

First United Methodist Church

310 North Rowley, Mitchell, SD 57301

Rev. Keith Nelson, Lead Pastor

keith@mitchellfumc.org

605.630.6586

Last night (Thursday) was the night. The Christmas decorations came down...tree and all. One of our cats had her favorite spot under the Christmas Tree. It was her jungle. She sat in her spot until the bitter end as branch by branch the tree was dismantled above her. Only 11 months to go, Calie, and the tree will be back.

Now before we get to far away from Christmas, I have a question or two for us all; When was the last time you played a part in the Christmas story? What was the character that you played? I can tell you exactly the last time I participated in living out the Christmas Story. It was exactly two weeks ago. I was in my office when a young gentleman came up the stairs to the office area. He was needing some assistance. He'd already been to one church and was told, "No Room in the Inn." That's when he came to our church.

If you remember, it was bitter cold, those days leading up to Christmas. He was simply looking for someone that could help him with a night or two at the Rodeway Inn. It was a common story; traveling through the area, car issues of some sort. He was looking for shelter, and the phrase that he said several times was, "This isn't for me. This is for my kids." There was a pleading in his voice and his eyes. He was serious...this was a dad trying to care for his family. In that moment I knew I was in a modern-day Christmas story. I was the innkeeper and before me was a pleading father.

Instantly I was thinking about Joseph from Luke's story of Jesus birth. Was this man in the hallway expressing for me what Joseph must have felt, trying to find a place for his "in-labor" wife to have some shelter and a place to have her baby? Fortunately, we do have some funds available and our church was able to cover the cost of a couple nights stay to get this family through Christmas. I also invited them to come back to our church the next evening for the postponed Love Feast meal – and they did come. Christmas became very real for me in that brief moment of talking with this young father. I was the Inn Keeper. And though the Christ Child wasn't a part of this scene being lived out...he was. Because in my mind I heard the words, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you do it to me." Matthew 25:40

The Christmas Story is fading into the background of our journey, for the moment. Yet, the challenge for myself and all of us, is that we would keep the Christmas Story alive and real in our lives all year round. How can we each be the angels proclaiming the message of Good News that has come to us? How can we be the Wise Men, searching for this new King that our world still desperately needs? Maybe, in some way we can be Mary, bearing the Christ Child, the hope of the world, not physically of course, yet bearing the Christ so others may experience the presence and love of God in our world today. How can we be the Innkeeper, somehow offering space in our "full" lives so that the Christ can be born anew in the world an in our lives?

There are so many ways we get to live out the Christmas Story. I look forward to hearing the ways that we have each experienced and lived Christmas throughout 2018...and not just in the month of December. Living out the story is exactly what our faith calls us to do.

Serving Together,

Pastor Keith

Because of the cold weather, attendance was down last Sunday, so we're still looking for some folks to take up the **Year End Challenge** and give an extra gift so we can close the books on 2017 on a positive note.

Remember, Sunday School begins again this Sunday with an **Epiphany Party** for the Children, at 9:45. Worship is at 8:30 and 11:00 am. Hope to see you all at church this weekend.