

Let Heaven and Nature Sing #2
Christmas Eve – 11PM Service
Palisades Presbyterian Church
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Notes and an outline, sort of... again

Have you noticed how everything seems challenging lately? Not just little things, either. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the promise of violence continuing in Dharfur, conflicts in Iran and North Korea brewing...

A respite from the Katrina's this year, but reminders all around about the instability of nature, as we see it. Nature, as she sees herself, is doing just fine, "Thank you!"

Families struggling with raising young children, loss, separation, illness, malaise, financial insecurity, and a seemingly unending race to the finish line – wherever, if ever such a thing exists.

More, there is more, maybe sometimes the hardest thing is loneliness...

If I am revealing a bit too much about myself, forgive me. It's just that Christmas cannot be one day and have any meaning for me – at least lasting meaning.

Maybe that's why I can easily become involved, which I think is important and I encourage you to do so – become involved in the questions about whether the birth of Jesus was in fact miraculous, or the Wise Men and shepherd did as we're told, and whether Joseph was really of the House of David, and even so – how would that ensure the lineage for Jesus if he was, as we read, the result of the Holy Spirit brooding over Mary.

Tonight, I really don't want to think too much about that. I don't want the debate or the required skepticism of any biblical critical analysis. No, tonight I want to hear heaven and nature sing.

I want to float into a timeless period with stars stopped in the sky, with evidence, hard and fast – that God is in charge of the world. C'mon God, just a small star, - better yet maybe a cure for an illness – or the sudden disappearance of all nuclear weapons. How about a change in heart on same sex marriage, or a church that broadly welcomes all – and means it – as we do here.

Sounds like I'm turning God into Santa. As I say, there's a lot of me in all this, there has to be, because Christmas has to mean something to me, more than just one day, or what would I have to say to you?

Well, I do have some Good News to share. I walk with Jesus each day. Yup, the wonder how he was born, what about those miracles, and resurrection questions surrounding

Jesus – Jesus. That one. The one who believed so much that he set his face toward Jerusalem full well knowing that it wasn't going to be pretty.

I know the Jesus as a stranger I have met on the street, somehow affirming the work one night on a Midnight Run, making it clear that what I was doing was more important than what I think about doing – if you get what I mean.

And, you know, about the miracles, I've seen miracles in my life, evidence of healing (if such a thing can be quantified), real happenings that let me know – that I don't have to know. Just follow I hear more than anything, let go and follow – imperfections and all. , Just follow.

Jesus. We know him or of him at least. The one who has sustained and challenged literally billions of people. The same one who threatens the charlatans and oppressors, who, when they have enough power, will use it to stop the flow of Jesus. And yet that never seems to work. Jesus of Nazareth lives in a different way – inside us, deep in our hearts, our psyches, our souls. There is nor has been any stopping him in our lives, even when we sometimes try.

Funny, during quiet times I can feel his presence or his and God's presence – joined by the Holy Spirit, choirs of angels and saints, whatever that feeling or sense it – wonder, I think – awe, and most often it happens when I look into the eyes of a child.

I remember when I was on rotation at WMC in NICU and prayed with a small young girl, just days old in an incubator....

I guess it's not that hard to think of what might have happened to all those who saw Jesus as a young babe, looked into his eyes and couldn't help feeling that somewhere, somehow in this infant and his humble family, somewhere there was a connection to more hope and greatness and love than folks had seen for a while.

It has to be energizing, giving people that extra commitment to go on, even in the face of all the trials and tribulations, to not abandon that infant turned into adult and teacher and Christ and Messiah to some, quiet, piercing, loving voice to others from deeply inside who knows where.

Maybe the stars did stop that night. I mean God could do whatever God wants to do; maybe the story is more accurate than I think, I don't know –

Christmas, maybe it's a good idea for me, for us, for the world to remember – even with all the trouble and materialism and all that – to remember that there is such a love as this that God created in this One we follow – that this birth, this night will help to make things better – somehow, someday –

You know, I might just check the stars to see if any have stopped tonight, I suddenly feel as though they might have. Funny, I feel much better than when I started this. Wonder what that's about...

Merry Christmas...