

FOR WHAT ARE WE PREPARING? (ISAIAH 2:2-4) 12/02/12  
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

WHAT'S THE BUZZ? TELL ME WHAT'S HAPPENING 'ROUND HERE? WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS & BOTHER ABOUT "HANGING OF THE GREENS" & THE BEGINNING OF ADVENT? COME DOWN TO DEC. 26 WILL OUR DISPOSITION BE, "ANOTHER CHRISTMAS BITES THE DUST?"

ANOTHER ADVENT SEASON ROLLS AROUND - TOO QUICKLY FOR ME. HOW DOES THE CHURCH, HOW DO WE AS ITS MEMBERS GUARD AGAINST THIS BEING JUST ANOTHER SERVING OF LEFT OVER, WARMED UP TURKEY & DRESSING? **B-O-R-I-N-G!** I MEAN, THIS BABY JESUS WAS BORN OVER 2,000 YEARS AGO, HOW LONG IS THIS DELIVERY GONNA TAKE? FOR THOSE OF US WHO REALLY CARE, HOW CAN WE EXPERIENCE THE SEASON WITH MORE THAN ROUTINE NOSTALGIA?

LET US BE INTENTIONAL IN OUR PREPARATION FOR & SHAR-ING OF THIS ADVENT SEASON. FOR US OLD-HEADS IN THE FAITH, THOUGH, IT IS ABOUT TIME WE LISTENED TO OUR OWN HEARTS WHEN WE LANGUISH OVER THE CELEBRATION OF BABY JESUS. LOOK TO THE DEEPER MEANING OF THE CHRIST CHILD EVENT. PREPARE FOR SOMETHING DEEPER & MORE LASTING TO TAKE PLACE IN OUR HEARTS & LIVES. LET US GROW DEEPER IN OUR FAITH IN JESUS. THRU ADVENT GOD CAN CHANGE OUR HEARTS.

FORMER CBS NEWS ANCHOR DAN RATHER WROTE ABOUT WATCHING THE FLYING VALENTIS WHILE GROWING UP. HE WROTE, "WALKING PAST A VACANT LOT ON OUR WAY TO SCHOOL EARLY IN THE MORNING WE WOULD COME ACROSS THE FLYING VALENTIS PRACTICING IN LONG TIGHTS & TANK TOPS. THE FLYING VALENTIS WERE A TROUPE OF CIRCUS ACROBATS WHO TRAVELED & PERFORMED THRUOUT THE UNITED STATES. WORLD-RENOWNED!

"ALTHO WE WERE USED TO THEIR ART," RATHER RECALLS, "THE FLYING VALENTIS NEVER CEASED BEING THE WONDER OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD. EVERY MORNING IT WAS LIKE GETTING INVITED TO A GREAT SHOW WITHOUT HAVING TO BUY A TICKET. THEY DID TRIPLE SOMERSAULTS ABOVE THEIR PRACTICE NETS & CAUGHT EACH OTHER BY THE FOREARMS WHILE SWINGING FROM THE TRAPEZE. WE WOULD GASP WHEN THEY MISSED

CONNECTIONS & FELL INTO THEIR NETS.”

FROM WATCHING THIS FAMILY WORK OUT, RATHER & HIS FRIENDS DISCOVERED THAT ***PREPARATION MEANT A LOT OF HARD WORK***. IT LOOKED LIKE A LOT OF FUN BUT IT WAS WORK! RATHER WROTE, “IN THE LATE AFTERNOONS THEY WERE STILL SWINGING AWAY OVER THEIR NETS.”

***PREPARATION IS A LOT OF HARD WORK***. ADVENT IS SUCH A TIME OF PREPARATION EVENTHO WE OFTEN TREAT IT LIGHTLY. THE BABY JESUS EVENT IS MORE, MUCH MORE, IMPORTANT THAN FLYING ON ANY TRAPEZE! ***WE BEST GET PREPARED - IN A BABY JESUS SORT OF WAY!*** BUT FOR WHAT ARE WE PREPARING? ISAIAH PROPHESED, “THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOW-SHARES & THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS. NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE.” ***WOW! I MEAN WOW!*** THIS IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE BIBLE PASSAGES. THESE WORDS TUG & PULL ON OUR HEART-STRINGS - ***WHEN - HOW - SHALL THEY COME TO PASS?***

LITTLE DID ISAIAH KNOW AT THE TIME BUT THE BIRTH OF A BABY BOY NAMED JESUS WOULD BE THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS HUNGRY WORDS. THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN MATTHEW IS ONLY THE SPACE OF ***16 OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS*** AWAY FROM THE BOOK OF ISAIAH - BUT THAT TRANSLATED INTO OVER ***7000 YRS*** OF PATIENT WAITING! AT MATTHEW WE ARE BACK TO THE FAMILIAR STORY LINE BUT WHAT ABOUT ISAIAH’S DEEPER MEANING? ***PEACE***, PEACE THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND!!!

9/11 & IRAQ ARE BEHIND US NOW BUT THE CIVIL UNREST & VIOLENCE WHICH FUELED IT ALL STILL THRIVES - JUST LOOK AT SYRIA, IRAN, ISRAEL & THE GAZA STRIP. WAR & VIOLENCE LOOM EVERY PRESENT EVEN STILL IN JESUS’ HOMETLAND - HOT SPOTS FLARE UP WORLD WIDE - MASS MURDERS ARE THE COURSE OF ACTION. THERE ARE LANDS THAT LIVE & BREATHE WAR & DEATH. AROUND THE WORLD & IN OUR COMMUNITIES WHERE WE LIVE, THE MAKINGS FOR HOSTILITY & VIOLENCE THREATEN US. THE WORLD LOOKS TO US, THE CHURCH, CHRISTIANS TO GIVE THEM A WAY OF LIFE THAT WILL LEAD TO LASTING PEACE.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO GIVE THE WORLD? ***A BABY JESUS BORN IN A MANGER***. THE WORLD HAS A RIGHT TO GET BORED WITH & DISILLUSIONED BY THE CHURCH & ITS MEMBERS (YOU & ME) & WHEN WE KEEP TELLING THE STORY OF PEACE YET ARE NOT

REALLY PREPARED TO LET OUR OWN LIVES BE CHANGED BY THE DEEPER, POSITIVE LIFE STYLES OF PEACE. **ARE WE, ARE YOU MAKING FOR PEACE?** HOW HOLLOW & EMPTY OUR MESSAGE CAN BE. POINT IN FACT, HOW HOSTILE & MEAN SOME CHURCH MEMBERS CAN BE FROM TIME TO TIME - EVEN TOWARD ONE ANOTHER! BROTHERS & SISTERS, IT OUGHT NOT EVER BE SO! SAY IT ISN'T SO, SAY IT ISN'T SO! WE MUST, WE MUST LIVE LIVES FILLED WITH LOVE & PEACE!

ONE OF THE CURRENT & HOTTEST TOPICS IN CHURCH CIRCLES IS ***CONFLICT MANAGEMENT***. THE NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN SEVERE, DEEP CONFLICT - HATEFUL BITTER, UGLY CONFLICT - IS STAGGERING! HOW DARE US WONDER WHY THE WORLD DOES NOT LISTEN TO OUR MESSAGE! WE MUST NOT TREAT ADVENT SO LIGHTLY! THE MESSAGE OF ISAIAH IS THIS: ***IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO LIVE IN LOVE, PEACE & JUSTICE THAN TO BE RIGHT***. LET THAT SOAK IN A BIT - IT IS SO CONTRARY TO THE WAY OF THE WORLD!

WE FIND LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN HANGING THE GREENS & GETTING OUT THE MANGER SCENES & LIGHT THE TREE BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU & ME RENOUNCING THE WAYS OF VIOLENCE & HOSTILITY - REFUSING TO LEARN WAR ANY MORE, OURSELVES? HOSTILITY & VIOLENCE, GET BEHIND US - WE RENOUNCE YOU! SUCH WOULD REQUIRE RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF OUR HEARTS & SOULS. LOVE & GRACE, FORGIVENESS & JOY, HAPPINESS & PEACE, THESE BECOME THE LIFE BLOOD OF THOSE WHO WOULD PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE BIRTH OF BABY BOY JESUS. ***PREPARA-TION IS HARD WORK - HARD TO LET GOD CHANGE OUR HATING, VIOLENT HEARTS & WAYS.***

YES, WE WANT TO FLY HIGH & FREELY & EFFORTLESSLY THRU THE AIR LIKE THE FLYING VALENTIS. WE WANT TO TAKE THE BABY JESUS HOME WITH US. WE MUST BE PREPARING OUR LIVES WITH THE WAYS OF PEACE & LOVE SO THAT THE BABY JESUS WILL BE AT HOME WITH US!

WE PREPARE THE WAY BY BECOMING **THE INITIATORS** OF LOVE & PEACE: WHEN THOSE AROUND US LASH OUT & STRIKE IN HOSTILITY & VIOLENCE, WE ARE TO INITIATE PEACE & LOVE. TURN THE WEAPONS OF WARFARE & HATRED INTO INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE & LOVE. NOT MANY OF US CARRY SWORDS & SPEARS ANYMORE. BUT HOW WE CAN LASH OUT W/ CUTTING SARCASM,

GOSSIP, RUMORS, BACK BITING, PETTINESS, VICIOUS NAME CALL-ING, DEHUMANIZING BEHAVIOR. I WANT TO, BABY JESUS WANTS TO FEEL THE LOVE AROUND HERE & WHEN WE DON'T, WELL, WE JUST AIN'T BEING CHRISTIAN TO ONE ANOTHER! ***WE HAVE LEFT THE BABY IN THE MANGER.*** YES, WE REALLY MUST BE & ACT CHRIST LIKE HERE & EVEN MORE SO OUT THAR IN THE WORLD! WHEN WE TAKE OUR WARRING WAYS TO BABY JESUS, WELL, THEY MELT AWAY. IT IS 'BOUT NEAR IMPOSSIBLE TO HOLD HOSTILITY, BITTERNESS, ANGER IN OUR HEARTS WITH BABY JESUS IN OUR ARMS. PREPARATION TIME IS HERE - RIGHT NOW! FOR REAL!