

1)

So here you are. You’ve made it to the middle of your 2020 Christmas Eve service. Some of you have started to think about it several weeks ago: *“What will Christmas Eve 2020 look like this year? Will churches be open? Will it be safe to go? Will we watch a church service online or go to an outdoor service?”*

2020 is different. It started to be different 9 months ago. Some people say that 2020 is kind of a “misfit year” – a year that just wasn’t so great....

“A misfit year.” - I don’t know if that is true but I want to share a powerful story about misfits that I came across recently.

You are probably familiar with the story of “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” (Not well known in Germany...) In the story Rudolph ends up on “The Island of Misfit Toys,” a land that was filled with all the poor, rejected toys that no one wanted. (*Square wheeled toy engine, a toy elephant covered in dots...*)

Did you know that when the movie first aired on TV in 1964, all those misfit toys stayed on the island never to be rescued?ⁱ Viewers back then were not pleased with that ending at all – in fact, children from all over the country send hundreds of letters complaining that the toys were just left forgotten on that island.

So the next year they changed it. From 1965 on the story has Rudolph and Santa come back to the island. They invite the misfit toys into the sleigh and gift them to kids around the world.

Thanks to the complaining children from 1964 the story of Rudolph is more like a real Christmas story. Maybe you were one of those kids that complained about the original version. Thank you for doing so, because now the story of Rudolph shows us something about the truth of the original Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ.

You see, the Christmas story in the Bible tells us that what God did through the birth of his son is the foundation for what Rudolph and Santa do in the revised version of 1965. Just like Santa in the fictional story invited all the misfit toys into his sleigh, so God is inviting the whole world to jump on board the wonderful Gospel sleigh of his son Jesus. There is room for everyone, no matter how much of a misfit you feel you are. God loves you and has a purpose for you.

2)

I don’t know how much you connect with the image of being a misfit. I hope you don’t take it offensively.

I personally have to say that I resonate with the idea of being a misfit. Sure, there are areas in my life that I think are good, some people might even say: “That Markus Wegenast, he’s a decent guy.”

But there are other things about me that I'm absolutely not proud of. There are areas of my life that make *me* a misfit. These last 9 months of living in a pandemic, for example, I've noticed that my fuse got shorter and that I've displayed other misfit behaviors.

Maybe you have found that about yourself too. Maybe you've felt that even as a society we have treated *each other* like misfits if we didn't vote alike in the last election. Maybe you've felt that the way local authorities and school boards have dealt with the pandemic was a big misfit.

During the Advent and Christmas season we hear so much about peace, hope, love and joy, but this year many of us feel that there is a lot of 'mis-fitting' stuff going on: We feel that instead of peace we have anxiety, instead of hope we carry desperation, our joy is reduced, and our love is *compromised*.

That's why it is so powerful that the story of Christ's birth reminds us that God's love for this world is *un-compromised*. God has proven to the world that he loves us no matter how much of a misfit we feel we are. No matter how many un-lovable things we find in us or in this world – God does not give up on us.

And this gives me hope. I don't want to give up on myself just because 2020 is a misfit year and because I find a lot of misfit behaviors in me. God offers to redeem every misfit – whether it is a person or an entire year. And I think he wants us to do the same.

3)

Look around yourself. Do you see things that you find are un-lovable and a misfit? Sure there are "things" that are unlovable that should be eliminated. But when it comes to people, God shows us a different way.

He sent his son into this world to show us that there is something worth redeeming in each and every single one of us. God showed us that people are worth saving when the convenient solution would be to leave them abandoned.

Do you think you can make this the attitude toward your neighbors? Imagine how much things around you will change when you start living out the saving attitude that God displayed on Christmas.

Imagine what people around you will look like when you don't focus on that which is a misfit and un-lovable but instead on the potential that every misfit in your life has?

That is what God did with us – this kind of hope was born in the stable in Bethlehem and walked among us and went all the way to a cross for us.

May you be inspired by the love of God in Christ. I think you need it to make it through the challenges of life, regardless of whether there's a pandemic or not.

May you be inspired to love God and all the misfits in your life, including yourself. Amen.

ⁱ Almost Christmas, Nashville 2019, p. 109ff