

It's A Wonderful Life

December 24, 2009

(Christmas Eve – Year C)

John 1: 1-14

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Many of you might have seen or heard that St. Alban's Episcopal Church was featured on the 6 o'clock news on Channel 10 last Tuesday night. Channel 10 was doing a news story on how Christian communities are observing the Advent and Christmas seasons in different ways this year. And Channel 10 was interested in how St. Alban's embraced the Advent Conspiracy this year to:
Worship fully, spend less, give more and love all.

So, last Tuesday morning, a news reporter and a camera man from Channel 10 met me inside this church for the interview.

The camera man took wonderful video shots of the inside of our beautiful church. The news reporter, Stephanie Franks, talked to me about how our church had focused differently on the season of Advent this year.

Then she ended up her set of questions by asking me:

“Reverend Fisher, in just one sentence, what is the real meaning of Christmas?”

Immediately I got this “deer in the headlights” look and I began to stammer a bit.

In order to buy me some time, I replied:

“Wow, you really are a good reporter.

That is an excellent question!”

But then she asked me again:

“In just one sentence, what is the real meaning of Christmas?”

And when I finally did answer the question, my response did not draw from the familiar Gospel of Luke, where Jesus is born in a manger, with angels and shepherds and sheep gathered around.

My answer to the real meaning of Christmas drew from the Gospel of John, from the Gospel reading that I chose to read tonight.

So my reply to the Channel 10 news reporter was this:

“The real meaning of Christmas is that God becomes flesh, that God becomes a human being, so that we can see God, not only in Jesus, but we can see God each and every day, in the flesh of other people.”

Then, having answered that question, the news reporter then asked an even more probing follow-up question.

She asked:

“But for you, personally, for Jeff Fisher, what difference does Christmas make?”

The movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” has become a Christmas holiday classic. For many people, it just isn’t Christmas without watching “It’s a Wonderful Life.” For many people, it just isn’t Christmas without journeying with George Bailey and his guardian angel, Clarence, in the town of Bedford Falls.

If you remember that old movie, George Bailey decides to commit suicide on Christmas Eve.

But instead, his guardian angel, Clarence, takes George on a journey back in time. The angel shows George that if he had never lived, then Bedford Falls would be a slum.

If George had never lived, then his brother would have died in an icy pond and an innocent child would have been poisoned by the wrong prescription medicine. The angel shows George Bailey that his life really is a wonderful life.

I wonder, however:

Instead of focusing on the difference that George Bailey has made in lives of the people in Bedford Falls,

What if we focus on the difference that *Jesus* has made in our lives?

What if Jesus had never been born, then what would your life be like?

What difference does Christmas make?

For me, for Jeff Fisher, if Jesus Christ had never been born, then I would never hear Jesus’ words.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would probably not be a very loving person to people who are different from me.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would probably repeat racial and ethnic slurs that I have heard in my life.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would never hear Jesus say to me:
“Love each other, as I have loved you.”

Most of you know me well enough to know that I like things to be just-so, because I am a bit of a perfectionist.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would think that my self-worth is only based on my accomplishments.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would think that everything hinges on being on Santa’s list of the naughty or the nice.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would never hear the words of Jesus, when the forgiving father of the wayward and prodigal son exclaims:

“Let us eat and celebrate;
For this son of mine was dead and is alive again;
He was lost and is found!”

And my life is different because the life of Jesus is a life of risk and challenge and adventure.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would never have met my wife on a church retreat at Camp Allen.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would probably still be an accountant in Houston.

If Jesus had never been born, then I would have never heard the words of Jesus say:
“Leave your fishing nets behind - and follow me.”

When I look back upon my life, I can see that Jesus *has* made a difference in my life.

For a life in Jesus is an abundant life.

A life in Jesus is a loving and forgiving and challenging life.

It really is a wonderful life.

Now I doubt that a TV news reporter is going to interview you tonight and ask you what the real meaning of Christmas is.

I doubt that a news reporter is going to interview you tonight and ask you if your life would look any different if Jesus had never been born.

However, tonight, on the way home from this worship service, or on Christmas Day, I would like for you to have a discussion with your family and friends.

Ask each other these two questions:

“What is the real meaning of Christmas?”

and

“How would your life look different if Jesus had never been born?”

If you have a hard time answering these questions, then I think you will have some New Years’ resolutions for 2010:

Resolutions to get to know Jesus better, through the Bible and through this church community.

But I hope that in looking at the difference that Jesus has made in your life, that you will discover a revelation, like George Bailey did in Bedford Falls.

I hope that you will discover that Jesus has become flesh and now lives in you.

I hope that you will discover that Jesus’ words have given you power, the power to love other people more fully.

I hope that Jesus’ words have given you power, the power to forgive yourself for not being perfect.

I hope that Jesus’ words have given you power, the power to go on a great and risky adventure with God.

My dear friends, the Word becomes flesh and now lives among us.

And that Word gives us power, the power to love all and the power to forgive and the power to take risks for God.

This Word, this Jesus, gives us power, the power to become the daughters of God, the power to become the sons of God.

It really is

A Wonderful Life.

AMEN.