



Reflections for 2nd Sunday after Christmas, January 3, 2020

Happy New Year!

Welcome church and Facebook friends, I am Lisa Williams, pastor at the San Pedro United Methodist Church and we are glad to be worshiping with you this day.

As we bring in a new year we gather in our virtual platform asking for God's grace and forgiveness. One way we do that is through communion. You are invited to grab something that represents the bread of life and a cup of God's love. All are welcome to join in this sacrament, you just need hands that are open to receive and heart willing to accept God's love.

Please pray with me:

Holy and most amazing God, when you came to us in a stable at Bethlehem, you scattered the darkness and filled your people with new light and joy. We ask that you continue to fill us with your light, that by deed, word, and abundant good humor, we may share your incarnate glory with those around us. In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Inspirer. Amen.

It has been some years now but, for about a decade the first Friday of December was a big event at our house. It started out small and then over the years it grew. People recount waiting to receive "Their Very Fancy Invitation." Now I love to make fancy things and write with fancy pens to make cards, but I was a working wife and mother doing children's ministries for a large church during Christmas so all I could muster was an email with the subject line "Very Fancy Invitation." That subject line became one that people waited for and grew to expect.

Waiting and expecting is what we have been doing this past season. And as we enter into the season of Epiphany, a time of light and mission, a time when we are being invited to show love, to listen compassionately. We are being asked to model reconciliation, to help unit one another not by being right but by humbly loving each other. When done successfully, we begin a movement where people all around us want "in," they begin to seek the invitation.

It was in the middle ages that invitations for gathering first got their start. Families would commission monks who were skilled in calligraphy to craft their invites. By the middle of 1600's the most popular method was engraving. To protect the ink from smudging a piece of tissue paper would be placed on top of the invitation. That is where the tradition of adding tissue

paper began. The invitation was delivered by horse back so to protect the invitation during its travels an outer envelope was used, this is why even today we have double envelopes.

This new season we are about to enter – Epiphany, where we are being invited to shine our light into the mission field, begs the question - do we need to wait for a fancy invitation with tissue paper and a double envelope or should we get right to work?

Well, we can learn a few things about invitations from Psalm 147 and Ephesians 1:3-14 (I encourage you to read them in full, verses are provided below)

Psalm 147 is divided into three sections:

First invitation: verses 1-6 invites us to Sing Praises to God

The community of worshipers – all of us are being invited to participate in praising the Lord and then we are given the reasons for the invitation – because of God’s actions on behalf of the community of faith and all creation. God is gracious (verse 1); God builds up Jerusalem and gathers the outcasts (verse 2); God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (verse 3); God determines the number of the stars and names them (verse 4); God is great and abundant in power and understanding (verse 5); and God lifts up the downtrodden and casts out the wicked (verse 6).

The second invitation invites us to Sing and Make Music to God

“Sing to the Lord with thanks” and “make music to our God.” Because God covers the heavens with the clouds, prepares rain for the grass, and makes grass grow on the hills (verse 8); God gives the animals and the young ravens their food (verse 9); God does not delight in the strength of the horse or the speed of the runner, but rather in those who revere (in the NRSV, “fear”) God (verses 10-11).

The third invitation invites us is to Glorify God

“Glorify O Jerusalem, the Lord; praise your God, O Zion.” This introduces the reason that the singers of the psalm should glorify Jerusalem and Praise God. God strengthens the bars of your gate and blesses your children (verse 13); God grants peace within your borders and fills you with the finest of wheat (verse 14); God sends out commands to the earth and the words run swiftly (verse 15); God give snow like wool and scatters frost like ashes (verse 16); God hurls down hail like crumbs so that no one can stand (verse 17); God sends out God’s word and makes the wind blow and the waters flow (verse 18); God declares statutes and ordinances to Jacob and all Israel, unlike any other nation (verses 19-20).

Here we have a sense that God cares and provides for each individual and each member of the community of faith. That our God is creator and rules over the created order.

Nancy deClaisee-Walford, Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University in Atlanta, GA says,

The closing verses of Psalm 147 outline a process of what I like to call “becoming human” as God’s good creation. We begin with ourselves, attempting to understand who we are in relationship to God; we then observe the world around us and try to fathom God’s place in the magnificent, created order; and then we join with the larger community as we pursue the good for all creation.”

James L. Mays, on page 442 of the 1994 Interpretation commentary on the book of Psalms, sums it up well:

The history of the community of faith is a small part of reality, but the power that moves its course is the same that governs the stars. On the other hand, the processes of the world are vast, impersonal, and uncaring, but the sovereignty at work in the world is the saving, caring God whom Israel has come to know in its history.

The words of Psalm 147 remind the faithful of the nature and character of the God they worship.

Ephesians 1:3-14 provides us with a picture that we are blessed as children of God. It is through God’s wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:8) that we are assured of God’s “plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).

Our invitation is to enter the community of faith, to recognize God as creator of all and to accept that God intimately cares for all humanity.

Paul's words in Ephesians can be summarized in prayer like form:

*Light of life, you came in flesh,
born into human pain and joy,
and gave us power to be your children.
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness
and walk in the way of peace. Amen.*

This new year, we are given an incredible invitation to be reminded of the divine power we share as children of God. As you consider accepting God’s invitation to be a beloved child, I offer these questions to ponder:

How will you look for God’s presence in a fragile world?

How often will you seek the presence of God in your siblings in Christ, in your actions, in your choices, in your freedom?

Will you live into the beautiful dream that God has laid out for you, so you may sing new songs of gladness and walk in the way of peace?

We already have been given the power and the ability to see all that God hopes for us and has planned for us, including the ultimate dignity that belongs to us. The real question is

Are you ready to accept God's "Very Fancy Invitation?"

Communion

As we prepare our hearts and minds for Communion, I invite you to embrace the light of the Christ child filling our tables with hope, peace, joy and love.

Lift up your hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, you made us in your image, to love and to be loved. When we turned away, and let our love fail, your love remained steadfast. By suffering, death, and resurrection of your only Son Jesus Christ you delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us he took the bread, gave thanks to you, O Holy One, he broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over Jesus took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and the blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation,

**but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.
Amen**

Now take your bread hold it in your hand, this is the body of Christ given for you. Take the cup which represents God's love for you; dip the bread in the cup remembering that you are loved, you are worthy, and you are forgiven. **Amen**

Benediction

God of this new year give us the courage and strength to accept your "Very Fancy Invitation," to show others what it means to be loved by your divine grace and how as your beloved children, together we can live into the dreams you have for each of us today, tomorrow, and always. Amen.

Psalm 147

Praise for God's Care for Jerusalem

¹ Praise the LORD!

How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

² The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

³ He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.

⁴ He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.

⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.

⁶ The LORD lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

⁷ Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.

⁸ He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.

⁹ He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.

¹⁰ His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;^[a]

¹¹ but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

¹² Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!

¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.

¹⁴ He grants peace^[b] within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
¹⁵ He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
¹⁶ He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
¹⁷ He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
¹⁸ He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
¹⁹ He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the LORD!

Ephesians 1:3-14

New Revised Standard Version

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ^[a] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,^[b] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this^[c] is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory