

HOMILY ~ CHRISTMAS

There was a very wealthy family planning for the baptism of their first baby. They decided that they wanted to make it a formal event at their mansion rather than having it at church. Dozens of guests were invited, and they arrived in their latest fashions. After the guests put their coats and furs on a bed in a bedroom upstairs, they gathered downstairs. When it came time for the baptism, they could not find the baby. After frantically searching, they found the baby buried under the coats and furs. They had lost track of what was important about the celebration, the baby!

In all the busyness of the season, we can sometimes lose track of what is important about Christmas, the baby Jesus. He came into the world as one of us in a human body 2,000 years ago to teach us how to live and how to love. He changed the world. He came in a way that was unexpected. The Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah for many years, but they did not expect him to come into the world as a helpless vulnerable little baby born to unknown poor parents. I think Jesus will come into the world again today in a way we do not expect, but we need to watch for him. With COVID, we have been walking in darkness for almost two years. We can get through this, but we have to do it together. We need to look for the light of Christ to enter the world again today in a new way, a way we may not expect. Jesus does not want us to sit passively by and wait for him to make it all right. We do our part; Jesus does his. That is the way Jesus works in the world.

Jesus already taught us that we must love and serve one another. One of the things that I think is causing a great deal of suffering in our world today is the divisions between people, the polarity, the isolation, the focus upon individual rights and individual interests. This began several years ago, and COVID made it worse. We forgot what Jesus taught us, our responsibility to love and to serve one another. When we encounter people we do not agree with, we make them the bad other; and we respond to them with anger that drives us further apart. Jesus wants us to respond to one another with loving kindness. This is the new Commandment that Jesus gave to us: to love and serve one another.

One of the things we need to do is start really listening to one another. When we hear someone we do not agree with, we frequently hear them; but we are not really listening. We are frequently formulating our response while the person is still talking. That is not really listening. Pope Francis has been talking a lot about

how we need to listen to one another. This is what he said: "Listening means being able to share questions and doubts, to journey side by side, to banish all claims to absolute power and to put our abilities and gifts at the service of the common good." How often do we listen like that when we disagree with someone? We need to build bridges with people we do not agree with. No two people agree with everything. It does not make them the bad other. We need to find a common ground and treat them with loving kindness in spite of our disagreements.

When we really listen to one another, we need to be open to the possibility of rethinking our opinion. Studies have shown that the most successful people are people that are willing to frequently re-think their opinions. I think this was one of the biggest weaknesses to our reaction to COVID. When we learned new information, we were too slow to re-think what we were doing. We have learned a lot over the past two years, and this should have caused all of us to re-think.

There are a couple of reasons why we resist re-thinking our positions. First, it is too much work. I thought through that many years ago, and I am sticking with it. Maybe it is time to re-think. Secondly, we do not want to be wrong. We do not care as much about being right, but we do not want to be wrong. If we cared about being right, every time we got new information we would re-think our position. Maybe that person is not the bad other at all. If we really cared about being right, every time we find ourselves doing something that is not working, we would re-think what we are doing. If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always gotten.

Let's not forget what is important about Christmas, that baby that was born 2,000 years ago. He came to teach us how to love and serve one another. We seem to be more willing to come together in loving kindness at Christmas. This could be a good start. We can get through this, but we have to do it together. Anyone who wants to walk that journey with us at St. Edith is more than welcome. Jesus will help us, probably in ways we do not expect. Let's be open to him.

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim