

Christmas Eve Service (7:00 p.m.)

Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

Missing Link

I want to begin this evening with several words of gratitude for our blessings.

The last time Judy and I accepted a new Call required that we came into town, signed the Mortgage to buy our house and the moving Van arrived on December 22nd; my first Sunday was December 23rd with multiple worship services; followed by Christmas Eve on Monday night, when her parents arrived. Getting to know one another over these last three months has been a wonderful extended season of Advent of coming to know the Love of God in you. Thank you.

Second, that over the last 35 years, I have always had a late night traditional Christmas Eve worship which concluded with Candlelight Silent Night, but these were always at 11pm ending on the stroke of Midnight. Thank you for having our late night Christmas Eve worship service at 7pm. I can guarantee that tonight, the worship service will be over before Midnight.

And Thank you for the way you have treated us. Several have commented about the different mood and feeling in this church, attributing this to me, when the truth of the matter is that that spirit is from God, through all of us. I was visiting a couple Sunday afternoon and described the passage where Jesus was going through a Village on his way to the Cross, and people did not believe in him, and he could do no miracles only healing a few people, which leads to Jesus sending out the Disciples as Pairs of Apostles. Something amazing happens when we believe in each other, when we believe God is with us; which when we do not, when we doubt one another or criticize one another, prevents us from experiencing, prevents us getting anything done.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Church at Philippi wrote one of my favorite passages, which I believe explains this essential and often “missing link”. (Philippians 2: 1-7)

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore my beloved, as you have always listened, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for God’s good pleasure.

The wonder of this night is the absolute NORMALCY of it all. At the birth of the Son of God we want Angel Choirs singing the Halleluiahs Chorus. We want Kings and the Wisest of Leaders from every Country

to cross continents and oceans to bring Gold and Treasures, bowing down to him. We want to believe that this was so monumental an event that another Star was added to the Universe. We want Animals to talk. But the INCARNATION of God with Us, the Messiah awaited for hundreds of years, the coming of the Savior, happened in a totally insignificant understated way.

A subtle message of this passage comes from the Angels. Beginning on Christmas Eve is recited the Most Common phrase in all the Bible. It is said over and over throughout Jesus' life as a link tying together the Gospels, do you remember what it is? Be not afraid. That is the human crisis. Fear is the desire of terrorists, that we would no longer trust, no longer listen, but act in anxiety and fear, so Be Not Afraid.

Jesus was in the form and being with God, and emptied himself to be One with us. Being born in human form, he then humbled himself by being obedient to Trust even unto a death of shame. Instead of accumulating stuff and gorging ourselves on Christmas Goodies, we need to lower the tensions between us. A few weeks ago I shared with the congregation a theory of the Levels of Conflict. The difficulty is that if we match each other, or try to dominate the other, we only escalate the hostility and hurt feelings and conflict. No, the only method for lowering Conflict is and has always been for us to lower our level of conflict, to be humble, to compromise and to accept. In that way we become less of a threat and the other either gives up on fighting or becomes a friend. But what this requires is realization that your INTEGRITY, your RELATIONSHIP, are worth more than WINNING. Do we care more about the other person, do we care more about who we are and what we represent than we do beating the other?

In 1863 Thomas Huxley was the first Biologist to create a systematic comparison of the differences and similarities between Modern Humans and Apes, concluding that there are less differences between Modern Humans and Apes than there are between African Apes and Orangutans. It was Huxley's work that Charles Darwin referenced in his book The Descent of Man in 1871 causing all the fervor between Creationists believing in Adam and Eve vs. Evolutionists searching for a Missing Link. What I want to suggest tonight is that search for a Missing Link has been looking in the wrong direction! Instead of searching for evidence through fossils from Millions of years ago, we need to recognize that Jesus Christ gave us the means and example of OUR BEING the Missing Link. Our being the link between the people we are in contact with and GOD. I want to say that again, the search is not about a Missing Link between Us and Apes Millions of Years ago, we are the Missing Link between Humanity and God now and in the future. To be a Christian is not about quoting Scriptures, being a member of a Church, to be a Christian is to imitate the example of Jesus Christ.

In the Book The Different Drum, Scott Peck tells the story of a Monastery set atop a hillside. Over the centuries, people had stopped coming and the Monastery had fallen into disrepair. The Monks each lived their lives as in solitude and silence, looking after themselves and their responsibilities, but nothing outside their view. One day, the Senior Abbot was playing Chess with the local Rabbi, when the Rabbi said "It came to me in a dream that one of the Monks in your Monastery has been sent there by God." The old Monk thought this quite odd and told it to all in the Monastery. Each one knew it could not be him, but also wondered about each of the others. They began treating one another as if sent by God. They began laughing together and helping each other, singing together and harmonizing. Hearing the music, witnessing the relationship between the monks, people began bringing picnics to enjoy on the hillside around the Monastery. Eventually choosing to be married here. Which One it was that was sent by God does not matter, the Missing Link was that they humbled themselves to treat others as if they were a gift sent from God to make their lives better rather than living isolated and alone.

I was in the bank the other day, as a customer blessed the Tellers: "Merry Christmas, I hope you each receive corvettes and second homes and puppies!" What ever happened to Be Not Afraid, Peace on Earth, Goodwill, or Joy to the World?