

CHRISTMAS DAY, 2022

JOHN 1:1-14

GOD'S CHRISTMAS LETTER

TWO OF MY FAVORITE PARTS OF CHRISTMAS, BESIDES THE OBVIOUS BIRTH OF JESUS, ARE FRUITCAKE AND CHRISTMAS LETTERS. SOME OF YOU HAVE TURNED YOUR NOSE UP AT FRUITCAKE – ME, I LOVE IT! BUT LIKE SO MANY THINGS, IT SEEMS TO HAVE GONE BY THE WAYSIDE, AS PERSONAL TASTES CHANGE OVER THE YEARS. THEN THERE ARE THOSE CHRISTMAS LETTERS. ALL OF US GET THEM. SOME OF US WRITE THEM, BUT NOT ALL OF US LIKE THEM. OH, IT'S NOT THAT WE DON'T APPRECIATE GETTING NEWS OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, BUT THAT THE NEWS WE GET IS OFTEN SO SLANTED.

“DEAR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, IT'S BEEN ANOTHER WONDERFUL YEAR AT OUR HOUSE. DAD RECEIVED ANOTHER PROMOTION (THAT'S THREE IN FOUR YEARS). I HAVE INCREASED MY CHARITABLE WORK TO FIVE DIFFERENT GROUPS AND WAS SELECTED AS CHAIR OF THREE OF THEM. JUNIOR MADE ALL-STATE IN THREE DIFFERENT SPORTS, AND COULD HAVE A YARD SALE WITH ALL THE MEDALS AND TROPHIES HE HAS WONE. SIS IS IN EXCELLENT POSITION TO BE VALEDICTORIAN OF HER CLASS. SHE WAS A UNANIMOUS PICK FOR HOMECOMING QUEEN – SECOND YEAR IN A ROW. AND OUR SWEET BABY – NOW TWO YEARS OLD – IS ALREADY READING AT A FIFTH GRADE LEVEL. WE HOPE YOUR YEAR WAS AS BLESSED AS OURS. FONDLY, THE WHITES”

WHICH OF COURSE IT DIDN'T. DOES ANYONE'S YEAR GO THAT WELL WITH NOTHING TO MAR IT? SO LONG AS OUR CHRISTMAS LETTERS SHOWCASE ONLY OUR TALENTS AND REWARDS AND SUCCESSES, WHAT ROOM WILL WE MAKE FOR GOD? JUST ONCE I'D LIKE TO RECEIVE THIS KIND OF CHRISTMAS LETTER, THE KIND I KNOW MANY OF YOU COULD EASILY WRITE WITH THE YEAR YOU'VE HAD...

“DEAR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, I HOPE YOUR YEAR HAS GONE BETTER THAN OURS. DAD'S COMPANY CLOSED AFTER THE CEO WAS ARRESTED FOR INSIDER TRADING, WHICH PUT HIM OUT OF WORK AND FORCED ME TO FIND A SECOND JOB. THE KIDS ARE PRETTY MUCH ON THEIR OWN, WHICH MAY EXPLAIN WHY JUNIOR WAS PICKED UP FOR SHOPLIFTING, AND WHY SIS WAS HELD BACK IN 9TH GRADE. WHEN WE CAN AFFORD IT, I AM STILL IN THERAPY, ALTHOUGH DAD SEEMS TO HAVE ENOUGH MONEY FOR HIS DRINKING. SAD TO SAY, OUR MOST MEMORABLE WEEK THIS YEAR WAS WHEN THE CAR, THE WASHING MACHINE, AND THE DOG, ALL DIED WITHIN DAYS OF EACH OTHER. MAYBE NEXT YEAR'S LETTER WILL BE BETTER. BUT MAYBE NOT. HO, HO, HO. YOUR FRIENDS, THE GREENS.”

IT'S EASY FOR US TO LAUGH AT A LETTER LIKE THAT, BUT FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE, IT ISN'T A SPOOF. IF THE TRUTH WERE TOLD, COULDN'T YOU HAVE WRITTEN SEVERAL PARAGRAPHS ABOUT WHAT DIDN'T WORK OUT THIS YEAR? SURE, SOME OF IT WAS BEYOND OUR CONTROL, BUT ONLY RARELY DO WE BLAME OURSELVES FOR THE REST. WE'RE QUICK TO TAKE CREDIT FOR THE SUCCESSES BUT TEND TO BLAME SOMEONE ELSE FOR THE FAILURES... EVEN GOD.

GOD, WHO INTENDS FOR LIFE TO BE BETTER THAN WE HAVE CAUSED OR ALLOWED IT TO BECOME. GOD, WHO WOULD STILL LIKE TO TURN THINGS AROUND.

WHICH BRINGS US TO THE CHRISTMAS LETTER THAT GOD WROTE VIA THE PEN OF ST. JOHN IN OUR GOSPEL THIS MORNING. *"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD. AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD. AND THE WORD WAS GOD."* JOHN WANTS US TO KNOW THAT EVERYTHING POSSESSING DNA WAS CREATED BY THIS WORD. THAT WITHOUT HIM, WE WOULD LACK LIFE AND LIGHT.

THEN JOHN COMES TO THE CHRISTMAS PART OF THIS LETTER WHEN HE SAYS, *"THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND LIVED AMONG US."* IN OTHER WORDS, GOD REVEALED HIMSELF ON THIS PLANET WE CALL EARTH. HE WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM. HIS PARENTS WERE FLESH AND BLOOD PEOPLE – JOSEPH AND MARY. HIS BED, A MANGER FILLED WITH STRAW.

ST. JOHN WANTS US TO KNOW THAT GOD'S CHRISTMAS LETTER TO US IS A LIVING, BREATHING PERSON WITH A NAME. *JESUS. IMMANUEL. GOD WITH US.* GOD WITH US TO REVEAL HIS FATHER'S GLORY. GOD WITH US, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH. JOHN GOES ON TO SAY THAT THE WORLD DID NOT KNOW THIS WORD WHO WAS JESUS, THAT THE WORLD NEITHER RECOGNIZED HIM NOR RECEIVED HIM.

IF GOD WROTE A CHRISTMAS LETTER TODAY, I WONDER WHAT IT WOULD SAY? *DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF MINE, HOW QUICKLY THE TIME PASSES. SOME OF YOU HAVE ASKED WHAT I'VE BEEN UP TO THIS YEAR. ACTUALLY, MORE OF THE SAME. I STAY BUSY, BUT NOT MUCH CHANGES. EVERYTHING I MAKE BEAUTIFUL SEEMS TO GET MESSED UP. I HAND OUT GIFTS, BUT THEY GET BROKEN BEFORE THERE'S A THANK YOU – IF THERE EVER IS A THANK YOU. MY LOVED ONES ARE ALTERNATELY BOSSY AND UNGRATEFUL, SELFISH AND DECEITFUL, HATEFUL AND VIOLENT. EVEN THE ONES LOMNG-OUT-OF-SCHOOL DON'T PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS. DAYS ARE FULL OF DISCOURAGEMENT – MINE AND THEIRS. BUT NONE OF THAT HAS*

DIMMED MY HOPE FOR WHAT COULD BE. SO WITH EVERY GOOD WISH FOR PEACE AND JOY, I SEND YOU MY BEST – SPECIAL DELIVERY.”

SPECIAL DELIVERY – IT’S A PLAY ON WORDS IN CASE YOU MISSED IT. IT’S A BABY IN BETHLEHEM. IT’S A PROMISE THAT OUR SOMETIMES GLAD, SOMETIMES MISERABLE, ALWAYS VULNERABLE LIVES WILL INDEED BE REDEEMED. THE GOOD, ALONG WITH THE BAD. *“FOR TO ALL WHO DID RECEIVE HIM, WHO BELIEVED IN THE NAME OF JESUS, HE GAVE POWER TO BECOME THE CHILDREN OF GOD.”*

TODAY IS ABOUT A SPECIAL DELIVERY – *“ FOR UNTO IS BORN THIS DAY IN THE CITY OF DAVED, A SAVIOR, WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD.”* A BABY BORN IN BETHLEHEM – FOR YOU!

BUT SENDING IS ONLY PART OF THE EQUATION – ANYTHING CAN BE SENT, BUT WILL IT BE RECEIVED? AND IF RECEIVED, THEN OPENED AND CHERISHED? WHEN YOU TAKE THE MAIL INTO YOUR HOUSE, DO YOU THROW EVERYTHING ON A PILE TP READ LATER, WHEN YOU HAVE THE TIME? EVEN THEN, DO YOU OPEN THOSE CARDS THAT COME THIS TIME OF YEAR, READ THE NAME AND THEN PUT THE LETTER ASIDE. DO YOU TAKE THE TIME TO CAREFULLY ABSORB THE MESSAGE, OR JST ASSUME YOU ALREADY KNOW THE GIST?

WHETHER YOU RECEIVE GOD’S LETTER THIS MORNING, OPEN GOD’S LETTER, READ IT AND COUNT IT AS GOOD NEWS DEPENDS ON THE CONTENT OF YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS LETTER, DOESN’T IT? IF THERE’S BEEN NOTHING BUT CHARM AND SUCCESS AT YOUR HOUSE THIS YEAR, WHY WOULD YOU NEED A LETTER FROM GOD? BUT IF LIFE ISN’T PERFECT, MAYBE THAT’S THE POINT – THAT GOD WANTS TO DO FOR YOU WHAT YOU CANNOT DO FOR YOURSELF.

SOMEONE WILL ASK, “DOES THAT MEAN GOD WILL GIVE WORK TO THE UNEMPLOYED? HOPE TO THE DISTRAUGHT? MONEY TO THE POOR? EASE TO WHOEVER IS TROUBLED?” CAN WE REALLY EXPECT ALL OF THAT, ANY OF THAT FROM A BABY? EVEN FROM A HOLY BABY? EVEN FROM A BABY WHO GREW UP TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS?

WEL – YES. BUT MAYBE NOT THE WAY WE THINK. MAYBE THE GOOD NEWS THIS BABY PROMPTS US TO SEE IS WHAT GOD INTENDS TO DO THROUGH EACH OF US. HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THAT YOU, TOO, ARE A LETTER SENT FROM GOD TO THE WORLD? EVER CONSIDERED THAT YOU YOURSELF ARE A SPECIAL DELIVERY, BECAUSE THE WORD WHO BECAME FLESH DWELLS IN YOU?

THAT'S WHY WE COME TO CHURCH – TO COMMUNE THIS CHRISTMAS DAY, WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER. TO THOSE WHO ARE DOWN, CAN COME A HAND THAT LIFTS UP – THROUGH YOU. TO THOSE WHO HAVE EVERYTHING CAN COME A LESSON IN PRIORITIES. AND IN THE SHARING, WE DISCOVER HIM. RIGHT HERE. IN THE MOST UNLIKELY OF PLACES. IN BREAD AND WINE. IN THE EMBRACE OF A FRIEND. IN SHARING WHAT WE HAVE TO GIVE – IN RECEIVING WHAT WE MOST NEED – HERE – WE DISCOVER HIM. THE WORD MADE FLESH – THE GOD AMONG US.

AND SO DEAR FRIENDS, WE COME TO THE END OF THIS CHRISTMAS LETTER. HOW DO YOU SIGN YOURS? FONDLY? SINCERELY, HO, HO, HO? GOD BLESS US EVERYONE? LOVE? I THINK GOD WOULD SIGN HIS LETTER “AS ALWAYS”, BECAUSE THAT’S HOW THE WORLD IS. “AS ALWAYS”, BECAUSE THAT’S HOW GOD IS. ALWAYS.

ALWAYS LISTENING,
ALWAYS GIVING,
ALWAYS SAVING,
ALWAYS LOVING...

ALWAYS WISHING US WHAT WE GAVE US IN THE FIRST PLACE. ALWAYS GLAD TO KNOW THAT WE CELEBRATE IT AND CHERISH IT AND BASE OUR LIVES UPON IT’S PROMISE.

“THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND LIVED AMONG US – AND TO ALL WHO RECEIVED HIM, HE GAVE POWER TO BECOME THE CHILDREN OF GOD – FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.” IN JESUS, AMEN!