

The Rev. Kathy Crary

Christmas Eve, 2008

This is the day of big days. This is when we get all of you here at one time. Look around, wave, hello everyone, Hi there. Good to see you. I'm not going to go on and on just because we have you here tonight.

I wonder if Jesus ever felt like he was running out of time. I know we're supposed to be talking about him as a baby, but I have a point to make here.

The disciples are well known as dunderheads. Every time he tried to teach them something, they'd turn it around, mess it up and get confused. Their questions show they have missed the point yet again. And Jesus had limited time to get the message to them. They would be the bearers of that message as the Gospels made it clear. The Gospels also make it clear Jesus knew time was running out. So did he feel like he needed to sit them down one more time and have a heart-to-heart talk with them so they would get it? Now look, guys, here is the heart of the matter, here is the central theme, here is what you need to remember and tell others.

We ask so much of the Christmas season and I feel the pressure of trying to convince you church is okay, Jesus is okay, this congregation is okay, the Episcopal Church is okay.

I want you to have wonderful holidays full of rosy moments, maybe a tear or two of joy, lots of carols, wonderful food and big tables full of people. I want to guarantee that everyone in your family is getting along, that no baby gets fussy between now and about eight o'clock tomorrow night.

I wish you all the presents you could want, all the happiness and contentment you could possibly imagine, all the security and safety any human person or family could dream of.

But I can't.

We have so many conflicts on earth, we have so many expectations of the season, we have so many broken dreams, missing relatives at the table, fears of job loss, economic disaster, compromised health and confused messages from the world around us.

Making peace with Christmas and the conflict of the world around us is a task we've been working on for two centuries. I've heard criticisms from non-Christians and marginal Christians that it doesn't mean anything to do all the festivals and services over and over again. Remarking on the number of services we were having in another church where I served, a 16 year old said, "If you have seen one Christmas Eve service you have seen them all."

I beg to differ, but of course, you knew I would. If the world was perfect, if we had peace on earth, no global warming, everyone shared, no hunger, poverty and death, no loss, fear or disappointment, then maybe a Christmas service would seem irrelevant.

Since that is not the case, here is the straight up story, now that I have you hear. Around here we still believe in Jesus. We believe he is the light of the world and the world could use more of that.

We are trying to love God and love neighbor to the best of our abilities, and sometimes we don't get there. But then, sometimes we DO.

If we didn't need new birth, we wouldn't need Jesus, the manger, the story, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, sheep and goats and cows and such. And we wouldn't need images of sacrifice, a ritual last meal, a cross, the grief or the resurrection, either.

But we do.

Don't ask Christmas season to be something it isn't. The gatherings are great, the food and fun and festivity, go for it. But the season is about Jesus, born again into our hearts, our houses and our places of worship.

You are here, and we are darned glad to see you. What I want you to hear is that this baby tonight will grow up into someone different and wonderful and compelling. I pray you meet him here tonight and spend the next year growing up in faith and hope and love. That is our greatest wish for you this night.