

# A kingdom in our hearts

CHURCH OF SAINT CLEMENT·TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2019·7 MINUTES17 Reads

Christmas Eve Sermon

Rev. Robin Razzino

December 24, 2019

In the Name of One God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the early 1940s, an American poet, Kenneth Patchen, having been a young boy during World War One and at the time watching as the ravages of war began devastating Europe once again, penned a haunting Christmas poem.

I have lighted the candles, Mary...

*How softly breathes your little Son*

My wife has spread the table

With our best cloth. There are apples,

Bright as red clocks, upon the mantel.

The Snow is a weary face at the window.

*How sweetly does he sleep.*

Into this bitter world, O Terrible Huntsman!"

I say, and she takes my hand – "hush,

You will wake Him."

The taste of tears is on her mouth

Which I kiss her. I take an apple

And hold it tightly in my fist:

The cold swollen face of war leans in the window.

They are blowing out the candles, Mary...

The world is a thing gone mad tonight.

*O hold him tenderly, dear Mother,*

*For His is a kingdom in the hearts of men.*

I wonder how many thousands of times since this poem was written, how many thousands of people have had the same heartbreaking thought:

*The world is a thing gone mad tonight.*

I am sure Nicole Williams thought that the night her 27-year-old son was shot. It was just over two years ago - November 2017. Williams spent that Thanksgiving by his bedside, praying for his survival. By Christmas, he was dead, leaving his mother to question her faith in God.

*The world is a thing gone mad tonight.*

I am sure Dairon Elisondo thought that the night he and his girlfriend finally made it to the United States border having fled from Cuba because they were being threatened at home. Persecuted and endangered they sought safety and a new home. They were turned away.

*The world is a thing gone mad tonight.*

I am sure the 15 medical students thought that as they imagined the lives and the nights of the slaves who lived, worked, sweated, screamed and died in the house on the plantation they now stood before.

How many of their ancestors had the thought - *The world is a thing gone mad tonight.*

What is the hope of this night – this same night in which there are those who are sitting, praying, weeping, and shaking outside these doors – knowing in their flesh that the world is a thing gone mad tonight?

The hope is Jesus Christ, our Emmanuel - God with us to comfort, guide, inspire and redeem.

The birth of this hope is announced this night – in light and song, from shepherds and angels.

Our hope is born this evening in a stable in Bethlehem.

But this hope isn't *restricted* to the stable – or even to the life of the baby born to Mary and Joseph. The hope that is announced this night isn't confined to the stable – or to the story in the Gospel.

The hope that is announced this night is an ancient hope and an eternal hope.

And it lives inside each one of us.

It lives to animate our response to the violence, injustice and death we encounter in our world.

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;*

*those who lived in a land of deep darkness--  
on them light has shined.*

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah prophesied to a experiencing exile – physically, emotionally and spiritually. They had been forcefully removed from their homes and led away to a foreign land; they were broken, hungry, lost, and persecuted. Many nights they must have thought - *surely the world had gone mad tonight.*

And yet.

And yet there was hope, enkindled, spreading, fading, dying. Over and over.

For hundreds and hundreds of years.

Until the birth of a baby boy in Bethlehem.

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

These titles. They speak of power and might and strength. Of Royalty. Of Victory.

Surely we can trust and hope in this wonderful baby boy and the promise of the night.

Surely we can. Even if the world is seemingly going mad all around us.

*O hold him tenderly, dear Mother,*

*For His is a kingdom in the hearts of men.*

Oh how are hope lies naked in the hearts of each one of us.

Our sweet hope - true and naked, open and bare.

Oh how our hope lies bundled up in hearts that bleed, and crave, break and mend.

Our hope lies in our hearts – in the pulsating heart of a loving Christ – surely – but also in the rhythm of the beating heart within each of us – struggling sometimes to continue to beat in the midst of darkness and despair.

Our hope is born in a stable but it is not confined to the stable.

Our hope grows in and through the life of a man in whom we live and move and have our being.

“It is an adult Christ that the community encounters during ... Advent and Christmas,” writes Nathan Mitchell: “A Risen Lord who invites sinful people to become church.

Christmas does not ask us to pretend we were back in Bethlehem, kneeling before a crib, it asks us to recognize that the wood of the crib became the wood of the cross.”

And we find our hope in the light of the cross - the path it sets before us and the life it gives.

Both the crib and the cross point us – ultimately - to life.

Life together.

Life with God.

God with us.

In describing the chaos of the Christmas story, one scholar says, “Even if things did not go as planned, new life breaks forth. Jesus, Gods work, arrived in the midst of political events and no vacancies. The important message of Christmas is that even when things do not go as planned, God arrives. (Aaron Klink in Feasting on the word Vol 1. p118)

God arrived in the stable in Bethlehem – 2000 years ago.

And God arrives now as well.

God has been born to be with us – for ever and for all time to give us hope.

To give us life.

Just last Saturday, Nicole Williams helped to throw a holiday party at the Los Angeles Police Department’s 77th Street Station for children who have lost a parent or another loved one to violence. It’s her way of coping with the violent death of her son.

Williams said she plans to continue helping other victims’ families cope with their grief. “We don’t have no choice but to live,” she said.

Dr. Elisondo, the doctor from Cuba turned away from the border has found a new calling. He is the sole full-time doctor in the teeming tent city that has been born at the base of a bridge that connects the Mexican city of Matamoros to the United States.

More than 2,500 migrants have squatted in the camp while their cases wind their way through immigration court in Brownsville, Texas. He makes \$30 a day caring for the sick, the weak, the hurting.

"This is perfect, perfect," Dr. Elisondo said in Spanish about the arrangement. "It's what I know. It's what I do best."

Russell Ledet is a 33-year-old second-year medical student at Tulane University. He recently spoke to NPR about the photo of the black medical students from Tulane University standing before the old slave home.

"I could just imagine our ancestors in heaven looking at us and being so happy," he said. "They're saying, 'Look at them. They're doing so well. Their resiliency is shining.'" Another of his classmates added, "We are truly our ancestors' wildest dreams."

*O hold him tenderly, dear Mother,*

*For His is a kingdom in the hearts of men.*

Christmas is the story of God's Kingdom breaking into our world, breaking into our hearts and breaking them open – to love.

In our world which is seemingly going mad day after day – night after night – we trust in the hope being born this night – not only in a stable in Bethlehem – but also in the hearts of each one of us.

In our hearts God lives in hope – for ever and for all time. May tonight be a night in which that hope animates our love, our work, and our world.

Amen.