

December 9, 2012

A Sermon Preached by
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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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This Incomplete Christmas

Matthew 2:13-18

Will You Pray With Me?

Gracious and loving God, we pray that the Holy Spirit will move in such a way that our minds may be opened to hear something fresh this morning and our hearts receptive to a deeper obedience to Your Word. This we ask in the certain Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

As I studied this lesson from Matthew, I was reminded of a story I once read of a surgeon who operated on a young woman to remove a tumor. The procedure required that a facial nerve be cut. The result was the loss of muscle support on one side of her mouth. This young woman's beautiful smile now drooped on that side as if she suffered from palsy.

When her young husband was permitted to see her, he studied her condition, smiled and said, "It's kind of cute." As he bent to kiss her he twisted his lips to accommodate hers to show that their kiss still works. Here was a husband who had

eyes to see goodness and joy in the midst of loss.

Do you have eyes to see truth, goodness, hope and joy, particularly in the midst of loss?

Matthew's Gospel presents three dramatic stories in succession: the star over Bethlehem, the death of children and the weeping of Rachel, and heaven breaking open and the voice of God thundering down, "This is My Son." The tragedy, the death of children and the tears of Rachel is framed between hope and certainty. The star represents the hope that God will do something and God's voice announces with certainty that God has done something.

This year Christmas comes to many who live in the middle story – the loss, the weeping and fear that there is little left. Some have lost loved ones and there is an empty chair at the holiday table. Some fear the loss of someone dear who now

suffers a serious illness. Others are estranged from family or friends and don't know how to bring healing. And the lonely, some are simply lonely. Theirs will be an incomplete Christmas. Jingle Bells will not console them.

Margaret Huffman writes of a young woman who suffered a difficult year. In just one calendar year she suffers a serious illness, the loss of a remaining parent and the end of a relationship. She could not even imagine celebrating Christmas. Early in December she received a brightly wrapped package from a friend. The gift was a tiny gold Christmas tree lapel pin. The card read, "Wishing you even a little Christmas."

That woman later said to someone that the gift was all the Christmas she could celebrate that year. But she now realized that a little Christmas is better than no Christmas.

Friends, there is something deeply profound in that. A little Christmas is better than no Christmas. A little celebration is better than no celebration. A little hope is better than no hope. Faith the size of a mustard seed is better than no faith. And our scriptures

teach that from something small, something large can grow.

In a year that some have experienced loss, Matthew points back to the star and forward to God's voice. The star doesn't eliminate all loss. The star doesn't eliminate all tragedy. The star and voice does make loss more bearable. The star and voice announces that loss is not the final word in our lives, that the goodness of God is still present and there is hope for our tomorrow.

Friends, this Christmas I invite you to look back to the star and forward to the voice. Look, in all things, we live in the embrace of God.

Glória in excélsis Deo, Glory to God in the highest. Amen.