

## In Just the Right Place

It's Christmas time, the most wonderful time of the year, and for many people Christmas is time to get pampered. We consume the extras and do the things we normally wouldn't do. This pampering is epitomized by Frango mints, Facials, and new fuzzy blankets. Maybe on a list for someone is an idea of pampering - anyone trying to pamper or being pampered this Christmas? Last week we took our teens downtown, and for me pampering has to do with the fun foods that are available. Donuts of course. And our quest to see the tree in the Walnut Room we paused for a box of Frango Mints. For me the best chocolates in the Chicago area or really anywhere. I'm always surprised at how much chocolate they pack into one box.

And what is surprising to me is how easy it is to get acquainted to being pampered or upgraded. Like have you ever had a rental car a few years newer than the car you've been driving around. And you have the heated seats and steering wheel. The better sound system and overall ride. It's not hard to get used to it. Ever been at a spa or out - offered a glass of champaign or mimosa. Ok. If I have too. This is real hard. But the problem with being pampered is coming back. Coming back from the spa to screaming children. Coming back from the Christmas and dealing with the calories and the spending - and reality without the pampering.

Well if you can relate to the idea of pampering ending, of being demoted and entering back into a much colder reality. Than you get the idea of the first Christmas and what the story is really all about. We have Jesus who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The one to whom every knee will bow whether by choice or by force. And if there was anyone entitled to come to earth and be pampered, to be served hand and foot, to have the penthouse at the Four Seasons. It's king Jesus. But as we are looking at the One Christmas when everything was merry and right. When it all went according to plan we see what he chose as his place of arrival.

We're unpacking the story of Luke 2 during these weeks and consider these words, "she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them." (7) Out of all the places God could have picked for his Son to be born...what's his choice? Not the Ritz, the Four Seasons, nope a barn. A place for animals. What's off with this picture, one of these things is not like the other.

And we've so romanticized the place of his birth, we're tempted to miss the point. There is one Christmas song that we've even sung here that romanticizes this place. There's a song called welcome to our world. And it's fine song but the title of welcome. This is not a welcome place. Or we have the picturesque nativity scene. Kind of pretty. Snow falling, everything just so. But have you ever been to a barn with animals? Smelly, disgusting, they are placing the Son of God's head in the place where animals eat, and I'm not sure they sanitized before hand. No the first Christmas, and the environment Jesus is entering into is less like eating a box of Frango Mints, and more like the storming of Normandy beach. It's hostile, smelly, chaotic. It's filled with peril as the ruler Herod wants to kill him, and quickly they'll have to flee to Egypt. Welcome to our world, welcome to the fray more like.

But this was just the right place, the perfect place. For it signaled what kind of King this would be. Not a King who fits all our pictures of corruption where might makes right. And those in power who use that power to get their way. No it signaled this King would be a servant King. The tenor of his reign would be different. And it also signaled what kind of followers he would desire. Those who put periods of pampering in perspective. Those who know pampering is nice, but there is something better than pampering - and it is purpose. Our purpose to serve as he served, to live as he lived, and love as he loved - so all could know salvation through this servant King. Yes as we look at this Christmas we know it can't be perfect. Only one Christmas went according to plan. And to have a Christmas like that one *we need to chose purpose this Christmas*. And as we get our bearings over what that purpose is we turn to our lesson from Philippians which directs us and reminds us why Jesus came. Why he was born in a barn. Can you turn to the person next to you and say, "Humility is the key."

The news tends to nauseate me. I'm not sure if you're on the same page. And I think the main reason I'm nauseated is because depending on who you are listening to or what channel you are watching they seem to present only side or one spin to the story. CNN or FOX depending on your flavor will have a different spin. But I don't know if you've heard there are two sides to every story. Kind of like when two children get in trouble, and the one who comes to mom first is going to present their side of the story. And if he or she is convincing enough that might just work.

In his famous book 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Steven Covey says a principle that will do you well is this, "Seek first to understand than to be understood."

But this is especially hard at Christmas. Christmas is a time when we know what we want to get, what we want to experience and how we want it to go. Christmas if we're not careful becomes one of the most egotistical times there is - afterall don't we deserve a good Christmas, and for one part of our year to go just right. But I need to warn you. *You cannot have a great Christmas that is radically centered on me*.

And when we look at the One Christmas when all was merry and right we see Jesus entering to our side, seeking first to understand than to be understood. I love v.7 which says, "he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Literally that last part being in the ways of man. He came to see what we see, feel what we feel. To understand us out of love. And as the writer to the Hebrews says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses." (4:15)

This Christmas, even if you're new to Christ, you need to know he knows. He knows how you're feeling and who you are missing. He knows the stress of the season, and what it's like being sick. He knows busy, he knows tired, he knows excited. Because he became just like us - and it took humility to do so. Some of you are new to Christ and you're struggling with life because inevitability you've had your share of tragedy and bad days. You need to know he knows - because he had them too. The God over all became completely like us.

But it isn't just what he did to become us, it's what he did as us. Let's talk about this. If I talk about social chameleons do you know what I'm referring to? It's what we all kind of do on a first date. But it's this idea that we might change our vocabulary and speech patterns to match another persons. We might entering into their way of thinking in order to participate in the conversation. We might even start liking what they like because we like them. That every

happened. I don't even like whatever sports, show, music, but I like them so much you know what I kind of like that too now. Social chameleons. They are kind of nice because instead of operated based on who they are, they operate on what the situation or the other person needs.

Isn't that what Christ is doing that one Christmas. We know him as Lord of Lords, and King of Kings but as we see him becoming man. As we see his life play out. As v.8 says, "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" We see him being more than just who is, he's being what we need. The Son of God willing to become the sacrifice. And it was one thing to become like us and breathe our air, and feel all the feels. It's another thing to have done this. As we romanticized his crib, so we also romanticize his cross. But make no mistake that was the worst way to die. The Greeks invented crucifixion, and the Romans perfected. It was humiliating torture. We know Jesus became bloody and naked and did all of this for us.

We were talking about this lesson in our pastor's study group and we were trying to compare the degree of God becoming man. One pastor said it's kind of like a human becoming a worm to die like a worm to save worms. Those wiggly things we put on hooks for fish. We all kind of breathed a collective sigh, because there was no way of satisfyingly getting to the degree of what Jesus did. What if it was like Jesus becoming an ant to save ants, or worse a mosquito to save mosquitoes. I was thinking what if it was like a human becoming a caterpillar to save caterpillars. Because caterpillars cocoon, and come out as a butterfly. So Jesus came and died as caterpillar but came out of his cocoon 3 days later as a butterfly. So that all who believe in him can become butterflies as well. But the staggering degree to which he lowered himself for us - it's amazing! If you want to see how wide and high and deep and long is the love of Christ. Start trying to comprehend the King of Kings birth in a barn and crucifixion on the cross.

And how does that relate to our lives, and the followers he desires. Let me share with you. *I think better than who we are, is becoming what others need.* I had this thought the other day that I think was informed by the Holy Spirit dwelling in me. I thought of my life as a pastor, and it cares so little who I am and what I like. I'd rather give all that up my Packer's allegiance, Cubs allegiance, donut loving, movie watching me. I'd rather put that aside to enter into what you need to see Jesus better. And isn't that our God. Son of God willing to become sacrifice. Isn't the Paul who became all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some. What if this One Christmas we were less fixed on what makes me happy and more fixed on what others need.

And while this humility is the heart of what it is to follow Jesus, it is probably the hardest thing to do. Look at v.3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." Selfish ambition had this idea of jockeying for position. Of the bad for of using politics in your favor. And that is common isn't it. What can I do to get ahead, how can I prove I deserve it more. And vain conceit. Our world is filled with it. Is it why some of the light displays are so big, or presents given, or cars, or houses. Don't you know who I am. One of the news stories I have heard about, and seems never to let go of is all of the sex scandals. Which is disheartening to say the least. But what led to it. In general people in power who were not humble, who were thinking I can do what I want 'cause don't you know who I am. But what about my own life. What about my road rage, don't you know what it's like in my driving shoes? I'm reminded once again through this passage that Scripture acts like a big mirror on me

and all of us, reminding us we haven't been as humble as God calls us to be. And that this is sin that should keep us from God forever.

But a Savior is born that One Christmas. In just the right place - a barn. And the one born in the place where animals lay, he lowered himself beyond what we can imagine. And he did it out of love. So the proud, the conceited, the vain could be redeemed. You and I have forgiveness through the humility of Jesus Christ. The ugly crib and the ugly cross combined so we the ugly, could become beautiful. So we could be the sons and daughters of God. And that is what we are.

And there's fuel here, there's passion for living when we see Jesus sacrifice. Because we all have the do I have to moments. Do you have any do I have to categories. For me decorating the house for Christmas is always fun, but do I have to come when you have to take down the lights in the bitter cold. Like don't I have an older son to do this for me. Do I have to. For kids you got do I have to categories. A lot of them right. Homework, chores, being nice to siblings who aren't always so nice to you. And adults our do I have to's are bigger than Christmas lights. It's going to work with people who are perfect and navigating that mess. It's dealing with the stress of life. And perhaps for all of us the biggest do I have to is forgiveness. I'll never forget when someone came up to Jesus and said, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21) Because you know what I think is behind that question. "Do I have to."

But friends look again at our Savior. Coming from heaven to earth. Enjoying perfection and leaving it for this mess. And not only that consider what he did. He didn't just agree to go to the restaurant you wanted, or clean the house for you, or buy you the perfect gift. He shed his blood and he gave his life. And if you're wondering how do we get to a point when we stop dragging our feet when it comes to serving other people, how do we have motivation to forgive - even the 5th time. It's Jesus. Our do I have to's are silenced at the cross. *For when you see how far he went, you won't complain at how far you have to go.* Because the truth is it is less than how far he went for you. So far less. This reminds me of verse 1. Where it says, "Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion." If what Jesus did for you moves you in any degree, then go and serve others, go and value them above yourselves.

And what does this service look like? What is it to put others before ourselves. I love this quote about humility from Tim Keller. "The essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, but thinking of myself less." We don't have to be self-deprecating to serve others. That doesn't honor who God made you to be. Nor prop ourselves up, look how good I am by serving you. No, it's being so engrossed in what you need we don't think of ourselves. We escape to a different point of view completely.

But why is it worth it? My wife and I did a bit of black friday shopping and got an echo dot. And as I am setting this thing up and allowing it access to my amazon account and wifi, and other things, I'm like..."i'm participating in the big brother experiment. I am allowing big government to watch over me. It's the culmination of the book 1984. Alexa is going to know every move I take and every purchase I make." Someone's watching reminds me also of the elf on the shelf craze, you can go into any room and woah there it is watching. Reminds me of the

lyrics for santa's song, "He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good. So be good for goodness sake."

Do you know the world may never recognize all the steps you took in humility. For part of humility is the willingness to be overlooked as you put someone before yourself. But there is one who sees. And he ain't no creepy elf. Our God sees. And you know why I know. When Jesus did what he did in humility. He was exalted for it. As the one who went the lowest out of service to us, he was also placed the highest. v. 9 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name." The Father knew what the Son had done, it was lost it was watched.

And know that he sees I find this to be true - *The lower you go equates to a higher currency in the kingdom of God.* I wonder if the angels sit around watching - did you see what they just did like we watch one handed catches in the NFL. Did you see that. They didn't even argue about their rights, or their vantage. They just picked the other persons point of view. Amazing. And I guess I go here because when Jesus was teaching he said, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." (Matt 20:26)

And you know why also this humility though not easy is great, is worth it. Because we all want joy at Christmas. We all want to feel like the elf who is running through the spinning doors having the time of their life. And there is a pathway to joy. It's not being pampered, though that is fun too. It's living with a higher purpose. A purpose that puts other people first. A purpose that was displayed in the life of Jesus, and pointed out by the fact he was born in a barn. May we humble ourselves for the sake of others and the glory of God, and then find the complete joy Paul was talking about. Amen.