

The Touches of Christmas

The Christmas Touch for the Forgotten

Luke 2:8-20

Have you ever forgotten something that is important?

There's a story about a young woman who went away to college in the fall, leaving her plants and her goldfish in the care of her mother, who had a tendency to be forgetful. Some of us may know somebody with a "brown thumb." This mother had one. The plants that the daughter left behind in the care of her mother died by the end of the month. The mother dutifully broke the bad news to her. When the young woman called a week later, her mother confessed that the goldfish had died too.

There was a long pause, then in a fearful voice the girl asked, "How's Dad?"

As we come into the Christmas season, it is easy to forget what is important...like feeding Dad. Seriously though, we easily get our priorities mixed up. And the true meaning of Christmas gets lost.

We begin to think it is about presents, decorations and parties. But the truth is...

The true meaning of Christmas is not found in the wrappings, but in the gift (Luke 2:8-20). You know who helps us with getting the true meaning of Christmas correct? It is Charles Schulz' "Charlie Brown Christmas."

In this Christmas program that is broadcast faithfully every year, Charlie Brown picks out a lonely tree with only a few branches as a tree for the gang's Christmas program. When he brings the tree back, everyone mocks him for picking such a lousy tree (it bends over; the needles keep falling off), which makes Charlie Brown all the more depressed. And in despair, he tells us that he doesn't know what the true meaning of Christmas is all about. It is then, his friend Linus informs us all. He says something like this:

(8) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (15) When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (16) So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying

in the manger. (17) When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, (18) and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (19) But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (20) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

And this, folks, is what it is about.

It is about the gift.

It is about God with us.

It is about God coming to touch us.

It is the Christmas touch.

So...Using Luke 2:8-20, let's examine three stages that describe the shepherd's role in the Christmas story.

- I. The first stage is DERISION (8).
 - A. There was a fellowship of the forgettable.
 1. They had no status in their culture.
 2. They were uneducated, smelled lousy, and were considered low-class.
 3. They were called shepherds.
 - B. During Jesus' time, being a shepherd was a dead-end job.
 1. There was no hope for advancement.
 2. As a result, you wouldn't want your daughter to marry one.
 3. These were people that were considered outcasts and misfits.
 - C. Shepherds had a hard, thankless dangerous job.
 1. It was their responsibility to protect the sheep from robbers and wild animals.
 2. They were not considered very important.
 - D. Child of the Promise
 1. In the musical "Child of the Promise" by Michael and Stormie Omartian, the song "Nothing Ever Happens to a Shepherd" capture what it was like for shepherds:
 2. "It's cold outside in this God-forsaken place and we're stuck here with a thousand sheep.
While life is exciting for everybody else, the highlight of our day is sleep. It's lonely out here in this isolated job.
Our position is without esteem.
We're socially challenged.
We're society's scourge.

We're not exactly every woman's dream.
Shepherds have a humble purpose.
Of our fate few people care.
Sometimes I wonder if God knows we exist.
If he does he's forgotten where.
Nothing ever happens to a shepherd.
Life is boring as can be.
While exciting things occur all over the world, nothing ever happens to me."

3. Loneliness, weariness and boredom characterized the life of the shepherd.
This brings us to...

II. The second stage is DECLARATION (9-14).

A. When it comes to the announcement about Jesus...

Who would you have told first?

1. After all, this was the Messiah.
2. This was the greatest birth of all time.
3. So if you were God, who would you choose?
4. We would pick the "beautiful" people.
5. In the culture then, our choices may have included the religious leaders—the priests at the temple, the rabbis and the synagogue officials.
6. Our choices and God's choice are different.

B. I think it is fair to say that the shepherds would not have been expecting this.

1. This was not a random choice.
God sent angels to shepherds!
2. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

C. I like how Max Lucado expresses it in The Applause of Heaven:

1. An ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds.
And were it not for a God who loves to hook and "extra" on the

front of the ordinary, the night would have gone unnoticed. The sheep would have been forgotten, and the shepherds would have slept the night away.

But God dances amidst the common. And that night he did a waltz. The black sky exploded with brightness. ... Sheep that had been silent became a chorus of curiosity. One minute the shepherd was dead asleep, the next he was rubbing his eyes and staring into the face of an alien.

The night was ordinary no more.

The angel came in the night because that is when lights are best seen and that is when they are most needed. God comes into the common for the same reason.

2. God often chooses to do his greatest work through people or things we normally think of as weak or unimportant.

D. This is what Paul means in I Corinthians when he writes:

1. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.
2. To God, nobodies are somebodies.
3. This leads us to...

III. The third stage is DEVOTION (15-20).

A. The first names in the guest book belonged to the shepherds.

1. When the shepherds got the news about the birth of Jesus, I like the fact that they did not come casually. They moved on it. They hurried.
2. They became the first guests to this miraculous birth.
3. So...Something exciting was happening to a people that were characterized by nothing exciting ever happening.
4. This was network-worthy news.
5. If there had been TV back then, they would have been on the news.
6. These social misfits were, by God's design and desire, the first to know and respond.

- B. WE NEED TO CONNECT WITH THOSE THAT ARE OVERLOOKED.
1. Some of the overlooked during that day were shepherds.
 2. But the truth that we must not miss is that God continues to identify with the poor.
 3. God absolutely insists that we reach out to the overlooked.
 4. For when we do, we reach out to Him.
- C. For as it says in Matthew...
- “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”
- D. The overlooked today come in many categories.
1. They are the elderly, outcast, and homeless.
 2. They are the unappreciated and challenged.
 3. They are the untouchable, the addicts, and the diseased.
 4. They are infected with AIDS.
 5. They are convicted felons.
 6. They are the battered wives and neglected children.
 7. They are migrant workers.
 8. Essentially, the overlooked are the ones we are overlooking.
- E. Just like the shepherds, all are invited to worship.
All are invited to “come and see.”
1. By the grace of God, each one of us is welcomed here.
 2. When considering how to “honor the overlooked,” we usually don’t need to look too far.
 3. Max Lucado muses about how lepers were treated in the Old Testament but illustrates how we do much the same thing today. He writes:
 4. It seems harsh, doesn’t it? The banishing of a leper seems unnecessary. Of course, the ancient East isn’t the only culture to isolate their wounded.
 5. We may not build colonies or cover our mouths in their presence, but we build other walls and avert our eyes.
 6. I wonder what would happen if Carson Wentz would walk in and sit down during our worship service.

7. How would that compare to a homeless person walking into the back of the church
 8. What if he came down the center aisle with his backpack, ratty jeans, and torn T-shirt. His face was unshaven, and he had a distinct odor. Yet he walked right down to the front and sat down.
- F. The contrast would probably be striking
1. If Carson Wentz would enter, he would immediately be swamped.
 2. People would want to touch him and be close to him.
 3. Nobody would jump up to sit next to the homeless man.
- G. But the message we should received in our heart should be:
1. If you want to touch Jesus, whom do you touch?
 2. Jesus said, "Whatever you've done for the least of these, my brethren, you've done also to me."
 3. And so, if we want to touch Jesus, we have a special use for our hands—to touch people no one else wants to touch.
 4. We can find special purpose by seeking out the forgotten the ignored—people like this man.
- H. God doesn't give preference to any group or class.
1. He does not discriminate on the basis of intelligence, education, wealth, profession, political power, or social standing.
 2. Jesus is the Savior of all equally (Luke 2:10).
 3. As the angel declared to the overlooked shepherds:
"...I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody..."
- The Message

They were the only family with children in the restaurant. The mother had just placed her son Erik in a highchair and noticed everyone was quietly sitting and talking. Suddenly, Erik squealed glee and said, "Hi." He pounded his fat baby hands on the high chair tray. His eyes were crinkled in laughter and his mouth was bared in a toothless grin, as he wriggled and giggled with merriment.

The Mom His looked around and saw the source of his merriment. It was a man whose pants were baggy with a zipper at half-mast and his toes poked out of would-be shoes. His shirt was dirty and his hair was uncombed and unwashed. His whiskers were too short to be called a beard and his nose was so varicose it looked like a road map. We were too far from him to smell, but I was sure he smelled quite bad. His hands waved and flapped on loose wrists. "Hi there, baby. Hi there, big boy I see ya, buster," the man said to Erik.

She and her husband exchanged looks, "What do we do?" Erik continued to laugh and answer, "Hi." Everyone in the restaurant noticed and looked at us and then at the man. The old geezer was creating a nuisance with my beautiful baby. Our meal came and the man began shouting from across the room, "Do ya patty cake? Do you know peek-a-boo? Hey, look, he knows peek-a-boo." Nobody thought the old man was cute. He was obviously drunk. The husband and his wife were embarrassed. They ate in silence; all except for Erik, who was running his repertoire for the admiring skid row bum, who in turn reciprocated with his cute comments.

They finally got through the meal and headed for the door. the husband went to pay the check and told his wife to meet him in the parking lot.

The old man sat poised between her and the door. "Lord, just let me out of here before he speaks to me or Erik," I prayed. As I drew closer to the man, I turned my back trying to sidestep him and avoid any air he might be breathing. As I did, Erik leaned over my arm, reaching with both arms in a baby's "pick-me-up" position.

Before she could stop him, Erik had propelled himself from her arms to the man's. Suddenly a very old smelly man and a very young baby consummated their love kinship. Erik in an act of total trust, love, and submission, laid his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. The man's eyes closed, and she saw tears beneath his lashes.

His aged hands full of grime, pain, and hard labor, cradled her baby's bottom and stroked his back. No two beings have ever loved so deeply for so short a time. She stood awestruck.

The old man rocked and cradled Erik in his arms and his eyes opened and set squarely on hers. He said in a firm commanding voice, "You take care of this." Somehow I managed, "I will," from a throat that contained a stone.

He pried Erik from his chest, lovingly and longingly, as though he were in pain. As the mother received her baby, the man said, "God bless you, ma'am, you've given me my Christmas gift." I said nothing more than a muttered thanks.

With Erik in my arms, she ran for the car. Her husband was wondering why she was crying and holding Erik so tightly, and why she was saying, "My God, my God, forgive me." I had just witnessed Christ's love shown through the innocence of a tiny child who saw no sin, who made no judgment; a child who saw a soul, and a mother who saw a suit of clothes. She was a Christian who was blind, holding a child who was not. she felt it was God asking, "Are you willing to share your son for a moment?" when He shared His for all eternity.

Now as we prepare to leave this service,

Connect with the overlooked...for though our worship time together is ending, the service has just begun; there are many God wants us to reach that are

being ignored, intentionally or unintentionally.

Connect with the overlooked...ask God to give you compassion and passion to understand the needs, and then extend the loving arms of God around others.

Connect with the overlooked...see God's face on those that are ignored; touch them with your eyes, your time and your love.

Let us pray: