**December 24, 2014 – Christmas Eve**

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All over the world, over the past few days, preachers were cranking out Christmas Eve sermons. Some posted on Facebook a few days ago that they were almost done, which was met by either disbelief or dismay by the rest of us. Show offs!

One Episcopal priest in Massachusetts offered this “helpful” advice:

*For my fellow preachers: If you're having trouble cranking out that Christmas Eve sermon, remember my easy-to-follow, fool-proof prescription for homiletic success -- Just make it profound, moving, funny, theologically sound, accessible, challenging, inviting, and short. But mostly short.*

I’m taking that last part very much to heart, believe me! Besides having to write two sermons in less than a week, the main problem with today’s text is that it’s so darned FAMILIAR! What can you say about what may be the most familiar and beloved story in the whole New Testament?

One of the things I noticed when I was trying to look at this story with fresh eyes is all the movement. “In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered…[and] all went to their own towns to be registered.” All the world, including Joseph and his very pregnant wife to be, Mary. The whole world was on the move.

Then we meet the shepherds, watching over their flocks at night. They’re perfectly content to stay put, as they do every night, until an angel, and then a whole host of angels, travels to earth to bring them the good news. Once they get over their shock, and probably not a little terror, they take what the angels have to say to heart and scurry over to Bethlehem to see this newborn king for themselves. The story doesn’t say if they brought their sheep along or not, but either way it would represent quite a departure from their usual routine.

Of course, Luke doesn’t mention the three Magi – that’s Matthew’s story to tell – but we can still imagine them on their way to Bethlehem from the East. And all of this movement revolves around one point. It all revolves around Jesus. Jesus is the center point of the cosmos at that moment.

There is a lot of both theological and scientific speculation about the way the universe started, but a lot of that thought thought has gone into the Big Bang Theory. Well, like the explosion, or whatever it was, set the universe into motion, this little baby being born in a stable in a somewhat insignificant town has set something else in motion. Something as big as the universe.

It set our salvation in motion. Our redemption.

Christmas is a beautiful season of wonder, but let’s not forget that it’s also a season of revolution and change. It was in first century Palestine under the thumb of the Romans, and it still is today. Nothing could possibly be the same now that Jesus is here with us.

Because he IS here with us, right here, right now. Don’t be lulled by the feeling that this all happened long ago. Jesus is here, right now as he promised, whenever two or three are gathered in his name.

When we gather at this table to celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus is with us. When we greet each other in the name of peace, he’s with us. And when we walk out that door to continue our celebration of his birth with our families, he is with us.

As the angels are always saying, “Don’t be afraid!” Don’t be afraid to let God in and let him work in your life. Don’t be afraid to tell people what God has done for you. Don’t be afraid of the changes that might come about in your life if you entrust that life to God. Don’t be afraid to care, to give, to love.

The universe is still expanding, and God’s redemptive work, started in that stable so long ago, is still on the move. This year, let’s all look for ways to be a part of that movement, that revolution. To paraphrase Teresa of Avila her poem that I recite often, “Christ has no body now on earth but ours.”

I want to read something from Steven Charleston, the retired bishop of Alaska. I thought it fit perfectly.

*The beauty of your life is contained in its simplicity. You were born to be an agent of grace, sharing kindness into the world. You are an unconscious healer, restoring hope into the world. These two simple definitions are a spiritual job description. They represent the core of your calling. I believe they describe all of us, uniting us into a shared purpose. Beyond all of the differences we construct among ourselves, we have a common task. Agents of grace. Sources of hope. If we see ourselves in this way, the complexity we imagine becomes the simplicity we are.*

It’s up to us. Let’s be agents of grace. Let’s get out there and continue Christ’s revolution of love without fear. Because Emmanuel has come and God is truly with us – this night and always. And as Paul says, if God is with us, who can be against us?

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to all people on earth!

And have a Merry Christmas!