

THE FIRST MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS (LUKE 1:5-23) 12/16/12
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

FROM REGIONAL MINISTER PAXTON JONES: DEAR DISCIPLES IN KANSAS, WHAT CAN BE SAID IN THE WAKE OF SUCH A DEVASTATING TRAGEDY AS THAT WHICH PLAYED OUT YESTERDAY [FRIDAY] IN NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT? WORDS ARE SIMPLY INADEQUATE TO EXPRESS WHAT WE'RE FEELING—SHOCK, DISBELIEF, ANGER, CONFUSION, HEARTACHE, AND SO MUCH MORE. YET WE SEEK SOLACE IN WORDS SPOKEN BY COUNTLESS NEWS REPORTERS—INADVERTENTLY MISLEADING, PARTIALLY CONFIRMED, OFTEN FLAT WRONG, SOMETIMES RIGHT—AS THEY AND WE RUSH FOR INFORMATION, ANY EXPLANATION, THAT CAN TELL US WHY A YOUNG MAN HURT SO BADLY THAT HE FELT HE HAD TO DESTROY THE LIVES OF OTHERS BEFORE ULTIMATELY DESTROYING HIS OWN ... AS IF BY KNOWING THE DETAILS WE CAN SOMEHOW REGAIN CONTROL IN THE MIDST OF SUCH CHAOS, CAN REBUILD A WALL OF DENIAL THAT PROTECTS US FROM THE FEAR THAT IT CAN HAPPEN HERE. WHAT CAN BE SAID TO THE FAMILIES OF THOSE 20 CHILDREN WHO WERE SLAUGHTERED, OF THE 6 SCHOOL EMPLOYEES WHO DIED TRYING TO PROTECT THEM, OF THE LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL WHO WITHOUT THOUGHT OF PERSONAL SAFETY RUSHED INTO SUCH AN HORRIFIC SCENE, OF THE FIREFIGHTERS, EMTS AND MEDICAL EXAMINERS TASKED WITH REMOVING THE BROKEN BODIES OF THE INNOCENT, OR OF THE FAMILY OF THE SHOOTER WHO STOLE ALL OF THOSE LIVES? AS ONE YOUNG MOTHER WHOSE CHILD WAS PHYSICALLY UNINJURED SAID LAST NIGHT IN RESPONSE TO A REPORTER ASKING HER, "WHAT CAN YOU SAY TO YOUR NEIGHBORS?" "THERE ARE NO WORDS ..."

OUR WORLD IS FILLED WITH HORRIFIC EVIL & SIN - THE EVENTS OF THIS PAST FRIDAY MADE ME WANT TO THROW UP - ITS HORROR RAN SO DEEP & WIDE. IT CALLS FORTH OUR ATTENTION TO OUR NEED FOR CHRISTMAS. CHRISTMAS GIVES EVIDENCE TO GOD'S SAVING ACTION FOR US. DURING ADVENT WE ARE CALLED TO BE OPEN & RESPONSIVE TO GOD'S **PREPARATORY ACTIVITY**. INTERESTING, IS IT NOT, THAT GOD KNOWS US SO WELL. GOD KNEW WE WOULD GIVE THE BIRTH OF HIS SON LITTLE OR NO ATTENTION, LEST WE WERE PREPARED. JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY BY CALLING US TO A NOT SO CHRISTMASY

TASK: **REPENTANCE**. WE DO NOT USUALLY ASSOCIATE REPENTANCE WITH CHRISTMAS, DO WE? PLEASE DO NOT BE FOOLED BY THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHRISTMAS INTO BELIEVING & THINKING THAT ADVENT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH ALL THE CHRISTMAS SHOPPING. NO, THE WORK OF ADVENT GOES MUCH DEEPER THAN THE POCKET BOOK. IT IS A MATTER OF THE HEART & SOUL - REPENTANCE.

REPENTANCE PREPARES US TO COME TO THE MANGER.

WHY REPENTANCE, OF ALL THINGS? BECAUSE YOU SEE, **NON**-REPENTANT PEOPLE ARE NOT PREPARED TO BE LED INTO THE PRESENCE OF BABY JESUS. WE ARE TO CHANGE & STRAIGHTEN OUT OUR LIVES AS WE COME TO HOLD THE BABY IN THE MANGER. **WHO OF US WANTS TO BE TOLD TO STAY OUTSIDE & WAIT?** JOHN QUOTED ISAIAH, "MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT, THE MOUNTAIN & HILL BROUGHT LOW, THE CROOKED MADE STRAIGHT, THE ROUGH WAYS SMOOTH FOR THE COMING OF THE KING." IN THOSE DAYS, THE KING'S ENGINEERS WOULD CLEAR THE WAY & BUILD A NEW ROAD TO MAKE THE KING'S TRIP AS EASY & BANDIT FREE AS POSSIBLE. A LOT OF CHANGES WOULD BE REQUIRED OF THOSE ROCKY, POT-HOLED, UP HILL-DOWN HILL, COW PATH WINDING ROAD WAYS.

REPENTANCE OFTEN REQUIRES DRASTIC CHANGES OF US IF WE ARE TO BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE THE CHRIST CHILD INTO OUR LIVES. TO REPENT MEANS TO EXPERIENCE A CHANGE OF HEART OR ATTITUDE, TO CHANGE SO THAT WE HAVE REDIRECTED OUR LIVES. DID WE SUPPOSE FOR A MOMENT THAT WE COULD STAY JUST LIKE WE ARE? IF SO, THEN WE WOULD BE LIKE THE SMUG ONES, CHASTISED BY JOHN IN LUKE, "YOU BROOD OF VIPERS! WHO WARNED YOU TO FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME?" IT IS EASY TO HEAR THE BIBLE'S MESSAGE TO REPENT OR CHANGE OUR WAYS ONLY TO THINK THAT IT SOMEHOW DOES NOT APPLY TO US. WE DO NOT LIKE TO ADMIT IT WHEN WE DO SOMETHING WRONG, DO WE? WE THINK THAT THE MESSAGE OF REPENTANCE IS MEANT FOR **SINNERS** - NOT FOR GOOD RESPECTABLE FOLK LIKE US WHO COME TO CHURCH EVERY WEEK! BUT JOHN'S MESSAGE **IS** FOR US. IT IS A CALL TO EXAMINE OURSELVES, TO AWAKEN US FROM OUR SENSE OF SMUGNESS & SELF-DECEPTION. THE DANGER FOR US IS THAT WE BECOME SO FAMILIAR WITH & SO CLOSE TO THE STORY OF THE MANGER THAT WE CAN NO LONGER BE CHANGED BY IT. THAT

WE SUPPOSE WE ARE NO LONGER IN NEED OF REPENTANCE - ***WE MIGHT THINK WE ARE ALREADY GOOD ENUFF!***

REPENTANCE IS SO IMPORTANT FOR OUR LIVES BECAUSE OUR SINFULNESS BLOCKS OUR CONTACT WITH GOD - PREVENTS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD FROM FREELY FLOWING. WHEN WE HOLD ONTO OUR SIN THE GOODNESS & INNOCENCE OF BABY-BOY JESUS **JUDGES** US RATHER THAN **BLESSES** US. THE SIN IN OUR LIVES MAKES US **UNTOUCHABLE** RATHER THAN **EMBRACEABLE** - KINDA LIKE NOT WANTING TO HOLD A BABY BECAUSE OUR HANDS & CLOTHES ARE FILTHY DIRTY. OR LIKE A CHILD WHO DOES NOT WANT TO GO HOME BECAUSE THE CHILD HAS DONE SOMETHING WRONG & NOW FEELS SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT IT. THE PARENTS MAY NOT EVEN KNOW BUT THE CHILD'S AWARENESS OF THE WRONGDOING PREVENTS LOVE FROM FLOWING, THE CHILD STOPS AT THE DOORWAY TOEING THE LINE, AFRAID TO GO ON IN.... THE CALLOUSNESS OF SIN CAUSES US TO BE ISOLATED & INSULATED SO THAT GOD & PEOPLE CANNOT TOUCH US. COME TO THE MANGER LET THE CHRIST CHILD TOUCH YOUR HEART & LIFE!

THE SAME HAPPENS WHEN WE HOLD ON TO GRUDGES OVER THE MISDEEDS OF ANOTHER PERSON - BITTERNESS & HOSTILITY WON'T LET US FREE - THE PAIN RUNS TOO DEEP - HAS TAKEN ON ITS OWN LIFE NOW - WHAT TO DO? REPENT, BE WASHED CLEAN, FORGIVE THE PAST, THEN COME TO THE MANGER, EMBRACE & BE EMBRACED BY JESUS. FIND PEACE & REST AT LAST.

GOD IS THINKING HERE OF YOU & ME. OUR OWN PERSONAL, PRIVATE SIN, THAT KEEPS US FROM THE MANGER. REPENT - LET YOUR SINS BE GONE! GOD'S FORGIVENESS AWAITS US.

THE MULTITUDE TURNED TO JOHN & ASKED, "WHAT THEN ARE WE TO DO?" REPENTANCE WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE THEOLOGICAL OR THEORETICAL BUT **PRACTICAL**. JOHN SAID TO REPENT WE LOOK TO OUR RELATIONSHIPS. CHANGE THE UNGODLY, UNFORGIVING & UNLOVING WAYS WE TREAT ONE ANOTHER. THEN WE ARE PREPARED TO COME TO THE MANGER.

LET US NOT BE DISTRACTED FROM THE FIRST MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS - **REPENTANCE**. YES, DO OUR SHOPPING...BUYING... RUSHING TO & FRO. WITH REPENTANT HEARTS WE WILL BE FILLED WITH MORE JOY & HAPPINESS TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR BABY BOY JESUS.