

A Christmas to Remember

Experts in the study of the human brain have said when there is an emotional experience of either joy or grief, the brain locks it into a permanent memory mode and it's there forever. This is why some things are remembered, others are forgotten. The forgotten things are those events in your life that did not move you. I don't want this Christmas to be a non-eventful, forgotten Christmas that amalgamates into just another time of our year. I want you to enter into the wonder of Christmas. Here's the definition of wonder: a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable, for example: *he had stood in front of it, observing the intricacy of the ironwork with the wonder of a child.*

To be able to remember this as a wonderful Christmas, let me suggest that you first:

1. Tidy up your mind; get ready for Christmas.

One of my favorite paragraphs in literature comes from the book *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie. It is found in the first chapter entitled, *Peter Breaks Through*: "Mrs. Darling first heard of Peter when she was tidying up her children's minds. It is the nightly custom of every good mother after her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things straight for next morning, repacking into their proper places the many articles that have wandered during the day. If you could keep awake (but of course you can't) you would see your own mother doing this, and you would find it very interesting to watch her. It is quite like tidying up drawers. You would see her on her knees, I expect, lingering humorously over some of your contents, wondering where on earth you had picked this thing up, making discoveries sweet and not so sweet, pressing this to her cheek as if it were as nice as a kitten, and hurriedly stowing that out of sight. When you wake in the morning, the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on."

One of our problems is our minds become so cluttered at Christmastime, by the time the joyous event gets to us, we have lost the sense of wonder. So, try not to let the stress of everyday steal the joy that this season brings. Christmas is the combination of faith, hope and charity (I Corinthians 13:13). When we begin to set these basics aside, we will find ourselves in a downward spiral: "*Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life*" (Proverbs 13:12). Now that we have replaced the un-tidy mind with prettier thoughts and beautifully aired, as Barrie phrased it, let me challenge you to:

2. Transcend the downers; go for the "warm and glowy."

When Barbara and I were newlyweds living outside of Chicago, she kept telling how much fun she, her family and their friends had a Palos Park in Chicago. Being reared in the south, we had not been introduced to the wonder of tobogganing. This is a from an Indian word for sled. I had never had such an experience! So the day came when her family introduced me and three fellow Floridians to the experience of tobogganing. We climbed up the 130 limestone steps to the top of the runs called Swallow Cliff, nicknamed, "Terror Hill." I was hardly prepared for the ride for my life! You may wait in line for a couple of hours, but it was well worth it. The conversation, the winter wonderland around you, the periodic screams were all anticipatory of the event. A toboggan was roomy enough for a whole family or your own set of friends and once you were locked in, the starter gate would lift and you would immediately plummet 100 feet, sliding a total of 1,100 feet. Having been away for so many years, I did not find out until recently the toboggan chutes had been closed down. I predict they won't stay closed, it was too much fun! Hear from one 88 year old man who commented about the ride from his youth: "We kids always wanted to sit up front because that's where you get the thrill,

going 65 mph with the cold air hitting you in the face. When you make the first drop off, you go straight down. And let me tell you, you move. You have to scream because if you don't scream you lose your breath. You go zero to 60 mph in just a couple of seconds." "It's a wonderful way to get a really neat adrenaline rush in a really short period of time," remembers Dr. Richard Carroll, a resident of Palos Park. "The rush is good for a minute, and then you just feel warm and glowy for five or 10 minutes, certainly enough time to get back up to the top and get down again."

I appreciate the expression that Dr. Carroll used of the feeling after the ride, "...warm and glowy..." It may not be an eloquent way of saying it, but it certainly describes what we need at Christmastime. The warm and glowy excitement of a child. Remaining child-like without being childish should be the goal of everyone. There is a song that reminds us that Christmas is for kids, from eight to eighty-five. No matter who you are, you need to transcend all that makes you gloomy and get into the "glowy." It may not be a chute at Swallow Cliff that will take you there - it may be somewhere else or something else. Well, then go there; do it again. I would be remiss as a minister of the Gospel not to mention that some of you just need to become active in church again. Find a need and fill it. In being a blessing we receive the greater blessing. The Lord Jesus said, "...*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). I cannot imagine Christmas without Church. The lessons of the first Christmas, the carols, the cantatas, the WMS Christmas party and, at our church, the birthday party for Jesus when we replenish the nursery toys for our kids and visiting children. And what would Christmas be without our annual Christmas Eve Candlelight service? This is the ultimate "warm and glowy" that some of you have been missing. Let's us enjoy the family and friends that will be with us on Christmas morning and dinner. Leave the cares of the world behind and transcend the things that sadden you.

3. Take the present; get past the past.

Yesterday is spent, tomorrow is a promissory note, all we have is today and that's why we call it the "present." One of the most difficult things I have to do is to get past the past. Sometimes it is not just the bad experiences of the past that haunt us, it is the good things of the past that we constantly compare our present to and sometimes it just doesn't compete. Someone has said, "The good old days are a combination of a bad memory and a good imagination." Going back to our original premise: when there is an emotional experience of either joy or grief, the brain locks it into a permanent memory mode and it's there forever. So what shall we do? Make great memories for tomorrow by doing something good in this moment! For years I have encouraged our kids with the phrase: *carpe deum*, translated from Latin, "seize the day;" however, there is another phrase in Latin very close and sounds phonetically similar: "*carpe Deum*" which means "Seize God." I want to challenge you to take advantage of the moment by seizing the day, squeezing everything you can out of a day, by laying hold on God and His purpose for your life. Do it this year and you'll have a Christmas to remember! "*And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him...*" (Matthew 2:11).

- Pastor Pope -

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