value than some others in our world.) God doesn't distinguish or prioritize. God's love is equal and for all.

These three-letter words from Luke can change our perspective every day. They can shape how we think about ourselves and about others. They can shine over each moment and encounter we have. What does it mean to you to know that God loves you, deeply and unconditionally? How does that good news influence you right now? How might it impact your life as you go about your day? Three-letter words from one verse can have such great power. Maybe we should read that verse to begin all our days.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey