

“All I Want/Need for Christmas: Love”
December 23, 2018
Rev. Dave Baldrige
Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor, Florida

I don't know anyone that doesn't want to receive love. Hope, Peace, Joy, and love. When we think of love in the Bible, we often think of 1 Corinthians 13 written by the Apostle Paul and known as the “Love Chapter.” Hear it a different way. Not by the Apostle Paul but with some changes by Sharon Jaynes.

1 Corinthians 13 Christmas Style

If I decorate my house perfectly with lovely plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights, and shiny glass balls, but do not show love to my family – I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals, and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family – I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home, and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family – it profits me nothing.

If I trim the tree with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties, and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child.

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the spouse.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn't envy another home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens, and lots of lights and outside decorations.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of your way.

Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return, but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Love never fails. Toys will break; pearl necklaces will be lost; golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure.

Love---the gift of love will endure. We give gifts, but the greatest gift we can give is love.

The great gift of love was given to us in a very special way.

Lest we not forget.

He is still the reason for the season.

Always will be.

Singing about a Man

Who was a Baby,

Who became a Boy

Who became a Man.

Born in an obscure village.

A Child of a peasant woman.

He actually grew up in another village where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty.

And for three years, He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home.

Never wrote a book.

He never held an office.

He never really had a family of His own.

Never went to college.

Never set foot in a big city.

He never traveled 200 miles from the place He was born.

He never did things that usually accompany greatness.

He had no credentials but Himself.

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him.

His friends ran away.

Even one of His best friends denied Him.

He was turned over to His enemies.

He went through the mockery of a trial.

He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves.

While He was dying, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on this earth and that was His coat.

And when he was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone and today He is still the centerpiece of the human race, and leader of the column of progress.

I'm far within the mark when I say that all the armies that were ever marched, all the navies that were ever built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, all put together, have not affected the lives on this Earth as powerfully as has that

ONE SOLITARY LIFE.

(adapted from an essay by Dr. James Allan Francis)

(Part B---After Communion)

Angel's Point of View (The Visited Planet) By J.B. Phillips

Once upon a time a very young angel was being shown round the splendors and glories of the universe by a senior and experienced angel. To tell the truth, the little angel was beginning to be tired and a little bored. He had been shown whirling galaxies and blazing suns, infinite distances in the deathly cold of inter-stellar space, and to his mind there seemed to be an awful lot of it all.

Finally, he was shown the galaxy of which our planetary system is but a small part. As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. It looked as dull as a dirty tennis-ball to the little angel, whose mind was filled with the size and glory of what he had seen.

Senior Angel: "I want you to watch that one particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

Little Angel: "Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me. What's special about that one?"

Senior Angel: "That is the Visited Planet."

Little Angel: "Visited?" "You don't mean visited by ——?"

Senior Angel: "Indeed I do. That ball, which I have no doubt looks to you small and insignificant and not perhaps overclean, has been visited by our young Prince of Glory."
(And at these words he bowed his head reverently.)

Little Angel: "But how? Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince, with all these wonders and splendors of His Creation, and millions more that I'm sure I haven't seen yet, went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?"

Senior Angel: "It isn't for us, to question His 'why's', except that I must point out to you that He is not impressed by size and numbers, as you seem to be. But that He really went, I know, and all of us in Heaven who know anything know that. As to why He became one of them – how else do you suppose could He visit them?"

(The little angel's face wrinkled in disgust.)

Little Angel: "Do you mean to tell me, that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"

Senior Angel: "I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping, crawling creatures' in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him."

The little angel looked blank. Such a thought was almost beyond his comprehension.

Senior Angel: “Close your eyes for a moment, and we will go back in what they call Time.”

(While the little angel’s eyes were closed and the two of them moved nearer to the spinning ball, it stopped its spinning, spun backwards quite fast for a while, and then slowly resumed its usual rotation.)

Senior Angel: “Now look!”

And as the little angel did as he was told, there appeared here and there on the dull surface of the globe little flashes of light, some merely momentary and some persisting for quite a time.

Little Angel: “Well, what am I seeing now?”

Senior Angel: “You are watching this little world as it was some thousands of years ago. Every flash and glow of light that you see is something of the Father’s knowledge and wisdom breaking into the minds and hearts of people who live upon the earth. Not many people, you see, can hear His Voice or understand what He says, even though He is speaking gently and quietly to them all the time.”

Little Angel: “Why are they so blind and deaf and stupid?”

Senior Angel: “It is not for us to judge them. We who live in the Splendor have no idea what it is like to live in the dark. We hear the music and the Voice like the sound of many waters every day of over lives, but to them – well, there is much darkness and much noise and much distraction upon the earth. Only a few who are quiet and humble and wise hear His Voice. But watch, for in a moment you will see something truly wonderful.”

The Earth went on turning and circling round the sun, and then quite suddenly, in the upper half of the globe, there appeared a light, tiny but so bright in its intensity that both the angels hid their eyes.

Little Angel (in a low tone of voice): “I think I can guess, that was the Visit, wasn’t it?”

Senior Angel: “Yes, that was the Visit. The Light Himself went down there and lived among them; but in a moment, and you will be able to tell that even with your eyes closed, the light will go out.”

Little Angel: “But why? Could He not bear their darkness and stupidity? Did He have to return here?”

Senior Angel (voice stern and said): “No, it wasn’t that. They failed to recognize Him for Who He was – or at least only a handful knew Him. For the most part they preferred their darkness to His Light, and in the end, they killed Him.”

Little Angel: “The fools, the crazy fools! They don’t deserve —”

Senior Angel: “Neither you nor I, nor any other angel, knows why they were so foolish and so wicked. Nor can we say what they deserve or don’t deserve. But the fact remains, they killed our Prince of Glory while He was Man amongst them.”

Little Angel: “And that I suppose was the end? I see the whole Earth has gone black and dark. All right, I won’t judge them, but surely that is all they could expect?”

Senior Angel: “Wait, we are still far from the end of the story of the Visited Planet. Watch now, but be ready to cover your eyes again.”

In utter blackness the earth turned round three times, and then there blazed with unbearable radiance a point of light.

Little Angel (shielding his eyes): “What now?”

Senior Angel: “They killed Him all right, but He conquered death. The thing most of them dread and fear all their lives He broke and conquered. He rose again, and a few of them saw Him and from then on became His utterly devoted slaves.”

Little Angel: “Thank God for that.”

Senior Angel: “Amen. Open your eyes now, the dazzling light has gone. The Prince has returned to His Home of Light. But watch the Earth now.”

As they looked, in place of the dazzling light there was a bright glow which throbbed and pulsed. And then as the Earth turned many times little points of light spread out. A few flickered and died; but for the most part the lights burned steadily, and as they continued to watch, in many Parts of the globe there was a glow over many areas.

Senior Angel: “You see what is happening? The bright glow is the company of loyal men and women He left behind, and with His help they spread the glow and now lights begin to shine all over the Earth.”

Little Angel (impatiently): “Yes, yes, but how does it end? Will the little lights join up with each other? Will it all be light, as it is in Heaven?”

Senior Angel (shaking his head): “We simply do not know. It is in the Father’s hands. Sometimes it is agony to watch and sometimes it is joy unspeakable. The end is not yet. But now I am sure you can see why this little ball is so important. He has visited it; He is working out His Plan upon it.”

Little Angel: “Yes, I see, though I don’t understand. I shall never forget that this is the Visited Planet.”