

HOMILY CHRISTMAS December 2020

I wonder as I wander,
out under the sky,
how Jesus our Savior did come for to die,
for poor lowly creatures like you and like I,
I wonder as I wander,
out under the sky.

Do you ever wonder why God acts the way that he does in our world? The Christmas story and the story of our redemption are both so familiar to us that we just accept it without giving it much thought. But nothing could have been more of a surprise to the people two thousand years ago. If I did not know what happened two thousand years ago, I never would have expected it myself. The Messiah, the King of Kings comes into the world as a baby, born to poor parents, lives a normal life for 30 years, spends three years traveling around with a group of ordinary people, reaching out to the poor and the marginalized teaching everyone his law of love. Does this sound like the background of a King? Did this get him the power and wealth of a King? It got him brutally tortured and crucified. Why didn't Jesus just come into the world as a great king and straighten everything out for us. That is what the people wanted and expected two thousand years ago. That is what we still want today. Isn't that what we frequently pray for?

That is not what he did two thousand years ago and that is probably not what he is going to do today. Jesus, who is fully human and fully divine, lived a normal life and struggled to learn all the lessons that we need to learn to be productive adults. Jesus is one of us, like a brother or a best friend. Jesus wanted to love and serve everyone that he came into contact

with. He wants to love and serve all of us today, especially ordinary folks like us as well as the poor and marginalized. He wants to be in relationship with us. He is with us today, but are we with him? Jesus gave us an example of how to live and love. He modeled it for us. When he was on earth in bodily form, he did not just take care of everything for us, he worked with us so we could learn. When Jesus fed the multitudes with the loaves and fishes he did not say: “Relax, I have this covered.” He said: “Feed them yourselves. Bring me what you have. Tell the people to recline. Start distributing the food. Gather up the leftovers.” He worked with us to teach us. Jesus performed miracles not so much for the end result, but to teach us who he is. And when loving and serving got him into trouble, he suffered and died for our salvation. That is how much he loves us.

I think Jesus acts in a similar way in our lives today. He usually does not just take care of everything for us. He is still teaching us how to live and love. I know that, but the details of how he acts in our lives are still frequently a total surprise to me. Things frequently work out in ways I never would have expected, so I know it was not just my efforts, so I continue to just try and cooperate with him. We need to be open to God’s promptings. And I believe that Jesus continues to perform miracles today to show us who he is. I have seen them and they are always a surprise. It is the mystery of our faith.

We have been walking in the darkness of this pandemic for a longtime. We heard in the First reading: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Can you see the light? The peace and good will that comes with Christmas always renews my hope that our lives can be different. If you want to see how Jesus is working in the world, look for the

goodness. That is where you will find Jesus. I can see some ways that he is working in our world today. Scientists all over the world have worked together to discover a vaccine that is safe and very effective in record breaking time. This shows me how things can be accomplished when we work cooperatively with one another and with God. All of the essential workers, health care providers, police, fire fighters, first responders, nursing home workers, food providers and many more risk their lives every day so that we can go on living. Look at the goodness there. They are all cooperating with God's plan and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

One of the things that I have learned through this pandemic, and all of the isolation, is that the only thing that really matters is loving and serving others. Everything else is secondary. I hope we do not forget that when things go back to normal. I hope we do not start taking the people in our lives for granted. When I think of some of the petty things that I got upset or irritated about in the past, today I would give anything to be with them again and not be irritated by them. We need to collaborate with one another to make the world better. We need to exercise empathy. We need to stop judging one another. We need to love people for what they are rather than for what we wish they would be. Mend a quarrel. Stop blaming. Build peace. Encourage youth. Forgive. Write a love letter. Listen. Express your gratitude. Take pleasure in the beauty of the earth. Love, and then love again, and once again. And I wonder what surprises God has for us in the New Year.