

# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY DECEMBER 3 2023

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## "Giving Thanks"

Based on 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

It's that time of the year when we all need to practice up on our "Thank-you's."

- Ladies, when a new vacuum cleaner with a red bow arrives on your doorstep this Christmas mornig, the correct response is "Thank-you."
- Gentlemen, when a pair of mis-shaped and incorrect sized bright orange hand knitted hunting socks arrives in your stocking, the correct answer is "Thank-you."
- When the kind neighbour arrives at your door with her home-made candy that was so hard last year it broke a tooth and you ended up at the dentist on Christmas Eve, the correct response is "Why thank-you for the lovely gift!"

But other than being mannerly with our 'thank-you's' during this season, with our:

- Pass the turkey, please and thank you,
- Pass the eggnog, please and thank you,  
Giving thanks is something we

consider more during early October, with the long holiday weekend; with images of harvest and the blessings of creation, the wonder of nature as it feeds us, quenches our thirst, re-creates itself, heals itself. We sing a rousing chorus of "We Plough the Fields and Scatter" during worship, and then push forward towards Hallowe'en decorations.

But that's not the kind of thankfulness I'm seeking today. In our desire to return to Bethlehem once again, we play out the stories of the characters involved: of Mary and Joseph, of the Shepherds, the Angels, and later, the Magi. Like a child's favourite story book, we long to hear the story once again, even though we know it by heart. We want to wrap our minds around that journey and the hope that comes with the Holy Family on Christmas night.

But do we stop and give thanks to these characters?

- Do we give thanks for Zechariah the prophet, for keeping the story of God's promise alive in his family, his community, and his temple by telling the promises of old, over and over again?

- Do we give thanks for Elizabeth, who provided a safe place and an open heart to listen to Mary's vision and her plan, and support her when her family shunned her?

- Do we give thanks for Mary, who despite her young age, listened to the whispers of an angel, and followed her heart for God?

- Do we give thanks for Joseph, who saw how cruel the world could be to an unwed mother, and sheltered her with his name, his wisdom, and in time, his affection?

- Do we give thanks for the shepherds, who despite their low status in the community, came into town to spread the Good News of the angels?

- Do we give thanks for the Magi, who were willing to explore new ideas of faith, and I suspect, would later find a way to help the Holy Family escape the wrath of Herod?

Do we stop in our nostalgic retracing of all these character's role in the Christmas Story and recognize:

- The risks they all took,

- The potential for the world to disrupt our Holy Story,

- The odds that if any of these characters had not fulfilled their purpose, or lived up to the challenge, or answered the angels' holy whispers, that we would not have our story today?

So today we say to Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph and the unnamed Shepherd and the mysterious Magi from abroad:

- Thank you for your sacrifice, of giving up the life you thought you were going to have, to live the life God needed you to live.
- Thank you for your commitment to God's plan for the world.
- Thank you for your resolve to not give up at all the times when it seemed the world was trying to snuff your story out.
- Thank you for your love for a child, for a Holy Child, for God's child.
- Thank you for your trust in Godly whispers.
- Thank you for keeping the hope of the world alive so that we might come to know what hope is in our lives today.

Perhaps, before we venture too far into the journey to

Bethlehem, we might pause and simply:

- Give thanks that there was Bethlehem: a place for Mary and Joseph to land.

- Give thanks to God for the story He created, His mighty hands at work.

Even, Paul, angry at the Corinthians as he was, paused before scolding them, to give thanks to God and give thanks for the people God had given him to lead.

- Let us give thanks to all those: saints and sinners through the generations, who in one way or another, have continued to share this Holy Story: through the church, through Christmas Eve storytelling by the tree, by the Salvation Army kettles, by chance meetings on the street.
- Let us be diligent as the keepers of the story today to find ways to share the Christmas Story to those who come next.
- Let us be risks takers as well, to see that our Holy Story cannot be shaken by the world,
- Let us remember, that as long as we keep telling The Story, the story will remain alive. The world may change, the church may change, but the Story, the Story of Bethlehem will remain.

And for that, we give thanks.  
*To God be the glory, great things He has done.*  
Amen.