

Christmas Eve 2017
Fr. Pat Young

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Nothing Changes Except Everything!

Nothing changed. God had broken into our world with sound and beauty. Light and hope pierced the dark of gloom and nothing changed.

The prophets of old had spoken of it, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The people who sat in darkness waited and hoped and prayed and longed for Light to dawn.

But nothing changed.

A new mother, unprepared and scared, fleeing with her intended, and had said "yes", it seemed so long ago, without knowing the full responsibility, not knowing her voice would echo through eternity. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant."

Longing for deliverance, for a chance to recognize that her life matters in a world dominated by privilege, power and might. In a backwater town, an afterthought on the best of days, in the middle of nowhere, amid the screaming birth pangs, animal breath and a bewildered carpenter, an unwed refugee teenager brought our salvation, Jesus the Messiah, into the numb and noisy world.

Into humanity's quarreling and bickering and warring came forth God's shimmering light. A whisper, a word so fragile to utter it could destroy it. HOPE. God had done the improbable.

And yet...nothing changed.

Angels, winged messengers of fierce gentleness, clothed in light and overflowing with song, heralded the birth of the Word into the world, but the beauty of their song, the fierceness of their countenance, the light of eternity was lost on certain poor shepherds keeping their flocks by night. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" Message sent. Song ended. Even the angels turned back to their heavenly duties.

Nothing changed.

Living on the borders, the edges, the margins, the unwanted outcasts who tended the sheep, the hired hands who were counted as two steps above nothing, to these angels imparted their celestial song. The shepherds filled with fear and awe at the message of the angels, came and saw and stood for a time gazing at the world's redemption. All of God's self, wrapped the beauty of a baby, the Messiah, the Lord. But no matter how bright the angels, no matter how beatific the song, the sheep needed tending and life does not stop for a screaming squirming baby named Jesus.

Nothing changed.

Dull peace sprawled boringly over the earth, filling the holy night with scent of ordinary. Not even the Romans, the purveyors of power paid any attention. It was a night like any other, unremarkable in its blatant ordinariness.

Nothing changed. Except...everything changed!

God, the Great I AM, the sculptor of the mountains, the crafter of the universe, the voice of creation, entered into our world and changed EVERYTHING!

"We, unaccustomed to courage, exiles from delight, live coiled in shells of loneliness, until love leaves its high holy temple and comes into our sight, to liberate us into life." from Maya Angelou's Touched by an Angel.

On Christmas nothing changes, yet everything changes. Our world continues along its path, as God breaks into our humanity like a stealthy thief in the small hours of the night, leaving traces of hope and drops of courage along a weary path.

We often oblivious travelers seeking the lingering presence of the divine, miss the signs of God being born again and again in to our world.

We the followers of this helpless child, this Jesus, we are the ones challenged and called to change everything. We who would prefer a God who crashes into the world with power and authority and great might are called to the daily work of Christmas.

God comes into our lives, not with blazing glory but in the quiet of a stable.
God enters our world not with sound and fury but in the whimpering of a new born child;

Not with power and authority but in the helplessness of a baby;
Not with class or privilege but as a displaced refugee with no nation of his own.
The work of Christmas is our work. God enters and changes everything!

We are the ones who must love our enemies, turn the other cheek, bless those who curse us, and love without boundaries. We are the ones who must visit the prisoners, feed the homeless, and welcome the stranger. Nothing changes, except everything changes with us. God's work of redemption is done through the work of our hands. We are the ones who must seek the traces of hope and drops of courage in a world weary by division and strife.

Now more than ever does our world need Christmas, not the pristine angels or the idyllic shepherds of movies and Christmas cards, but the real, messy, unsure and often fearful carriers of the Christmas message.

Now more than ever our world needs the followers of Jesus to step out of our places of comfort and our communities of refuge to proclaim, not in words but in action God's favor, God's hope, God's love.

Our world needs Christmas not just today but every day.

God has work to do in this world; it is not enough that we be just, that we be righteous, and walk with God in holiness; it is not enough that we gather and say good things about Jesus in our beautiful places of worship. God needs us!

We, who are worried and wearied and terrified, the broken messengers with a living message. We must go out, like the shepherds to tell of the Good News in the messy, dirty and uninviting places of this world.

We must go out to serve the ones forgotten and counted as nothing, because in them we serve Christ.

God breaks into our world and nothing happens without us!!!

As Howard Thurman, a theologian, educator and civil rights leader has said in "Now the work of Christmas begins"

"When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart."

At Christmas nothing changes except everything!

Amen.