

Luke 2:8-20

So, “How was your Christmas?” We often ask that question to others now that Christmas day is over. I’m not really sure what it means. Are we asking,

“Did you like your gifts?”

“Did you have safe travel?”

“Did you eat too much?”

“Did any family members get in a fight?”

I can’t answer any of those questions because our family gathering is today. I’ll let you know how it goes!

For many people the day after Christmas is often either a let-down or a relief that now it’s over. Maybe it’s because of the expectations we put on this celebration, the Norman Rockwell picture-perfect Christmas.

In an article in the *Focus on the Family* magazine, Dave Meurer gives his answer to “How was your Christmas?” He writes:

“With candles glowing softly in the living room, snow floating quietly into our front yard and the Bible opened to that familiar ‘shepherds abiding’ story in the gospel of Luke, it was a picture-perfect Christmas Eve—until the coffee table erupted in flames.

“Our family has always opened at least one present on the night before Christmas. Somehow, a piece of wrapping paper got too close to a candle. It did not merely ignite; it exploded.

“Instinctively, I began stomping on the paper in an effort to smother the flames. This is an effective way to stop a small fire unless you happen to be wearing brand-new furry ‘lion’s head’ slippers.

“In less time than it takes to sing ‘presents roasting on an open fire,’ our quiet holiday evening was transformed into a modern-day version of Dante’s *Inferno*.

“‘Grab that thingy!’ I yelled to my son, Mark, as I performed an impromptu version of ‘River Dance.’

“‘The hose?’ he yelled back.

“‘The red thingy that sprays stuff,’ I barked.

“But my wife, Dale, had already grabbed the fire extinguisher and began blasting away. In a roar of white mist the flames died out, and the room filled with gently falling ashes.

“We all stared quietly at the mess.

“My lion slippers now sported melted whiskers, the coffee table bore scorch marks, and white powder residue from the extinguisher covered the floor. We spent the evening cleaning things up. I don’t think we ever got back to the shepherds abiding peacefully in their fields.

“For many years, I had embarked on a futile attempt to achieve that elusive ideal. But something always went wrong. The fireplace belched smoke back into the room, a drink got spilled or one of the kids wanted to play a video game right when the angels were about to bring glad tidings of great joy.

“As each year passed without me realizing my dream of a perfect Christmas, I became progressively more uptight.

“All I want is one perfect holiday! Just one,’ I complained to Dale.

“Dave, ... It will never be perfect,’ she replied. ‘Can you just let it be good? Can you just enjoy what actually is instead of what you think it should be?’

“As is so often the case, my wife was right....

“The perfect Christmas is a myth.... Christmas may not be perfect. But it can (still) be good.”

Aren’t we all a little like Dave Meurer?

We are disappointed when the holidays are over if “the anticipation far exceeded the actual outcome.” And the one thing that went “wrong” colors the whole outcome of our disappointment and we fail to see the good.

Or, we dreaded to see the holidays even come because things “aren’t like they used to be.”

But let me remind you,

if a friend or family member is missing,  
or you are struggling with finances and gifts were sparse,  
or you feel the insecurity of our world,  
or you have experienced some heartfelt loss,

Christmas may not have been perfect this year, but this holiday season—and life—can still be good. If you look for the good, you will find it—and your joy—because of what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

We’ve been talking all Advent about the Good News of the birth of Jesus—Emmanuel, God with us—coming to earth to be our Savior and teaching us what it means to be a child of God. That’s joyful news, without a doubt, but the last part of that verse is just as profound. The Good News is for ALL people and to accent it, the angels made their glorious proclamation to

...the king?  
the Jewish High Priests?  
the Scribes and Pharisees?

No, we know it was to (pause?)...shepherds—who were tending their flocks in the fields outside of Bethlehem.

So, why is that important? I think God is teaching us two “good life” lessons that we can take with us through the rest of the holidays and into the new year.

**First, all people are important to God.**

I’ve mentioned before the shepherds of that day were the lowest people on the social scale. They were overlooked and rejected by the Orthodox good people of the day because they couldn’t fulfill the ceremonial laws demanded of the Jews. Making them to be the eyewitnesses seems a bad strategy. Nobody would have taken shepherds seriously as witnesses to anything. But yet they were there and saw the Christ Child and went away praising God for all they had seen and heard. Maybe their witness is just the fact that they were chosen!

Have you ever felt  
overlooked or rejected,  
anonymous,

shunned,  
even shamed?

Then you can identify with the shepherds in that society. They were “nobodies.” Unfortunately, most of us have felt the sting of rejection:

a boy or girlfriend dumps you,  
a friend betrays your confidence;  
the job or promotion you were in line for doesn’t materialize.

What about the competition you lost or the sports team you weren’t chosen for? The list goes on and on.

Rejection is the opposite of acceptance. It is feeling left out, not good enough. No one wants to feel

devalued, deflated, defeated, or denied.

It’s one of the deepest wounds the human heart can experience.

I read a sad story where a woman who was a polio victim as a child related, “When my mother left me in Sunday School, I always asked to wear her locket. She thought I liked the locket. That wasn’t it at all. I knew I wasn’t worth coming back for, but I knew she would come back for her locket.”

Some people use the rejection from other people as an excuse to reject God. When we are hurt, we want to strike back, but how do we hit at God? We say, “I don’t believe in God. Or, I hate the church and all that’s associated with it. Or, Christmas is only a commercial excuse for indulgence. Or, if there is a God, He’s a distant, uncaring, sadistic autocrat.”

But the shepherds tell us God does care about us. We do have worth and value, even though we’re imperfect. He comes to us through angels and a baby to affirm how important we are to Him. He knows who we are and what we’ve done and been—and loves us anyway! We are “somebody” in Christ and He is our advocate in this impersonal world. And the church, in all of its imperfection, is still a good place to hear of the accepting grace of a loving God, not only at Christmas, but all year through.

The **second** thing God is teaching us in the story of the shepherds is this:

**all people are important to God.**

If you’re not asleep yet, I can hear you say to yourself, “Wait a minute, Dave’s lost it. That was his first point.” You’re right. And it’s the second point, too!

You are important to God, but so are others. If you have ever been hurt by being overlooked or rejected because you didn’t meet expectations, then you should be the most sensitive to being accepting and inclusive of others. It’s the teaching we’ve known since childhood, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” How do you treat others—especially those not in your life circles? God exalted the Shepherds by acknowledging their importance. Do we exalt others by acknowledging their importance?

A boss was conducting a series of interviews for a new job promotion. The finalists for the position were taken to lunch at a local restaurant. After lunch, the boss met with the candidates individually again and asked them one question, “What was the name of our waitress today?”

If we want to be respected, we need to show respect for others. We need to take time to know and appreciate those around us, those who serve us as well as those who work with us or for us. We are ALL “somebodies.” I think that’s the premise of the TV show Undercover Boss. In that show the owner/boss goes undercover with the employees to discover what they think of management. There were several surprises on that program.

Paul wrote a surprising thing to the Romans, one they did not expect, “Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Rom. 15:7)

We all want love and acceptance. God made us that way. Now it’s up to us to pass it on because what makes life “good” even though it’s not perfect is knowing—“it is in giving that we receive.”

However, sometimes those needing respect and acceptance put up walls and we may need to make an effort to get beyond their wall. A teacher assigned to playground duty watched a girl who had a reputation for being a loner and a troublemaker. She was moving towards a big tree in a corner of the school yard. The teacher watched her take something out of her pocket and put it in a crevice in the tree trunk. She was sure the girl had stolen something and was hiding it. When the girl went away the teacher went over and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper. She smoothed it out & read what the little girl had written: "Whoever finds this note, I love you."

In Bethlehem, in a manger, a similar message was placed. It says to us, "Whoever finds this child, I love you." The imperfect shepherds found the Child and went on rejoicing even the day after the birth, and so can we.

Listen, ... can you hear the angels proclaiming once again, “God’s gift of unconditional love and acceptance is Good News that will bring great joy to ALL people!” That’s what makes life “good” even when it’s not perfect!