



December, 24, 2019

The Messy Manger

*[Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn - **Luke 2:7***

How often do our lives look neat and tidy on the outside when a peek behind the scenes reveals a different story? When we combine the messiness of our own personal struggles with the hurt and heartaches of society, we realize just how messy the world really is.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that when Jesus enters the world, he is placed in a manger because no rooms were available at the nearby inn. Jesus' birth reminds us that God does not abandon us in our mess but enters into it with us. Jesus is Emmanuel—"God with us"—in whatever mess we may be experiencing. We don't need to pretend anymore that everything is okay. Our mess is where God is and wants to be.

Mess enters our lives in different ways. Mess can come from our sinful choices and their devastating consequences. Though free will allows us to make our own choices regarding any number of issues, it does not allow us to choose the consequences for our actions. Mess also comes from the decisions made by others. How often are our lives sent into a tailspin because of the thoughtless or harsh words spoken by a friend or family member? Mess also arrives through the overwhelming grief and sadness brought on by the loss of a loved one. As we grow older, these losses mount up, making us feel more and more alone.

Jesus wants to meet us in our mess so that he can transform us. Just as he comes to Zacchaeus in a tree and to a Samaritan woman by a well, he also wants to enter the messes and muddles of our lives to bring hope and new life. So how can Jesus meet us in our mess? We must share our mess with him, humbly asking him to join us as we learn to live as his friend and disciple. As we begin a journey with him, his Spirit gets to work in us.

As followers of Jesus, we also are challenged to meet others in their messes. We reach out to them in love as Jesus reaches out to us. We bring no words of condemnation or judgment; we don't try to "fix" anyone. Instead, we offer our presence as a source of encouragement and support. We listen attentively to their stories of poor choices, heartache, and grief. We think carefully about how we can respond in a way that offers life and hope. And we allow our words and actions to point to the One who is bigger than their messes: a God who loves them and will never give up on them.



Christmas Eve offers us an opportunity to consciously open our messy lives to Jesus and to acknowledge our mess before others. Our mess becomes our message as we explain how Jesus came to us in our desperate need and as we connect lovingly with those around us.

Practice: *When you take your trash out, remind yourself of the good news that our mess is the place where God wants to meet us. Thank God aloud for this gift of grace.*

May you find Jesus present with you this Christmas season, as you journey with him as his companion and apprentice.

Note: *This devotional was written by Trevor Hudson. Trevor is a dear friend who has a collection of devotionals for Advent titled, **Pauses for Advent: Words of Wonder***

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