



CHRISTMAS EVE
DEC. 24, 2014

MARSHALL, MINN.
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

IS 11:1-3a, 6-9; PS 96; TI 2:11-14; LK 2:1-20

A Still, Small Voice

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Says the **angel** to the startled **shepherds**:

*Do not be afraid; for see –
I am bringing you **good** news of **great** joy for **all** the people:
to you is born this day...a Savior, the **Messiah**.*

*This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby
wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger (Luke 2:12).*

With these **magical**, almost **mystical** words, the **angel** of the Lord concludes **God's** message to **all** the people of the planet: to all races in all places, to all tribes in all times, and to all creeds in all manners of speech.

It's a **wonderful** word of **grace** that I hope and pray is **forever** seared on my **memory**. It certainly **helps** to have heard it **multiple** *times*, and in *many forms*, over **more** than a few **decades**:

- from *Sunday School* programs...to
- Christmas Eve Candlelight* services...to
- the reading of the *Christmas* story **before** opening **presents**...to
- the old t.v. show Charlie Brown's Christmas in which Linus, using his quiet, little voice, shares with his friends the **true reason for the season**.

And though the saying is true in some respects, that *familiarity breeds contempt*, that **any** message so easily recalled might dull our **senses** and **lull** us to sleep...**not so here!** For the message of the **angel** to the *shepherds*, and through **them** to the entire world, is **nothing** other than an **earth-shaking**, **hope-making**, **thirst-slaking**, **hunger-breaking** word of **good news** for **all** people - **everywhere**.

- As I was reading this *old, old story* once again this week, I was **struck** by the **contrast** between the **highs** and the **lows**, the **extraordinary** and the **ordinary**, the **amazing** and the **average**, the **magical** and the **mundane** – all mixed together. I mean,
- Mary**, a **normal** young woman, is visited by an *angel* and gets pregnant by the *Holy Spirit*
 - Joseph**, a **normal** young man, is asked to take a giant leap of faith.
 - A host of **angels** scare the *daylights* out of some poor **shepherds**,
 - and **kings** from afar follow a star all to honor a Jewish child...

People of *all times* and in all *places* have wondered with Mary, *How can this be?* – but for entirely **different** reasons. I mean, we tend to be **realists**, we **know** how the **world works**, and we know that the world will ask: *how can a child – born in a barn – be any kind of good news – even to the shepherds, let alone the rest of the people of this planet?* **One more fragile life, one more mouth to feed, one more cry** in the **night**...among all the **other** bleats and baas, moos and coos, neighs and brays of ordinary, two-and-four-footed, furry-and-fur-less beasts!?!?

It's a great story, **but**...when you and I are feeling anxious or afraid, hurting or hopeless, burdened or **just plain bad**, we want something **more** than a *still, small, voice*, the *Spirit's whisper*, a child's *new-born cry*. At times like **that**, we want our God to **rise up** with a **shout**, we want that heavenly host to come down and **help** us, we want something **sure** and **certain** and **strong**...

But...such is the **mystery**, **and** such is the **beauty** of God's **great plan** to **grace** all **creation** – **not** with *angry shouts* and *loud reports*, **but** in the **quiet** language of **grace** and **love**.

And the **more** I **thought** about that, the **more** I **realized** that this is exactly how God has been working in life since the first moment of creation.

In the beginning, says the book of Genesis, **God spoke** and creation was filled with a creaturely chorus of the sounds of life.

When **Israel** languished as **slaves** in **Egypt**, **God spoke** and **Moses** led his **people** in singing a song of **freedom**.

When the prophet **Elijah** was despairing, **God spoke** to him – not in earth, wind or fire, but in a *still, small voice* – filled with the **promise** of **love**.

And Psalm 46, which describes God as *our refuge and strength*, as the one who *breaks the bow, shatters the spear, and burns the chariots with fire*, also includes this instruction. Says the Lord:

Be still...and know that I am God!

So it is that God **entered** our world and **became** like **one** of **us**, in the *still, small voice* of a newborn babe. God entered our world in the moment when life is its **frailest**, when so **many** things can go **wrong** – from travel plans to unsanitary conditions to **plots** by **politicians** to **protect** their **power**.

And **wonder** of **wonders**, that *still, small voice* not only **survived**, but **thrived** and began to speak in ways that ever since have **changed** peoples **lives**, in ways that have **changed** the *life* of the *entire world*.

I'm **not** sure **why** it is that babies speak so tenderly to our hearts...but it's **true** that *a little child* **can** lead us. When Carolyn and I returned to the seminary after our year of **internship** in Alaska, brought home with us our baby son, Mark.

One day I brought him up to visit my wife at work whose desk was just outside the office of the Academic Dean, Terry Fretheim. Much to our surprise, in no time at all, this highly respected theologian was on his belly on the floor trying to make Mark giggle in his *still, small voice*.

And some of you know our daughter, Rachel, who is a pastor down in the Fulda-Windom area. Sometimes she will take one of her children on visits to the hospital or nursing home. She tells of watching the vacant eyes of patients **light up** whenever their ears hear the *still, small voices* of those kids.

Until our dying days, we will continue to walk through this world that is **filled** with **loud** and **agitated** voices. We'll be **entertained** by some, **enraged** by others, and **confused** by many. **Few**, however, will be able to **speak** to our **lives**, and **none** will be able to **mend**, **heal** and **fill** our **hearts** with **hope**, in the way that our **God** has chosen to **speak** to us.

In **some** ways, this entrance by God into **life** is as *still* and *small* as the squeaks and squawks of a *new born child*. In **another** way, in the way that you and I are **assured**:

-that God **loves** us,

-that Christ **died** for us,

-that the Holy Spirit helps us **live out** our **faith**,

God's *still, small voice* is as **loud** as a **shout** that **echoes** from the **halls of heaven** to the **deepest recesses** of the **sea**.

Listen hard this Christmas season, and **every** day of the year. And let me know how many different ways you hear a *still, small voice* singing Glory to God in the highest, and peace among the people...of Marshall, and of **all** the earth. Amen.