

Sunday 11th December 2022

Glynde Lutheran Church

Sermon on Luke 2:10-11

Theme: “God’s Christmas gift: given that we may have joy”
“Rejoice in the Lord always”

Introduction:

Well, Christmas is now only just two weeks away.... What are you looking forward to getting this Christmas? What have you asked Santa for? Or what have you asked your wife or your husband or your parents for? Well, I hope that what you get this Christmas gives you some fun times and some happy times....

Story No 1

But I’m realistic enough and I’ve had enough experience of life to know that no gift that you get this Christmas, *or anytime for that matter*, will give you lasting happiness, *a happiness that lasts no matter what*. Let me tell you a story that make this clear.

Actually, it’s a story that Tony Campolo, an American pastor, tells. Some people are really good at telling stories, and Tony Campolo is one of those. I think I’ll let Tony Campolo tell it in his own words. It goes like this:

It was Christmas, and I wanted more than anything to have a set of Lionel electric trains. I had asked my parents, but they told me *that* I had to ask Santa Claus. I was already skeptical about the reality of that red-flanneled saint, but I knew how the system worked. So, on a carefully picked Saturday, I went with my mother to Gimbel’s department store – where the *real Santa* was (I was always confused about the many Santa Clauses that appeared on the streets at Christmas time, so my mother explained to me that the others were Santa’s helpers, but the real one was at Gimbel Brothers). As I stood in front of Santa that particular day, I shouted loud and clear, “I want electric trains”. I said it loud enough for my mother to hear. For that matter, I think half of Gimbel’s heard me.

Christmas morning, I tumbled down the steps and ran over to the pile of presents underneath the tree. I picked up the biggest box, tore away the paper, lifted the lid and found...underwear and clothes from

my Aunt Madeline! I'm a pacifist, but I believe that anyone who gives a seven-year-old boy clothes for Christmas should be shot!

I went through the rest of the presents in a halfhearted fashion, convinced that my hopes would not be realized. But then after a while I noticed a large box, way behind the back of the Christmas tree. And when I pulled it out, the label said "for Tony". I tore open the paper, lifted the lid, and there they were – the Lionel trains *that* I had dreamed about! I picked up the engine, and hugged it to my chest. I loved everybody. My joy knew no bounds. I loved my mother, I loved my father...I even loved my sisters.

My ecstasy lasted for about three hours, and then something happened. It wasn't that I broke the trains. Broken trains could be fixed. Something worse happened to them. They got old! In just three hours, they lost the lustre of newness.

Once they became old, all the king's horses and all the king's men could not restore their lustre again. I started to think, *You can't do much with electric trains anyway. You put them on the track, turn on the switch of the transformer, and they go around in a circle. You watch them, and watch them, and watch them, and that's it. The joy was gone...* (Tony Campolo, *Let me tell you a story*, p. 51-52).

Material things can give you moments of happiness, and moments of joy, but they can't give you a lasting joy, a joy that lasts no matter what!

There is only one gift that does that, and that's the gift that the angel is talking about in the message that he gave to the shepherds: the gift of God's Son, the gift of a Saviour.

Listen again to what the angel said to the shepherds:

"Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born – Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10-11).

The angel tells the shepherds the wonderful news from God that a Saviour, a *Rescuer*, has been born for them and all people. The shepherds would have had very little idea, I guess, of how this baby would be their Rescuer.

Probably they thought that this baby would grow up to be “the Christ”, “the Messiah”, a warrior who would rescue them by kicking the hated Romans out of their country (*cf. Acts 1:6; H. Wendt, TDD, on Messianic expectations*).

But with the benefit of hindsight, we know how this baby in a manger rescued us. He rescued us by suffering and dying on a cross for us, *and taking on himself the blame and the punishment that we deserve for our “sins” as the prophet Isaiah predicted (cf. Isaiah 53:4-6, 10)*.

Story No 2

Let me tell you another story. Again, it is one of my favourite Christmas stories, and it reminds us of what God did for us at the first Christmas so long ago.

It's a story that I call “the Henry Carter story”, because that's whose story it is. Henry Carter is a minister, a pastor, and he relates what happened to him one Christmas as he was trying to work out what to write for his Christmas sermon. I'll let Henry Carter put it in his own words. He writes: **I was working feverishly on my Christmas sermon – the hardest time in any minister's year to find something fresh to say – when the floor mother appeared at my study door. Another crisis upstairs.**

Christmas Eve is a difficult day for the emotionally disturbed children in our church home. Three-quarters of them go home at least overnight, and the ones who remain react to the empty beds and the changed routine. I followed her up the stairs, chafing inwardly at the repeated interruptions. This time it was Tommy. He had crawled under a bed and refused to come out. The woman pointed to one of the six cots in the small dormitory.

Not a hair or a toe showed beneath, so I addressed myself to the cowboys and the bucking broncoes on the bedspread. I talked about the brightly lit Christmas tree in our church next door, and the packages underneath it, and all the other good things waiting for him out beyond the bed. No answer.

Still fretting at the time this was costing me, I dropped onto my hands and my knees and lifted the bedspread. Two enormous eyes met mine. Tommy was eight, but he looked only like a five year old. It

would have been no effort at all simply to pull him out. But it wasn't pulling out that Tommy needed – it was trust, and a sense of deciding things on his own initiative.

So, crouched there on all fours, I launched into describing the menu of the special Christmas Eve supper to be offered after church that night. I told him, too, about the Christmas stocking there, *provided by the women's society*, with his name on it. Silence. There was no indication that he had either heard me, or that he cared about Christmas.

At last, because I could think of no other way to make contact, I got down on my stomach and wriggled in beside him. For what seemed a long time, I lay there with my cheek pressed against the floor. At first I talked to him about the big Christmas wreath above the altar, and the candles in the window. Then I reminded him of the carol that he and the other children were going to sing. And then I ran out of things to say and simply waited there beside him. And as I waited, a small, chilled hand crept into mine.

“You know, Tommy”, I said after a bit, “it's kind of close quarters under here. Let's you and me go out where we can stand up”. And so we did, but slowly, in no hurry. All the pressures had gone from my day, because you see, I had my Christmas sermon. Flattened there on the floor, I realised that I had been given a new glimpse of the mystery of the season.

Hadn't God called us, too, as I'd called Tommy, from far above us? With His stars and His mountains, His whole majestic creation, hadn't He pleaded with us to love Him? And when we would not listen, hadn't He come closer to us? Through His prophets and His lawgivers and His special people, hadn't He got down and spoken His message to us?

But it wasn't until that first Christmas, that God stooped right down to our level, and that He came to live among us in our loneliness and our alienation. And it was only then, that we, like Tommy, dared to stretch out our hand to take hold of His loving hand (*Christmas stories for the Heart*, p. 28-30; modified).

In short, God came to rescue us, *like Henry Carter rescued little Tommy*. That's what Christmas is all about!! Tommy's Christmas was markedly changed by Henry Carter coming down to rescue him.... I can imagine Tommy enjoying all that Christmas in the Children's Home had for him....

In the same way, because of God's rescue of us through Jesus, His Son, we can enjoy all that life has for us (*cf. John 10:10*).

What good news of great joy, God's rescue of us through His Son Jesus is!! Instead of having to live our life weighed down by guilt and in fear of death, we can live our life with peace of mind and without fear of any description.

As we trust in Jesus as our Saviour, we are God's forgiven children now, and we have a wonderful inheritance to look forward to in eternity. Such good news, such wonderful news, gives us an inner joy that no one and nothing can ever take away.

Story No 3

That reminds me about the story of an Afro-American slave by the name of Frank. It's a story that a Baptist pastor in America used to tell. Apparently it happened back in the days before the negroes were set free from slavery in America. In those days, the white folks had their seats in the main body of the church, while the negro slaves had to sit up in the balcony.

The story goes like this:

There was one man named Frank, who constantly disrupted the worship services by shouting words of praise to God *from up on the balcony*, whenever the preacher said something that seemed extra good to him.

Frank's white master was irritated by these constant interruptions during worship, so he told Frank that if he remained silent during the sermon on the next Sunday, he would buy him a new pair of boots. So Frank decided that he wouldn't say a word in response to any good thing that he heard from the pulpit, no matter how wonderful the things that the preacher said about God, so that he would get himself a new pair of boots from his white master.

That Sunday, though, it seemed to Frank that the preacher had some exceptionally good things to say about God, and about what God had done for us through His Son, Jesus. Poor Frank struggled hard to contain himself during the sermon. Several times he almost forgot his promise to his master not to let go with a word of praise, but he kept his lips buttoned by thinking about the new boots that would soon be his. Within his mind, though, there were shouts of “Hallelujah!”.

At one point, however, in the message, the preacher said something just so wonderful that Frank couldn't remain silent any longer. He stood up and shouted at the top of his lungs, “Boots or no boots, praise the Lord!” (*Campolo, Ibid., p. 53-54*).

Jesus is our Saviour, our Rescuer. Praise the Lord!!

Conclusion:

During this Advent-Christmas time, we have been focusing on the theme: “God’s Christmas gift” The four Advent candles remind us that the various benefits that are ours because of this gift: LOVE, PEACE, JOY, and HOPE. The first candle, the candle of LOVE, reminds us that Christmas is all about God becoming a human being out of love for each one of us....

The second candle, *the one we have focused on last week*, is the candle of PEACE. This candle reminds us the baby in the manger, became the man, Jesus, who suffered and died on the cross for all our sins. As we trust in him as our Rescuer, our Saviour, we are receive for ourselves all that Jesus did for us there. As we trust in Jesus, we have PEACE with God....

The third candle, *the one that we are focusing on today*, is the candle of JOY. Through the birth of God’s Son’s for us as the baby Jesus, we know that we are loved by God, and forgiven by God. This fills us we an inner joy that no one and nothing can ever take away....

I love the Children’s song that we sang before, *because it reminds us that the joy that we have in us just bubbles over in our life in smiles, and in rejoicing even in the toughest of times....*

Sing it again with me:

“I’ve got **joy** like a fountain,

I’ve got **joy** like a fountain

I’ve got **joy** like a fountain in my soul, *in my soul,*

I’ve got **joy** like a fountain,

I’ve got **joy** like a fountain

I’ve got **joy** like a fountain in my soul.

May God bless us as “we rejoice in the Lord always” (*Phil. 4:4*).

May you always rejoice in the fact that you have been rescued by God’s Son. May the fact that you are God’s rescued, forgiven child, *as you trust in Jesus as your Saviour*, always bring you joy, no matter what!