

December 20, 2009

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7

Sermon: "What do you want for Christmas?"

What do you want for Christmas? That's the question that we hear this time of year. What do you want for Christmas? That's the question that gets asked to children of all ages, young and old. What do you want for Christmas? It is an open-ended question that has answers given that range from inexpensive to really expensive items and sometimes includes things like Peace on Earth or everyone is home for the Holidays.

What do you want for Christmas? Take a few moments and think about the times that you have been asked this question, maybe even this year. What were your answers? What did you think about? Can you buy these items in a store or are they wishes and dreams?

What do we really want for Christmas? This question invites us to ponder the possibilities. There is no answer that is out of reach. And there is no right or wrong answer. There are no price limits. There are no qualifiers. There are no disclaimers of limited supplies. It is an open-ended question that engages our imagination, that allows us to name our deepest desires and gives us the opportunity to express our deepest hopes. This question opens our minds and our hearts to opportunities that we never anticipated that we could or would experience in our lives. This question invites us to really look deep within our hearts to discover what we want more than anything, what we hope for more than anything, what we desire more than anything right now, in this moment, on this day?

What do we want for Christmas? This question really is just another way of asking what do we hope for in this life that will bring us joy, bring us peace, and bring us wholeness? What do we hope for as people who live in a world that is battered, bruised and broken? What do we hope for as people who live in a world driven by greed and where the least of these gets pushed to the sidelines?

And there is another way to look at this question: through the eyes of faith? What do we hope for as people of faith who hold to the promises of God? What do we hope for as people of faith who have experienced God's goodness, God's grace and God's love in our lives? What do we hope for as people of faith who worship a God who has named and claimed us, who placed the stars in the skies, and who formed our every fiber of our beings?

As people of faith what do we want for Christmas this year?

I wonder if our list includes "Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, Mighty God, and Prince of Peace". I wonder if our list includes a Messiah born in a stable to a young mother, worshipped by shepherds and kings alike. I wonder if our list includes the Son of God dying on the cross to bring new life for you and me.

What do we want for Christmas? As we engage our imaginations, we hear these words from the prophet Isaiah and we begin to ponder the possibilities...the possibilities of our God, the

possibilities of God's love, the possibilities of God's grace, the possibilities of God's promises fulfilled.

And that is what Isaiah is inviting us to continue to do today, to ponder the possibilities of God working in our world, the possibilities of God's love changing this world and to really look within our hearts to discover our hopes that find strength and courage in the promises of our God.

He is inviting us to open ourselves up to opportunities that are beyond our imagination and to experience God's peace, God's justice, God's grace and God's love. Isaiah is telling us that to really understand that our is working in our world, that we have to embrace and trust that God gives us what we need as people of faith to sustain us, to give us strength for the journey and to show God's passionate, un-ending love for us.

In these words that we hear from the prophet Isaiah again this Advent season, we understand that we are invited us to place all our hopes and our fears in God who has watched over us from the beginning, who still works in our world, and who will continue to work through simple ordinary acts of love to bring us wholeness and healing as God's very own people to bring about the Kingdom of God.

Through these words of Isaiah that are so familiar to us, we are invited to once again open ourselves up to the possibilities that are beyond our imagination, that are beyond our comprehension, and to understand that the plans that God has for us are so much better than what we had planned for ourselves. These plans may not be we expect or even prefer but God's plans are so much more than we could ever hope for as people of faith. Because God's plans are designed for good, are designed to give us a future, are designed to show us God's unconditional love and grace.

In our Scripture today, we find Isaiah having a conversation with King Ahaz and he is telling the King to ponder the possibilities . But all King Ahaz can ponder is that the Kingdom of Israel is in trouble. There is a war going on all around them and it is slowly making its way into the Israelite territory. And so King Ahaz is trying to plan out a strategy. Who does he turn to for support? Who does he turn to re-enforcements? Who does he turn to for protection? He is making plans for this time, this day, for this moment.

And Isaiah comes in and says, "Open your mind. Think beyond this world and think about the Kingdom of God. King ,you've got it all wrong. You're looking in the wrong places. Trust God and God's promises. Know that God has promised a day of celebration for God's people where the instruments of war will be burned, where the darkness will be no more, where the people of God will be free!" Ponder the possibilities of our God. Ponder the possibilities of our God who works through ordinary act to do extraordinary things that will bring us healing and love. Ponder the possibilities of God's Kingdom and God's grace.

God will act on our behalf and give us what we need to find wholeness and peace. Trust in the Lord always and know that God has worked in the past and will work again in the future. Isaiah asks the King what is it that you want more than anything right now? He asks what do you hope for at this time? Isaiah asks King Ahaz this open ended question with no limits, no

disclaimers about limited supplies, and no expiration dates in hopes to engage Ahaz's imagination, in hopes for him to name his deepest desires, in hopes that Ahaz will express his deepest hope and know that that hope rests in God. What is it you want? Isaiah invites the King to ponder the possibilities with him. Isaiah invites the King to open himself up to the opportunities of God's love and God's grace that are beyond his imagination, beyond his comprehension, beyond his temporary finite planning.

Isaiah tells King Ahaz that God has plans for Israel and God will continue to work for God's people that will bring healing and wholeness.

Isaiah tells of this vision where the people of God are free, where there is no more darkness, where there is celebration and great joy. Isaiah tells of this hope where the people of God live in peace and wholeness. He tells of this act of love based on the promises of God. "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us...and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Isaiah tells King Ahaz that God will lift up a Messiah, will lift up a Savior, and this Savior will bring peace not only to Israel but to all of God's creation. And God's plan will be so much more than the king or even Israel ever imagined. Ponder the possibilities. Because that is the way God works and shows God's love for us, through gifts, plans, even possibilities, that we didn't expect, didn't comprehend, or even imagined. God works through ordinary events to bring about extraordinary results.

God has great plans for us and these plans are for good, not disaster. They are plans to give us a future and to give us hope. These plans are so much more than we could ever hope for or ever wanted as people of faith.

We imagine that the God who claims and names us acts in this world only through mighty acts of power, that the God who built the highest mountains, can only be found in grand buildings or wealthy kingdoms. But as we continue our faith journeys we realize that our God can also be found through ordinary acts like a kind word, a simple invitation, a warm embrace, and the birth of a child.

This world does not have the last word. God does. And God does and God will continue to act on our behalf as God's very own.

Ponder the possibilities...that our God took the form of a newborn baby. Ponder the possibilities...that our God came into this world as a vulnerable, helpless being through a young unwed mother who was engaged to a man who made a simple living as a carpenter. Ponder the possibilities that our God loves us so much that God gave God's only Son to die on the cross for you and for me.

Ponder the possibilities that our God is still working in this world, acting in this world, on our behalf.

Ponder the possibilities that our God is calling us to Love God and to love our neighbors, not through a passive love, but with the love that God loves us, with a passionate, an all-consuming, an all-inspiring, an all-encompassing love that knows no end, that knows no boundaries, that knows no limits.

Ponder the possibilities...that we have been shown this gift of love through Jesus Christ. So on this fourth Sunday of Advent, I ask you Midway Christian Church, "What do you want for Christmas?" Open yourselves to the possibilities of our God who claims and names us. Use your imagination and understand that God has great things planned for you, plans that will give you a future and give you hope.

Midway Christian Church, what do you want for Christmas? what do we hope for in this life that will bring us joy, bring us peace, and bring us wholeness? What do we hope for as people who live in a world that is battered, bruised and broken? What do we hope for as people of faith who hold to the promises of God? What do we hope for as people of faith who have experienced God's goodness, God's grace and God's love in our lives?

As people of faith what do you want for Christmas this year?

And let us begin to ponder the possibilities...the possibilities of our God who has named and claimed us, the possibilities of our God who showers us with grace, the possibilities of our God who loves us passionately, completely and unconditionally. This morning, let us begin to ponder the possibilities of our God working through us ordinary people doing ordinary things to bring about extraordinary events.

May open ourselves up to the simple ordinary acts of God's love that fill our lives every day.

men.

Heather McColl
Midway Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)