

Christmas Eve ~ December 24, 2011 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Isaiah 62.6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3.4-7; Luke 2.1-20

In July, we had a grandson born. No, I'm not going to liken him to Jesus, although ... Never mind. As with our other grandchildren, Sawyer gives us pause. Here's a brand new human being, completely dependent but filled to the brim with promise.

Who will he become? Will he be tall like his Dad? Will he be organized like his Mom. Will he become a Naval Aviator and wear the wings of gold my grandfather and I wore? Little by little these brand new munchkins unfurl like the bright petals on the blossoms of our Rose of Sharon.

Sawyer's oldest sister, Ruby, age 6, is all horses. The family live on a farm in Nordland, Washington, a setting similar to where my daughter Robin was raised. So Ruby is in constant contact with chickens, pigs, dogs, cats, cows, and, their three horses. Ruby takes care of Penny, her not-so-small pony. This coming summer, she hopes to start barrel racing. But, she's also wants to be an author and is good at gymnastics. So, it could very well be that cowgirl Ruby Mills from Nordland, Washington is out of the gate writing about being an acrobatic horseback rider.

As I wonder where Ruby is headed, 4 year old Bailey comes across my thoughts, too. Bailey's headed for stardom as a singer. There's no doubt. She seems to hear the world through music. Her Mom's a really fine singer, too. When Robin asks her to do something and Bailey completely ignores the request, Robin need only to break into a melody and sing what she wants Bailey to do. Bailey usually complies, singing her favorite John Denver song—*Take me home country road*—as she picks up the toys or clears the table. For Bailey, life is a song. How cool is that?

Perhaps you think of your own life from time to time and trace the paths that brought you to where you are, even to Old St. Andrew's this holy night. Do you remember wondering as a youngster who you would marry, where you would live, what kind of car you'd have? It's pretty impossible to write the story of your life going forward. Yet, after

a while, as experience builds on experience, a kind of pattern emerges and things start to make sense.

For me, the Jesus story on the human level is often more compelling than the theological version. We don't really know much about the birth of Jesus and so Luke's rendition—almost like a parable—is what we hold onto. The tale is truly beautiful, mysterious, and magical—a brilliant star, angels, the stable, and shepherds. Wow! We're assured by the gospel telling that Jesus is the Christ child. Mary, of course, ponders these things in her heart, according to Luke.

I'm wondering, too though, what she and Joseph, brand new parents, wanted and hoped for their little boy. Would he follow in his father's foot steps and be a carpenter? Maybe he'd become a shepherd, a merchant, a fisherman. What if the Romans co-opted him and he became a tax collector or if the local rabbi educated him to be a Pharisee?

Just thinking these things also raises the question, 'What did Jesus himself dream about doing and being when he was 6 or 8?' Barrel racing donkeys? Belting out popular tunes in a Nazareth café or in the synagogue on a Friday evening? How much did he think about things spiritual? What molded his concern for others, his willingness to risk everything to stand over against the domination system of his day—both Roman and Jewish—, his passion for justice, his acceptance of all people as they were, his ability to forgive? How were his eyes opened to see the kingdom of God here and now and the divine in the eye and heart of each and every person?

This child, this Jesus, like all my grandchildren, your own children and grands, was a *tabula rasa*—a clean slate—and so also, a fountain of endless possibilities.

The nativity is a story about the hope and promise of a child who brings extreme goodness to those who know him ... and later to millions who've never even met Jesus. "I am bringing you news of great joy for all people," Luke's angel declares to the shepherds. The message Luke creates is one of hope and promise that this child manifests the "unmediated and borderless kingdom of God,"\* both within himself and beyond to all the world.

These many years later, on a holy night each December 24<sup>th</sup>, we gather to renew our own hope for true goodness to be among us. Just as we see Jesus as the light of the world, so too, can we be the light of the world in our own day and see it in others as Jesus did? It's still a radical idea. Later in his life, Jesus says, 'Don't be afraid. Follow me.' Dare we be inspired by Jesus and follow his example?

Blessings and Peace to each of you and your families for a holy, joy-filled and happy Christmas.

*Amen.*

\* *Jesus, a revolutionary biography*, John Dominic Crossan

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