

December 26, 2010

Matthew 2:13-23

Presence

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Presence. That's what we are talking about today. I hope you had a great Christmas celebration yesterday. We sure did. I hope that yesterday was filled with many blessings as we celebrated the birth of Jesus and his presence among us. I also hope he will be born again in you this day, in this place, during this time of worship.

I was thinking yesterday about Jesus' birth and the impact that event had on human history. I was thinking how, within a mile radius of the manger in Bethlehem, hundreds of people were clueless about what was happening in their midst. People were all wrapped up in the little details and busy-ness of their lives; what they were going to eat, where they were going to sleep, who was in town and who wasn't, who was doing what and to whom. Meanwhile, eternity was breaking into the present. God was entering their world in a whole new way. And many people didn't even know it.

Life is like that, isn't it? We get all wrapped up in the details of our lives and lose sight of the big picture. It's easy to do.

The day after Thanksgiving, as we all know, has become the unofficial official start of the Christmas season. Although I have a feeling it's going to be backed-up to Halloween if we aren't careful. The Friday after Thanksgiving has become the busiest shopping day of the year. Did you hear about the fight that happened between shoppers this year as they pushed and shoved each other to purchases they wanted? It got pretty violent. In a radio interview on Black Friday, one shopper said, "Unless you're an experienced shopper, it can be really dangerous out here today."

What's wrong with this picture? People fighting, doing bodily harm to one another, to buy gifts to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace.

Like the people who flooded into Bethlehem so long ago, we can easily get wrapped up in the details of the moment, which blocks our view of what God is doing in our lives, blocks our view of God's powerful presence in our lives.

Perspective has a lot to do with it. Our lives can easily become nothing more than a struggle to just get by, just coping day by day, depending on our experience and our perspective.

It happens. Since 9-11 we don't feel as secure as we used to. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan continue. People are dying every day to make this world a better place. The election last month did more to divide our nation than it did to unite us. Corporate greed and government spending continues to run a muck. All of these things have us living microscopic lives – lives that are focused on the details. Lives of merely coping, surviving, just getting by.

I believe God wants us to do more than just cope, more than just survive, more than just get by. I believe God wants us to thrive. Christmas reminds us to live a Christ-centered perspective.

Christmas changes our perspective from the microscopic to the telescopic, from being consumed with the present (and presents) to looking forward to the future with high hopes of what God will do next because of God's abiding presence in our lives.

Our reading for today reminds us of how messed-up the world really is and why we need Jesus. Listen now to our reading from Matthew the 2nd chapter. (Matthew 2:13-23).

The wise men were searching for Jesus – to give him presents.
Herod was searching for Jesus – to do away with his presence.
The shepherds were searching for Jesus – to be in his presence.

Who or what are you searching for this Christmas? And why? Are you living a microscopic life, barely hanging on, focused on the details? Or are you willing, daring to live a telescopic life, searching for something more than just survival, more than just living day by day?

I've met many people in our area who are barely alive, just surviving. They're busy, busy with life. But they're dead, spiritually empty, not really living just going through the motions. Do you know people like that? You can see it on their faces. They're searching for something but they are looking in all the wrong places.

Question: Did you get everything you were hoping for this Christmas and still feel there's something missing?

The other day I was reading to my daughter the story of Snow White. Remember that classic love story how a beautiful young woman eats a poisoned apple and falls into a deep sleep. No one could wake her up, not even the seven vertically challenged people she hung out with. No one could wake her until a prince, the love of her life, comes into her world and wakes her with a kiss. She awakens and comes to life again finding the joy of her life.

Folks, that's Jesus for us. He is the love of our lives. Better yet, we are the love of his life. He comes into our world to wake us up spiritually, to bring us back to life, to grant us real life, with a real purpose for real living. He comes to resurrect us and equips us not with happiness. Happiness is situational. He equips us to live with joy, true joy.

Two days before Christmas I stopped by the bank. As the clerk was taking care of my banking needs, I said to her, "I hope you get everything you wish for this Christmas." She looked deep into my eyes and said, "I already have..."

So too have we. We have Jesus. More importantly Jesus has us.

I don't know why you're here this morning. I'm glad you are. Maybe you're here out of a sense of obligation or tradition. Maybe your parents or your spouse made you come. Maybe you were scheduled to serve. Maybe you're searching for something more. We could all be at home enjoying our Christmas presents right now but we're here. And I'm glad you're here.

I hope you are here to enjoy God's presence because God is here. And since God is here; our search, whatever that search might be, can end right here, right now.

Whether we want to admit it or not, we tend to be more like Snow White than we are like the wise men or Herod or the shepherds. Snow White didn't go looking for her prince, the prince came to her. Today we celebrate the fact that our prince, the Prince of Peace, has come to us, searches for us and finds us.

If our greatest need has been information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need is life and forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.

The Prince of Peace has come to awaken us to a spirit-filled life with him. To awaken in us the person God created each one of us to be, inviting us to live life with purpose and meaning and adventure that will change us and the world around us because of the joy we have in Jesus' presence.

Usually, when a baby is born, we like to hold that baby cooing and fussing making a fool of ourselves. Don't we? Or is that just me? But this baby, this child born in a manger, comes to hold us, to embrace with a love, making a fuse over us. We share a love with Jesus that will never let us go.

I invite you to join me in living a telescopic life as we move into 2011. Let's focus not on the details but on the big picture. God has awakened us to look to the future with high hopes of what God is going to do next because of God's presence in our lives. Amen.