

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTMAS (JOHN 1:11-12) 12/23/12
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

COME TO CHRISTMAS, WHERE THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A GIFT, NO STRINGS ATTACHED. THIS GIFT IS GIVEN TO US ANEW AS WE GATHER AT THE MANGER. BUT THERE IS A CHOICE TO BE MADE & THEREIN LIES **THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTMAS**. FOR WE **CANNOT RECEIVE THE GIFT OF NEW LIFE WITHOUT LETTING GO OF THE OLD LIFE:**

<i>CANNOT RECEIVE LIGHT</i>	<i>UNLESS WE GIVE UP DARKNESS</i>
<i>CANNOT RECEIVE LOVE</i>	<i>UNLESS WE GIVE UP HATRED</i>
<i>CANNOT RECEIVE PEACE</i>	<i>UNLESS WE GIVE UP VIOLENCE</i>
<i>CANNOT RECEIVE JOY</i>	<i>UNLESS WE GIVE UP</i>

BITTERNESS

HOW STUBBORN WE CAN BE IN HOLDING ON TO THAT WHICH IS FAMILIAR TO US EVEN WHEN WE SUSPECT IT IS DESTRUCTIVE & ABUSIVE FOR US. JUST WON'T LET GO! **WHAT HOLDS YOU BACK?**

FROM ONE OF MY PSYCHOLOGY COURSES AT VANDY I REMEMBER A STUDY DONE ON MONKEYS. THEY GAVE A **HUNGRY** MONKEY A LARGE, UNBREAKABLE GLASS CONTAINER WITH A BANANA INSIDE. THE MONKEY REACHED IN TO GRAB THE BANANA BUT COULD NOT REMOVE HIS HAND WHILE HOLDING ON TO THE BANANA. EVEN UPON PASSING OUT FROM FATIGUE & HUNGER THE MONKEY HELD ON FOR DEAR LIFE NOT REALIZING THAT HIS VERY LIFE WAS IN DANGER BY **NOT LETTING GO**. EVEN WHEN OFFERED A BANANA OUTSIDE THE JAR THE MONKEY WOULD NOT GIVE UP TO TAKE THE NEW GIFT OF FOOD. FUNNY AS IT MAY SEEM WE CAN ACT A LOT LIKE THAT!

LET'S TAKE A LOOK SEE AT THE DIFFICULTIES WE HAVE IN RECEIVING THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS - THE THINGS WE REGRET, THINGS WE RESENT, THINGS WE FEAR, THINGS WE COVER UP - ALL THOSE DIFFICULTIES **WE HOLD ON TO** THAT CAN PREVENT US FROM RECEIVING THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS. LET'S CALL THESE TO THE SURFACE & ALLOW THE CHRIST CHILD TO HEAL THOSE PARALYZING MEMORIES & EXPERIENCES. "MAKE US WHOLE & STRONGER, BABY JESUS!" AFTER ALL, IS THE MONKEY HOLDING THE BANANA OR IS THE BANANA HOLDING THE MONKEY?

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN STATES, "HE CAME TO HIS OWN HOME & HIS OWN PEOPLE RECEIVED HIM NOT. BUT TO ALL WHO RECEIVED

HIM, WHO BELIEVED IN HIS NAME, HE GAVE POWER TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD.” **THEY RECEIVED HIM NOT**...CAN YOU IMAGINE? WHAT WAS WRONG WITH **THEM!** YOU WOULD THINK THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD WOULD EAGERLY RUSH OUT TO THAT MANGER & SCOOP UP THAT BABY WITH TENDER ARMS, CUDDLE JESUS OH SO CLOSELY! **BUT NOT!** A LITTLE BABY CAN MELT THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE. BUT WE OFTEN TIMES DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE LIFE OF ANOTHER PERSON - MAYBE THEY/WE DO NOT WANT THEIR/ OUR HEARTS TO BE MELTED - TOO MUCH PAIN & BROKENNESS, UP AGAINST TOO MUCH HARDSHIP SO DO NOT WANT TO BE VULNERABLE, EVEN TO BABY JESUS. WE SELDOM KNOW ABOUT THE **DEMONS & DRAGONS** OTHER PEOPLE MAY BE FACING. NOT TO MENTION OUR OWN PROBLEMS & DIFFICULTIES. WE BRING THESE & MORE WITH US TO THE MANGER. EACH OF US HARBOR DEEP LONGINGS & EXPECTATIONS ABOUT CHRISTMAS. **IT MEANS A LOT TO US.** THAT IS WHY THERE IS ALL THE HOOPLA ABOUT IT. BUT FOR MANY PEOPLE CHRISTMAS FAILS TO PRODUCE THE DESIRED RESULTS & EVEN WHEN IT DOES, IT IS NOT AS LONG LASTING AS WE WOULD LIKE FOR IT TO BE. WHAT’S THE DEAL?

JOHN SAID THAT **RECEIVING** WAS THE KEY TO EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS. RECEIVE THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS - GOD’S LOVE. THE WORDS OF THE ANGELS TO THE SHEPHERDS, “THIS SHALL BE A SIGN FOR YOU, YOU WILL FIND A BABE WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES & LYING IN A MANGER.” JESUS IS THE SIGN THAT GOD KNOWS WHAT WE ARE GOING THRU & GOD CARES. THE BIRTH OF JESUS IS ENUFF TO TOUCH EVEN THE HARDEST HEART WITH A BIT OF JOY. WE WANT THE HAPPINESS, THE JOY, THE GLOW OF THE MANGER TO LAST.

STRANGE IS IT NOT - WE WANT TO RECEIVE THE FORGIVING LOVE OF GOD, TO HAVE A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD & WITH ONE ANOTHER BUT ALL TOO OFTEN A CONCRETE WALL GETS IN THE WAY, WE HAVE THE PROBLEM OF RECEIVING THE GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS. COMMERCIALISM, EVIL IN THE WORLD, HECTIC & BROKEN LIVES CAN GET IN OUR WAY OF RECEIVING THE GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS. THE HEART OF THE MATTER, THE REAL PROBLEM WITH OUR EXPERIENCING CHRISTMAS JOY HAS TO DO WITH OUR UNWILLINGNESS OR INABILITY TO **LET GO OUR REGRETS, L-G OUR FAILURES, L-G OUR RESENTMENTS & L-G OUR RELUCTANCE TO CHANGE.** NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE MAY WANT WHAT

CHRIST-MAS HAS TO GIVE, UNTIL THESE BARRIERS ARE RECOGNIZED & REMOVED, WE WILL REMAIN STRANGERS AT THE MANGER. SO LET US TAKE SOME TIME - TODAY EVEN; THIS VERY MOMENT; TO SEARCH OUR HEARTS & NAME THOSE THINGS THAT GET IN THE WAY OF OUR RECEIVING THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS. MAKE A MENTAL PICTURE OF EACH. WRITE THEM DOWN IF IT HELPS.

SOMETIMES, JUST RECOGNIZING SOMETHING AS A BARRIER IS ENUFF; HAVING NAMED IT, WE CAN DEAL WITH IT. LET IT GO. BUT AS WE MAKE OUR LISTS, SOME OF THESE THINGS ARE NOT GOING TO DISAPPEAR JUST BECAUSE WE NAMED THEM. SOME OF THEM MAY BE AROUND BECAUSE, WHEN WE ARE HONEST WITH OURSELVES, WE HAVE HUGGED THEM TO OURSELVES, CLUNG TO THEM. THESE ARE THE THINGS GOD CALLS US TO TURN LOOSE, TO LET GO OF, SO THAT THOSE OPEN WOUNDS & TENDER SCARS CAN BE HEALED. OFTEN IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE CHRISTMAS SEASON.

SOME THINGS MAY BE AROUND BECAUSE WE HAVE TRIED TO HANDLE THEM ALONE. THESE MAY NEED TO BE SHARED WITH A TRUSTED FRIEND OR PASTOR OR SOMEONE WHO HAS EXPERIENCED THE SAME THING. PROBLEMS SHARED WITH ANOTHER PERSON CAN BE DISPERSED MORE EASILY WHEN SHARED OPENLY & HONESTLY.

SOME PROBLEMS WE MAY NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH. THESE WE MUST PRAY ABOUT CONSTANTLY & TURN OVER TO THE BABY. THE LORD MUST HELP US FIGURE THEM OUT & HELP US HAVE THE COURAGE & STRENGTH OF WILL TO DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE, TO LET THEM GO.

WHATEVER...THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS IS THAT WITH IT COMES **THE POWER** TO RECEIVE IT (BATTERIES ARE INCLUDED): "TO ALL WHO RECEIVED HIM, WHO BELIEVED IN HIS NAME, **HE GAVE POWER** TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD." INDEED, WE MAY HAVE THE PROBLEM OF RECEIVING BUT THE EVENT OF CHRISTMAS IN & OF ITSELF GIVES US THE POWER TO CRUMBLE DOWN THE DIVIDING WALLS THAT DIVIDE & SEPARATE US FROM GOD & FROM ONE ANOTHER.

A LITTLE GIRL, DRESSED AS AN ANGEL, IN A CHRISTMAS PAGEANT WAS TOLD TO COME DOWN THE CENTER AISLE. THE CHILD ASKED, "DO YOU WANT ME TO WALK OR FLY?" YOU FEEL

AS THO SHE ALMOST COULD HAVE FLOWN! IT IS THE WONDER & MYS-TERY OF CHRISTMAS THAT EMPOWERS & ENABLES US TO LET GO & RECEIVE JESUS INTO OUR LIVES.

THE LATE PETER MARSHALL SAID, “WHEN CHRISTMAS DOES NOT MAKE YOUR HEART SWELL UP UNTIL IT NEARLY BURSTS & FILL YOUR EYES WITH TEARS & MAKE YOU ALL SOFT & WARM INSIDE THEN YOU WILL KNOW THAT SOMETHING INSIDE OF YOU IS DEAD.”

COME TO THE MANGER & RECEIVE JESUS ANEW INTO YOUR HEARTS & LIVES. THE LORD AWAITS YOU WITH SO MUCH TO GIVE & OUR NEED IS SO GREAT. WON'T YOU COME?