

Christmas

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled Christmas. Thank you to Ed, Rhonda, Geoff and Don for being involved in the service. The scripture reading is Isaiah 40:1 to 5.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Well, exactly one year to the minute ago, I was arriving at Dr. Taylor's house and in town with a painting for him that Rhonda did. And in my Santa suit, nobody knew I was coming except for the woman of the house. And there is grandchildren there. And it was quite an experience, you know, how do you knock on the door and just show up Christmas Day in a Santa suit? And so I said, as I said and this is Santa voice, I got all the way to James Bay. And I looked down in the sleigh and I saw a little bag and go, Oh, no, I have to go all the way back to Beamsville; I got to Orillia and the deer said, That's it, I'm not going any further. So I had to rent a car and fortunately it was red anyhow. So within the next few minutes they gave out these little poppet things to these kids and so then the Steve who's getting this painting is standing back in the house. He's got this toothy little grin and I said, you know, is wee Stevie Taylor back there somewhere, you need to come out, see, Santa only comes through the door and he's a skinny fella. And I said, Well, you know, it's been a long time since you sat in my lap, but the looks of ye, that pelvis is a-way too bony for me, so we're not doing that today. So I gave him the painting. I told him that the Mrs. Claus had made this painting, and she wanted me to instruct them to ask to open in front of me so that I can tell her whether you liked it or not. So he opens it up was a painting of a dog that they had had in the house for about 13 years, and the dog had to be put down right after Christmas. And this was Steve's best friend for 13 years. And he opens it up and he looks at it and tears up and and then he says, Rhonda Whittington, who is Rhonda Whittington like this? I said, ask your wife about it. And she'll tell you she's been in on it. And I saw them about two weeks later out on the street, and they were going by and we were on the other side of the street. And I yelled over, Well, there's Stevie Taylor. How are you doing? There we boy. And then we went over and talked to him. He joined the dots on who I was, who I was there and so forth. One year to the minute I was there at 1030 Christmas Day last year,

Welcome to our Christmas service. We have some birthdays to celebrate, Johanne A and Happy and Rebecca. Have birthdays this week and anniversaries Rhonda and Ed are having an. So we wish them the best, too. With that event. So how many years is it, Rhonda? [too many!] to too many. Yeah, actually, it's 49. So that's if you're counting. We are very, very. Let's pray our father in heaven. We are grateful for another year that's come and gone. We're grateful for this day where we can celebrate the birth of your son. This great and awesome gift that you have given to us, the gift of your presence on Earth here, the gift of seeing in Jesus and understanding your great power and your great wisdom. And we're impressed, Father, with your love for us, for your care, for us. And we see you and Jesus, this humble servant of yours. And so we see your qualities in your son Jesus. And we rejoice that we have that opportunity to know to some degree what you're like. We're thankful for the this time of year that draws us to so many spiritual lessons of your love and your care for us, for your wisdom and for your plan, for us, and for for the gratitude and thankfulness that we can have for you and for your care for us because we know you and because we know of you that we can be changed and transformed into Jesus likeness. And we pray that this might be our lifelong goal to be like Jesus. We pray, Father, that

being like Jesus, we radiate to people around us with love and concern. We pray, Father, that we might recognize the doors that are open for us to help others and to be to help people spiritually and to love people and to be kind and be joyful and peaceful and under self-control that these are gifts that we can give to everyone around us. We're thankful for our gathering today. We pray your blessing. I'm honored that we might honor you and what we're doing today to be reminded of so many powerful things that you have done for us through prayer, blessing, honor service. Today, in Jesus name, we pray, amen.

Communion

I'm not sure I meant to be up here because I had a talk all prepared, and then Amy pretty much did it. Word for word a couple of weeks ago. And I was like, Well, and then that video pretty much said what I was going to say word for word. So forgive me if I'm repeating the video, but we call him King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and he existed from the beginning, and he was God's son and he is God's son. So why did he start life in the stable and this looks fairly romantic, and I think some of our songs are fairly romantic, but I grew up on a farm and I practically lived in a stable and I know what it means to sleep in a manger because when I was little, my parents would put me in the cows manger while they were doing chores, and I would sleep there lots of times. And I know what it's like to be battered by cattle beasts when you're just dozing off. And I know all about sleeping in a manger, and I also know all about what a barn smells like. I know about the smell of straw. I know about the smell of hay. I know about the smell of animal dung I- you, you could probably take me now, and I haven't lived there for 50 years, but I think you could take me blindfolded. Put me beside a cow, a pig, a horse, a sheep, a chicken or any of those animals. And I could tell you by the smell exactly which animal I was beside, because they all have their own special smells. And and for my city friends, they found it very repulsive, I find, walking through Eaton Center very repulsive with the smell of the perfume, but they find that very repulsive.

So it's not as romantic as it looks here. And then the shepherds were the first people to learn about the birth of the Messiah. So Jesus was born in this situation, the shepherds through the first people to learn and shepherds, even though at that particular time they were considered to be the lowest people in society, they were the people who couldn't get a better job. And and so there was nothing about Jesus that was associated with wealth. There's nothing about him that was associated with success, nothing about him that was associated with privilege. And if you read Philippians two, which he read some of that in some of what I'm going to read, it said Christ Jesus attitude was He always had the nature of God, but he did not think by force he should try to remain equal with God instead of this of his own free will. He gave up all he had and took on the nature of his servant. He became like a human being and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death. His death on the cross. For this reason, God raised Him to the highest place above. He had a humble birth. He had a humble life. He had a humble death.

Then if you jump back in the same chapter, it says for us, he's talking to us. Don't do anything from selfish ambition, from cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourself and look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. And the attitude you should have is the attitude that Christ had, the attitude He had. It is first the attitude He had in his life and the attitude he had in his death. When we were baptized, we humbled ourselves before God. It's a humbling thing to be baptized and to say, I give myself to you and to also say I give

my sinful self to you. But when we exalt God instead of ourselves, we humble ourselves before God we deny, or when we deny our own desires and replace them with God's desires. And I think what we do when we become Christians, our goal is to deny our own desires and replace them with God's desires. And every step we take to be based on God's desires rather than our own. And when we pursue our own desires, that's we're stumbling. That's the stumbling block. We're putting a stumbling block between us and God. And I think if you're like me, you can probably look back over the last week and you can see times where you didn't put God's desires ahead of your own desires. And that's the whole purpose of Christ. Death is because we do sin. We do end up putting our own desires before God desires. And I think any time, any time that we are not 100% in sync with God, that is sin. And we are all sinners and we all need God's grace sent. And we're here today to, to, to be thankful that God saved his first scenes. But also, this is the time to take the bread and take the blood of Christ, Jesus Christ's body, Christ's blood, and what we're asking is for Christ to fill our lives so that we can be more Christlike and more humble and more like God.

So let us pray, dear God in Heaven, thank you for this opportunity that we have to remember Jesus and to remember His death on the cross. And we pray, God, that that you will be with us as we attempt to pick up our own crosses and follow you. And we pray that that we will have the courage to do that and have the strength to do that and have the wisdom to do that and that we will be more like you every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reading – Isaiah 40:1-5

Reading, as you can see, is taken from Isaiah Chapter 40 Comfort. Comfort, My People says your God speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins, a voice of one calling in the wilderness. Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up. Every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level. The rugged places are plain and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Sermon

Good morning, Merry Christmas to all. So glad that you are with us today. Want to share a Christmas sermon that came across this article that was written back in 1947. So this is a while back and I'll just read it. And you can picture in your mind the story early on Christmas morning, 1933, the minister of Our Lady Victory Church in San Francisco was interrupted at his morning prayers. His assistant minister was in such turmoil he could barely speak. And behind him, the young minister was pale and wide eyed. I've just opened the church and found the baby. Jesus is gone. Gone from the crib, the older minister said. That's absolutely absurd. He rose to his feet and looked disbelieving, leap from one to another. He strode with some exasperation down the church stairs into the auditorium. The first worship of the day was barely a half hour away. What kind of panic would sweep through the church when people found the baby? Jesus wasn't there even before he had verified the disappearance for himself. Ministers thoughts were concerned with the thief. What kind of feed, what kind of infidel would so outrage a shrine was this perpetrated by someone who wished to defile and desecrate the symbol of the very birth of Christianity? Or was it for revenge on the minister or the congregation or something else? Shall we call the police? The minister shook his head. No, the glass to both the church

he loved, which only four and a half hours ago had been filled with the happiest crowds of the year for the early service. He wanted no scandal to touch the church.

He just shook his head and walked away silently. Back in the office, he got into his overcoat and boots. The streets were clean with snow. Already the early crowd was coming to church and he greeted those who passed with a heavy merry Christmas that he didn't feel. As he reached a corner, a small boy running as he pulled an express wagon, almost knocked the minister down. Georgie Potter minister began indignantly at the sight of the upturned ruddy shining little face of the seven year old. He sighed and smiled. Now, is that a new wagon I see? Yes, sir, Georgie said. You're up early enough to get your presence. I must say, suddenly the minister stiffened. Georgie, what is that in your wagon? The Christ child. The minister stared the beloved statuette of the infant Jesus with his baby, arms outstretched in wide benediction, lay with a blanket tucked around him. The shining light was gone from the child's face. Any coward, Georgie? Did you take that baby Jesus from the church? What I promised, the boy blurted out defensively. I prayed and I prayed for a red wagon, and I promised the Christ child that if he'd give me a red wagon for Christmas, I'd give him a ride twice around the block.

The beauty of a child at Christmas and I think at Christmas time, many of us who are getting older can still put on the cloak of infancy and the marvelous experience of the birth of Christ and an angel said, You are to give him the name Jesus. He will save the people from their sins and if you don't mind, I would ask all of us to put this very personally. Then it's us saying he will save us from our sins in heaven. I looked and before me was a great multitude that no one could count from. Every nation, every tribe, every people, every language. Can't you just wait for that? That one day we will be part of all of that. There before me was a great multitude of which we are all a part. People from every nation, every tribe, every people, a language. Because for to us, a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government of all things will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and our everlasting father.

So a while ago I came across an article. First Corinthians 13 is probably one of the most popular scriptures in all of the Bible. It talks about giving ourselves to the Lord and what love is all about. But this has kind of a slanted transmission of this. This is first Corinthians 13, The Christmas version. It goes this way If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shining Christmas balls, but do not show love to my family. I'm just another busy decorator. If I slave away in the kitchen baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime. But do not show love to my neighbor. I'm just another cook. If I work at a soup kitchen, if I sing carols in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity but do not show love to a stranger, I profit me nothing if I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing the choirs cantata but do not focus on Christ. I have missed the point of Christmas Love stops the cooking to hug the child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the sparks. Love is kind though sometimes harried and tired. Love does not envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas China in table linens. Love does not yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful that they are there to be in the way. Love does not give only to those who are able to give and return, but rejoices in giving to those who cannot. It's true. Love bears all things it believes, all things it hopes, all things it endures, all things it never fails. Online games will quit working. Pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure and last forever.

Every Sunday we come together and we remember Christ, not just his life, his words, his death, his resurrection, but that he lives in us. And every week we come together to remember that God knew us before we were born, that He knew the exact time and places in which we would live, and that he has poured out and continues to pour out his love in our life. And that God gives us His Holy Spirit, encouraging us to welcome others, to come to Christ in all the wonderful things the Holy Spirit does. We are so wealthy spiritually and no matter where we are in life, Christ is with us every step of the way.

So a wonderful man who's passed away several years ago, you may recognize his name. His name was Edward Fudge, an amazing theologian, tried to read everything I could on him. He was just a wonderful man. He asks the question and then he answers it in his own way. Why did my Savior come to earth that has everything to do with love? And here's what he writes. An old hymn asked the question and answered it in the words even a child can grasp. Why did my Savior come to Earth and to the humble go? Why did he choose a lowly birth? You can finish it because he loved me. So no wonder John 3:16 is the most beloved verse for many of us in the New Testament, with its simple affirmation that God so loved the world, that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. Three chapters later, Jesus tells them more about the divine love and its recipients and its results. Listen to this. And that the father gives me will come to me. All that the father gives me will come to me. And whoever comes to me, whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will. But today I'll do the will of the one who sent me, and this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all that he has given me. But raise them up at that last day for my father's will is and everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life. And I will raise him up at that last day. No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws you and I will raise them up at that last day. It is written in the prophets. They will all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. I tell you the truth. He who believes has everlasting life. So that's excerpts from John 6:37, 34, 44, 35 and 47. In these words from John, chapters three and six, Jesus points to six glistening facets of Divine Love. I've been preaching for quite a few years, and I missed that. I missed this point that in John, there are six specifics regarding all of this.

Number one, God's love is passionate. God so loved that he gave his only son or see how great a love the father has bestowed upon us. And then, John later challenges us beyond all limits. He says God loves us and repeats and repeats and repeats. And then God's love is profuse. As the overwhelming flood of divine love breaks over us, it washes away every pebble of human pride, sufficiency or merit. Jesus does not save the deserving, but the sinful. He gave himself for the helpless, not the adequate. He died for his enemies, not his associates. But yet he did die for all on the cross. Jesus removed our sin, made our perpetuation, and accomplished our redemption. Because Jesus fully completed the saving work in His own perfect doing and dying. Nothing we ever perform, experienced or accomplished, is any part of the work which sets us right with God. Is God that does it. That work was finished 2000 years ago by the eternal God, who, for some 12,000 days Jesus came to dwell among us as one of us. All we can ever do regarding the saving work is to believe or reject it. God's grace. By God's grace, we can accept it. We can trust it. We can rely on it and commit ourselves to it for the rest of our time here, in all throughout humanity. So let's just take a look at a couple of things. God's love is personal. God so loved. Jew Gentile, slave free women, men of every tribe, every dialect across every ethnic group and political boundary. Yet this love so vast and far reaching is also intensely personal.

God did not love and under fire will match individual men and women and faces and names. He knows exactly who we are and that the father gives me all the father gives me. Jesus said, Don't come to me. This is the Father's will. He continues That all that he has given me, I lose nothing.

We view the larger corporate picture and proclaim with Paul. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it. But we may freely join the same apostle in making that truth our own. Christ loves me. And I wonder if you're willing, if you would say that out loud. Christ loves me. Let's say, together. Christ loves me. It's not rude to think of ourselves in that way. Christ loves me. And He has. From the beginning of time, he knew the exact times and places. And so it's a powerful scripture. There's no reason for controversy and every reason for all in retrospect. We really do belong to him. And then God's love, of course, is absolutely powerful. When he talked about God's love, Jesus used unequivocal language and he spoke in unqualified words that leave no room for exemptions. All that the father gives me shall come to me. Jesus boldly declares that God did not love an undefinable mass of human beings, but specific individual men and women with faces and with names. There's no room for error. God's love is perpetual. The God who gave his only son will not forsake us halfway to heaven. His plan has always been that the believer should not perish. And God always accomplishes what He sets out to do. On this, we have Jesus own promise. This is the will of Him who sent me. Jesus said that all that He has given me, I lose nothing but raise it up at that last day. Can you imagine that last day? The same God who calls us will confirm us in the end, the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion. First Corinthians one. Philippians chapter one. The Cross shows us God's deepest heart toward us sinners, and the resurrection shows God's final verdict in the saving work that Jesus accomplished there.

These gospel facts shine like eternal beacons throughout the darkness of human weakness and doubt. And these past few years, and especially in certain countries around the world, it's been dark and difficult. But God has not abandoned anyone. God's love is perilous. Let's not make any mistake. Jesus came to save, not to condemn. Yet, as someone has observed, the purpose of the sun is not to cast shadows, but it does. The wrath of God is the shadow cast by his love. The person who, knowing early and persistently rejects God, bounds as love in Christ. Jesus doesn't simply miss the opportunity to turn down a good deal. That person rejects his or her purpose in life. What love the father has shown us sinners passionate yet personal, powerful and perpetual, but also perilous. At such sayings, many of Jesus original heroes turned away, turned and walked away. May we instead, like Peter, have the grace to say, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

This is a brief message that I wanted to share today. And just a reminder that Christmas is special, that our everlasting father knew us before we were born. He knows us now. And this great joy that we will see him face to face one day. Merry Christmas to all.

Closing Prayer

One thing I've heard today, over and over and over again is thankfulness and gratitude. Thankful to God for His Son, Jesus to be born. That will help us to be born again, to be with him forever. And really, all of us need to be thankful for our existence because the odds of us actually being is considerably low in comparison to all of the possibilities in nature for the creation of human beings. We won the lottery. We need to be grateful for that. I, I picked up a quote written by Melody Beaty. It's about gratitude. Gratitude turns what we have into enough. It, too. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order,

confusion in the clarity. Gratitude makes a sense of our past. It brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow. Let's pray our Father in Heaven. We are people filled with gratitude to you for your boundless love for us, for your sense of purpose, for us in our in our life here. We are so glad that we have come to recognize, you know, you as God. And even though we don't fathom your greatness and your the and the greatness of your Majesty, we have a glimpse of it, and we're drawn to it. We pray, Father, that in our lives this week that we might be people of gratitude and thankfulness to you and thankfulness for the people around us, for the love that we feel for each other and for others. We pray, Father, that we might be your hands and your feet, that we might be your eyes to see and hear the pain of this world and to be able to respond to it in some way that honors you to this and we give thanks to you in Jesus name. Amen.

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