

“CHRISTmas Is Calling: Christmas 365”

Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

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Isaiah 9:6 New International Version (NIV)⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Ah, Christmas is over----but is it??? Throughout our Advent Season with the series “CHRISTmas Is Calling,” we have heard “Call” stories from members of our congregation. Christ called them to take certain actions and respond in certain ways. Beloved, Christ’s calling does not stop on December 25th.

Yes, earlier this year I talked about Christmas sales seems to come earlier and earlier every year. In fact, I mention a new term I learned=Hallowthanksmas. It seems like all the ‘holiday’ get scrunched into one.

Why I read of someone complaining the other day. It was December 26, and someone complained, “It’s 364 days until Christmas and someone already has their Christmas decorations up!!”

Ah in many ways may the “Christmas Spirit” continue 365 days.

In our 4 Christmas Eve services we have over 2300 people worship Christ the newborn King. At 4 pm there was this Elf, and pastor that got excited about Christmas. The message ended with an interpretation of The Elf Code. #1 of The Elf Code is “Treat everyday like Christmas.” Whoa. More than an Elf Code!!! It’s a Christian principle. Shouldn’t we be treating everyday like Christmas. Do we celebrate during the ‘season’ and then forget what and who we have been celebrating?

Several years ago, at the beginning of December I was doing some Christmas shopping for Sarah. I was waiting in line at a store and I heard a conversation of 2 ladies behind me. 1st lady says, “I’m feeling really religious this year.” The second lady, kind of chuckles and says, “Really, religious?” To which the first lady says, “Yes, I’ve sent out Christmas cards with Mary and Joseph on them.”

Beloved hear me when I say that Christmas is more than just being religious by sending out Mary and Joseph Christmas cards. It’s more than religion or religiosity. It more than Methodism. It is more than speaking Christian-ese or having the beautiful tradition of coming to candlelight services. It is personal.

At our 2, 7 and 11 p.m. Christmas Eve services the message was focused on “This Baby.” This baby, Jesus that can to change the world. Yes, the one who made the angels sing. The One who had a new star shine in the sky. Yes, Jesus came to change the world. But your world starts with you. Christ is calling 365!

Perhaps someone has at some point in time come up to you, pulled you aside and said, “Can I talk to you---it’s personal.” And they kind of pull you aside and speak to you in a quiet voice. Well let me share with you something personal that we need to say loud for all to hear.

The prophet Isaiah foretells of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. The us means them. The us means those. The us means others. The us means you. The us means....us. The us means me...it’s personal. Spell “us” for me.... u...s. What is the first letter---u---aha---it’s personal for you.

I was named David after my great-grandfather. Names are personal. Now to even get more personal...my middle name is Wayne. David Wayne. I also have other names. Same person, I am just called different names, and yes also probably called names.

Although named after my great-grandfather, my grandfather was named Harley Larue. My dad was Harley Roy, and my only brother was named Harley Dwain. And then I’m named David---I don’t know what happened with the Harley name. I guess I could be called Harley, David-son.

Ah names, they stay with you.

Believe it or not when I was a Youth Camp Counselor in Terre Haute, Indiana the head of the camp called me “Muscles.” (It’s a long story, but I think he was making fun of me.... imagine that.) One night during worship service I went up as one of the ushers to receive the baskets to take up the offering and he looked at me to say the offering prayer, you could tell by the look on his face that he had blanked on my name so he said, “Muscles, will you give the prayer.” Some dear friends who are Wycliffe missionary call me “Baldy.” It’s personal. People in my hometown of Centralia, Illinois would probably call me David. People from college and after call me Dave. When I taught school, I was called Mr. Baldridge. When I was pastoring in Plant City, I picked up kids for church in an old run-down church van, a green rusted out, I think it was a 1967 model. One of the kids rather than calling me Pastor Dave got mixed up because of picking him up in the van and would call me “Passenger” Dave. It’s personal. Once I was ordained, I was officially Reverend. Sometimes I have been simply called Preacher. Sometimes even Father. Often Pastor Dave.

Yes, I’m called son, also I’m called son-in-law. In fact my mother-in-law has point blank told me that I am her favorite son-in-law. I’m her only son-in-law. All these names yet the same person. Some names are more personal. Husband, Daddy, Dad. Pops. And there is what Sarah calls me.... **DAVE!!!!** Oh, it’s very personal.

Here is the name of this child, of this son that is to be born for us. It’s personal. Personal because it is more than a title, or a nickname. It’s personal to me and perhaps to you because I’ve need to call Jesus these names in times of very personal situations, not just at “Christmas time,” but 365.

Saw an article right after Christmas this week. The headline caught my attention. The headline was, "Didn't get what you wanted for Christmas, here's what to know about holiday returns."

Beloved I would make a case that we got exactly what we wanted and needed for Christmas. A Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR There have been times in my life when I have needed help. Lord what do you want me to do? What direction do you want me to take? Lord, I'm kind of in a crisis here. I've found that this child, this son that was born for us is a Wonderful Counselor. No hourly fee for this counselor. He is always available. He always in. I don't have to call and get appointment.

I don't have to call and see if my insurance will cover this form of Mental Health coverage. I don't have to wait in a waiting room. I don't even have to be afraid of who will see me going to this Counselor. He is there for you. It's personal. His office days are 365/24/7!!!! Yes, I need that Wonderful Counselor 365 days a year.

"And He will be called,.....**MIGHTY GOD**. The Jesus who is to be born should not be seen always as a weak infant. He is the source of strength. Really dating myself now...Do you remember Mighty Mouse cartoons? It was from the 1940's through 1967. I would watch him on Saturday morning cartoons growing up. He had a great theme song. Remember the theme song? Mighty Mouse flies in and says,

Here I come to save the day!
That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way!

Yes sir, when there is a wrong to right,
Mighty Mouse will join the fight!

On the sea or on the land,
He's got the situation well in hand!

We know that when there's danger, we'll never despair;
Because we know that when there's danger he is there...
On the land on the sea in the air.

We're not worrying at all
We just listen for his call
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way.

Beloved in all seriousness we need a Mighty God to come and save the day. He has come. We just need to listen for His call!!!!

I have an engraved sign on my desk that says, “Rule #1 God is Big Enough. Rule #2 (and it is blank.). If I believe Rule #1 does there need to be a rule #2. Are you with me? Xxxx I am joyful in the Hope that Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem is the Mighty God.....He’s big enough...it’s personal.

He will be called **EVERLASTING FATHER**. Everlasting is a long time. The Father image that is being talked about here is one who will not abandon you, One who will not leave you, He is not One who will punish you without cause, He is not One who will not support you....but the Everlasting Father is One who will be there for you....at all times. At times when you need a Fatherly word of encouragement....He is there. At times when you need some Fatherly support....He is there. my Heavenly Father is Everlasting. There are things I tell my Everlasting Father that I tell no one else....we have that type of relationship. It’s personal. I rejoice in the hope that indeed the Messiah is one in the same the Everlasting Father. A mysterious mystery...for me...it’s personal.

“And He will be called **PRINCE OF PEACE**.” Remember the story of Snow White and the 7 Little Guys. All she needed was a kiss from the prince to awaken. In Fairy Tales it is sometimes told to the young girl, “Your prince will come.” Well, it’s no secret, for I have good news for all of us. Our prince has come. The Prince of Peace.

I have confusion---He brings Peace. I have chaos in my life---Jesus brings Peace. I have a calamity in my life....His peace is there, not as the world gives, but a deep abiding peace. Sometimes at least in my life he doesn’t always calm the storms of life, but He calms me in the middle of the storm. I am joyful in the hope and realization that this One whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas is the Prince of Peace...for me it’s personal, and it is not just for now, but 365.

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE---this child that has been born for us, this son that has been given to us indeed has a special and personal name.

Several years ago in the month of December I was on the blessed I-4 and got behind a little pick-up truck that had one of those caution signs suction on the inside of his back window. You know the sign I mean---shaped like a little caution sign----some say things like “Caution, Baby on Board.” However, I was shocked when I saw what this one said. He passed me and I looked at the sign, and I said to myself, “Self, surely not.” So I pulled up close behind him....sure enough---his “on board” caution signs said, “Caution Atheist on Board.”

I became troubled. I became sad. It was Christmas time and He had no reason to celebrate. Certainly if he doesn’t believe in God he wouldn’t believe in Jesus and this Babe of Bethlehem whose name would be called Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. How sad, to not celebrate this most wonderful time of the year. How troubling that he wanted to publicize the idea that he was an atheist. “Caution Atheist on Board.” I was truly saddened.

Then I became inquisitive. Yep, that's right nosy. I wondered what this guy looked like. My judgmental side came out. I thought he probably looked like some freak weird-o. So I got in the passing lane, I gunned it and started to pass him, slowing down as I went by to look in the window. You know what he look like? You know what he looked like? I wish someone would ask me, "What did he look like?" (so glad you asked." I'll tell you what he looked like. He looked like...us. That's right could have been someone whose appearance would be typical of any one of us today sitting here today. What's the difference between that man and us? It's Personal. We can say as Buddy the Elf did, "I know Him."

Next week our 3 regular worship times of 8:05, 9:30 and 11:05. A new sermon series, "3 Objections to Christianity." We will deal with some of those things that perhaps that celebrated atheist driving down I-4 might have needed to hear.

Roy Lessin puts it this way:

"What We Find in Jesus"

We find peace, and the PRINCE OF PEACE;
 We find righteousness, and the RIGHTEOUS ONE;
 We find counsel, and the COUNSELOR;
 We find wonders, and the WONDERFUL ONE;
 We find salvation , and the SAVIOUR;
 We find the Kingdom, and the KING.

I don't know about you, but I need a personal Counselor, I need a Mighty God, I need an Everlasting Father that keeps loving and giving and forgiving, I need to have that Internal and Eternal Peace that only Jesus can give, not just now, but 365.

What would it look like if we were called to live Christmas 365? Now yes, I'm going to take my decorations down---but Christmas is a matter of the heart.

It is always a conundrum to me that people seem nicer at Christmas. What if that carried through 365. What if we embraced and realized this baby changed us? This baby was indeed with us 365 and was the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Oh, we have our work to do if we are called to Christmas 365.

Howard Thurman, an African American theologian, educator, and civil rights leader wrote something that I've used in various years past.

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
 when the star in the sky is gone,
 when the kings and princes are home,
 when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
 the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

(The poem "The Work of Christmas" is from Howard Thurman's The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations)

Oh, may we live a life of Christ calling 365. May our words, actions, and our very being shout, "Gloria in excelsis Deo" ---Glory to God in the highest.

The world needs to see Jesus 365. We need the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace 365.