

12/26/21
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Now What!!

Here we are—the day after Christmas. It's time for the decorations to come down, those beautiful, bright, festive colors that light up the season disappear and we are faced with: Now What!!

We've spent 4 Sundays preparing for the birth of Jesus and focusing on Hope and Love and Joy and Peace. You could say we have been basking in the Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace that the Messiah brings.

After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had at least 40 days to perform all things according to the law of the Lord which would have included the circumcision, Mary's time of purification, the presentation of Jesus at the temple, and the arrival of the Wise Men. Some scholars think it might have been up to 2 years before the Wise Men arrived.

We remember that before Jesus' birth, Mary made the trip to see Elizabeth who was pregnant with John, which was itself a miracle in her old age. Elizabeth validated that Mary was to be the mother of the Lord. At Jesus' birth, the shepherds were drawn into the picture and they validated that this was the Christ child, and then the Wise Men, the Magi came and presented "royal" gifts. When Jesus was presented at the temple two people, Simeon and Anna were yet others that validated that this was the Messiah. I'll call them their support group!! The group of those "in the know" had gotten bigger. I think Joseph and Mary needed those "others" to remind them that this was the Christ child.

In our scripture reading, after the Wise Men left, Joseph was told in a dream to take Mary & Jesus and flee to Egypt, we heard about the killing of the children, and the return from Egypt. Well, all the good festive feelings and our preparation times and looking forward to the Christ's birth and the excitement and celebration—what happened????

This is the Messiah who brings hope, love, joy and peace. It feels like the bottom fell out of things. In a way, maybe it feels like when we take all those decorations down and are left with the bareness, the emptiness and the let down.

We ask ourselves: Now What? Is it over? Is that all there is? Or is it a new beginning?

It is interesting to note that Joseph was told to flee to Egypt which was known as slavery, now it was going to be their protection, their sanctuary.

We read on in Matthew: When King Herod died, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph saying that they were free to return to Israel. When Joseph heard that Herod's son was now ruler he was afraid to take his family and in another dream he was told to go to Galilee and they went to the town of Nazareth.

What a journey! Joseph and Mary were exercised in hearing the angelic messages and instructions of God. As we say, this wasn't their first rodeo. They had experienced some miraculous things God had told them. It was an anchoring in a faith in what God says He will do, He is able to bring it about. This is a trust worthy God; especially in spite of the darkness of the world.

As we've been preparing for the birth of Christ, Christ has been at work preparing a birth in you. How do I know that? Because that's what Jesus does. With that I have to ask: Do you know what He's been preparing to birth in you? Most times I don't have a clue. Most times I don't think He's birthing anything!

I'd like to share a song I wrote way back in 1992—

God our Father, sent His only son.

Conceived by the Spirit, God's will to be done

Mary a virgin, was the vessel He used

A common maid servant just like me and you

Now in this hour His search still goes on

Looking for vessels to manifest His son

Are your one? Are you one? Are you one?

Jesus our Savior has a wondrous plan

He calls His children to be His feet and His hands

Go tell your neighbor Jesus loves sets you free

The miracle of Christmas we all can receive

God is stirring in the hearts of us all
Urging us now to respond to His call
Give your all! Give your all! Give your all!

Now in this hour His search still goes on
Looking for vessels to manifest His son
You are one! You are one! You are one. **YOU ARE ONE.**

Our scripture this morning speaks to me about the reality of life. God is working in all of us for the sake of the body of Christ. It isn't just about me or about you, it's about the relationship we have with each other as we struggle with living the life that we know God wants us to live. We are all in different places on this journey and we need each other. When I'm down, you can help lift me up. When I need help to find my way, there you are offering your hand and wisdom. We are each other's support group!

The bottom line is this: when the trials, temptations, and the "not-expected" come, we need to be anchored in Jesus and we help each other to do that. We need to be anchored in our identity in Christ, the knowing who we are. It's knowing what God says about us. And knowing that God's will will be done in our lives. There was nothing that could stop Jesus from coming into our world as one of us and fulfilling His calling or purpose. Hebrews 12:2 says "...Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame..." We were the joy, we are the joy, all of His children throughout the ages, that were set before Him and we now are called to participate in taking up our cross, laying down our life for one another.

This life that we have been called to live, the life that has and is being birthed in us, is not specifically about us! Oh, we reap the benefits but it's about what is good for the whole body of Christ, the good of all of us at Aldersgate, our community, state, country, and world.

Galatians 5:23" The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the things that God is birthing in all of us. And even when the bottom seems to fall out from under us, it is just a delay, a side step of protection maybe for the miracle that God is birthing in us.

And I don't have to tell you that we are in desperate need of laying down our lives and taking up our cross to birth and share the love of God. So now what?

I think it is appropriate for our mantra as John Wesley declared:

- Do all the good you can.
- By all the means you can.
- In all the places you can.
- At all the times you can.
- With all the people you can.
- As long as ever you can.

Amen!