

Dec 29, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: 1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26; Psalm 145; Colossians 3: 12-17; Luke 2: 41-52

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Merry Christmas. It's a whole season—twelve days after Christmas.

The texts today are quite marvelous. The parents take baby Jesus to the Temple—the Temple which had stood for more than 400 years—to receive the blessing. And the prophet Simeon and prophetess Anna welcome this child. They are surprised. After years of prayer, and fasting, and meditation, contemplation, devoting their elderly years to this anticipation of the breakthrough of God—it happens for them! They are dismayed, overwhelmed, grateful in heart. And then [they] offer this most strange and painful blessing: *'Mary, this child destined for the rise and fall of many will break your heart. Your heart will be pierced because he will be a sign of contradiction'* [Luke 2:33-35] —not just going contrary to people's expectations, but a sign of contradiction, overturning the way we think and see our lives, and think what it is to be holy. He will change all that and be confronted for it—and it will pierce your heart.

No parent wants a blessing like that. This, of course, is after his impoverished birth story, seemingly abandoned and alone, having no resources. And shortly after this. The family has to flee for their lives. That's part of the basic Christmas Story. They fled for their lives like refugees, because King Herod is out to kill this baby.

They fled to Egypt for a couple of years. Refugees are at the heart of the Christmas story. Shall we claim them? (Some of us had had that kind of experience.)

And Herod, this great king, is terrified of infants, and of his own shadow, and anybody threatening him. And the painful truth is King Herod is alive and well today. He lives on our border, terrified of children—imprisoning, killing them. He lives in Sudan; he lives in Gaza. He is still operating. That's why the story is in the Scriptures.

The next time we hear of Jesus in the Temple is when he's 12 years old. He comes there, and he meets with the scholars, and they converse. And there was just deep awe of his wisdom and knowledge, and how he is growing—formed and shaped by this practice of God. [Luke 2: 41-47]

And then it's about 20 years later. The next we hear is when he cleanses the Temple, [Luke 19: 45-46] a one-man show, comes in destroying all of the merchants' efforts, tearing down the Temple operations. It's been there for a hundred years. Try that at the Vatican; try it at Peace!! We'd kick him out, wouldn't we? *'What do you think you're doing in the name of God? One man. He's out of his mind.'* In another portion of the Scriptures, Mary is sent to fetch to get him because he's crazy. [Mark 3: 21] *'It's clear. He's crazy. Bring him home. Help him. He needs serious help.'*

Next thing we hear is his prediction about the Temple. *'Not one stone will remain upon another.'* [Matthew 24: 1-2] *'What are you saying?? This is the heart of our Jewish faith—the audacity!'*

And then at his death moment, crucified, the Temple curtain is ripped in two—powerful symbol/sign that the Holy of Holies, the most sacred beyond sacred, has now been opened to the ordinary people. The immediacy of God is here now for everyone. That which protected the Holy of the Holiest from us—from us,. (*'You're the problem. Don't you get that?'*) [is] torn open because we're all being welcomed in.

And then a few years later, the Temple is torn down. Destroyed utterly. No stone left on stone. Gone.

So, where is the Temple? It becomes Christ, a human God-man, divine, living, breathing being always on the move. Way Truth Life. Truth is not a 'what' for us. What is the truth? Who is the Truth? This embodiment, this profound sign of contradiction, who's deeply committed to opening our hearts and minds to understanding this life and ourselves in a new way. And he says, *'You are the temple. You've arrived. Congratulations!'*

And we go, *'Really? And I'm out of here. Who wants that? Who wants to bear the choice that in each of our lives, day by day, every decision we make, and how we live together, and contribute to the well-being around us, this is how God is acting in the world?'* This is the Living Temple.'

Oh, and it is a Spirit now who is the inspiration, the motivation, the catalyst, the creativity of God Among Us To, which we're invited to pay attention. That One who's always on the move like the wind, can't tell where it comes from, where it's going. The church is a dance. *'No, I just want the old institution. Don't you? You can count on it.'*

A 'Sign of Contradiction'. Even our expectations play us false. Are we willing to pay attention like that?

We turn life into an *'It'*, [a] thing outside of us—we want to control *'It'*. We have all kinds of categories for all kinds of people, don't we? It makes life simpler. *'There's that kind, you know what I mean? And then, there's this kind.'* Oh God, right? *'But at least we know how the thing is organized, right?'* And we turn people we love in our families into *'Its'*. *'He's always that way.'* *'You'll never change.'* *'I give up—but don't change because then I have to think about it.'* *'Why are you doing that to me?'* *'I just figured it all out. I got my categories set. They're all organized.'* It's so much simpler, isn't it? We commodify everything. We turn ourselves into *It*. *'Hmm, I can't take it anymore. I give up. I'm done. I'm out of here. Who needs this?'*

There's too much pain right now in your faces, confirming that that is so true, isn't it? *'Just when I thought I was on top of it; I had it figured out.'* And algorithms, not who we are. So hip we are somatic. *'Once I know your patterns, I've got you under control, right? "I know how he works. Just look where he shops. And yeah, that's him. That's it."*

Pathetic—we believe we've arrived. *'we have algorithms.'* It's sad.

It's the Spirit who opens us up again and again—to the welcoming of our own selves, let alone each other—through a gladness of heart which can break through, which shuts down that world of 'It' and commodifying, and says, *'It's about relationships.'* That connection of the heart—that's what it's about—living in a way that nourishes ourselves and others, keeps the dance of life going, makes us glad to be alive—glad to be alive.

It's not 'It.' It's the Spirit.

Hamlet got it wrong. It is not, *'To be or not to be.'* It is, ***'To be with or not to be with'***—creation, my friends, people in need, refugees. Those are signs of contradictions. *Will we be with or not be with?*

That's the invitation of Christmas. The God who comes to us through an infant in order to become intimate with us—with us—that we might become infinite.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.