

Christmas Day homily – Rev Judy Steers
Dec 25th, 2020

Christmas Day! The tree is up, the food is being prepared, gifts are wrapped, and we are managing to feel as festive as we possibly can in this impossible and unexpected time that we are living in. Amongst those of us gathered here, there has been lots of conversation about ‘remember when we wondered if we would be back together by Easter?’ And then we thought “Wow – we might not even be back by Pentecost”. Then, after a long summer of online pre-recorded liturgy we were back together, with small congregations here present for a few weeks in the fall, and now, here we are again - me in your living room.

I wish it were another way. But it’s not and we are figuring out how to live with that.

In “A Christmas Carol” which we read last week, there is much talk of generosity of heart and spirit, of ‘keeping Christmas well’, and so we shall. It is going to look different but, that’s ok. In his Rector’s letter yesterday, Paul talked about God creeping in to the silent spaces and the stillness of scaled back festivities, which might give us a glimpse of mystery and wonder that we otherwise might have missed.

If I can offer anything today, it would be to lift up the fact that the moment we celebrate at this time, with so much wonderfully jolly extra baggage – families and friends gathered, great food, gifts from the heart, generosity towards others...that moment had none of those things. In fact, our present time draws us closer to a story which was all about isolation, dislocation, unexpected moments worth pondering in our heart. The story is of a family who traveled alone, of a baby placed in a food trough because it was the most comfortable and dry option available, of those on the social margins who were working a lonely night shift. There’s no food, no family, no gatherings. There was only a glimpse of a turning point, a hopeful ‘maybe’, a breaking open of potential. That’s all. And, it’s not like this is the beginning of a big upswing – no, the story doesn’t get better from here. It has its moments but they too are just glimpses of something new – Simeon in the Temple, the bewildering appearance of magi. But the story is also of fleeing as refugees into uncertainty and a couple of years of dislocation.

Immanuel, God-With-Us, is close to us. God has come to share – not only in our joyous, festive, friend-filled, full-up feasts, but in our dislocation, our isolation. It's not ideal. It's not what we want. But the turning of our hearts towards 'what happens next?' or 'how has life changed?' or 'what is being revealed here?' happen in places like this. That is the Christmas story – and it is connected somehow to what we are living right now. Uncertainty. Dislocation. Loneliness. Wonder. Pondering. And a light breaking in and audaciously proclaiming how to face a new reality - 'Do Not Be Afraid. God is in your midst'.