

“Charlie Brown: Christmas Is Coming and I’m Not Happy”

December 17, 2018

A *Charlie Brown Advent* series – Blue Christmas: A Service of Hope and Healing

In this season of Advent as we prepare for Christmas, we’re using “A Charlie Brown Christmas” as a theme for worship. Take a look at the beginning of the special.

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“Christmas is coming, and I’m not happy.” Charlie Brown’s honest assessment of how he’s feeling resonates with us as we gather here – a time set apart to acknowledge the grief, pain, and difficulty of this season. Maybe you’re here for yourself, with a loved one, or because of the pain and anguish in the world – people recovering from natural disasters, refugees seeking safety and security, violence in our communities, worry about the state of our country and the world. Whatever brings us here, God receives us just as we are and welcomes us.

Charlie Brown has become a powerful witness to me in this season. He wants to know the true meaning of Christmas. He’s honest about his struggle to be happy in this season when everyone around him is excited. You might be here tonight because you’re struggling, too – whether it’s the first Christmas without a loved one (or whether it’s been many years and this is simply a hard time of year), maybe you’re overwhelmed by circumstances in your life, battling illness, worried about finances or employment, going through family conflict, or many other things that bring us to a place where we can relate to Charlie Brown: “Christmas is coming, and I’m not happy.”

Hear the song again that starts the T.V. special:

Christmas time is here

Happiness and cheer

Fun for all that children call

Their favorite time of year

Sleigh bells in the air

Beauty everywhere

Yuletide by the fireside

And joyful memories there

Snowflakes in the air

Carols everywhere

Olden times and ancient rhymes

Of love and dreams to share

Christmas time is here

Families drawing near

Oh, that we could always see

Such spirit through the year

Beautiful words, but they may ring hollow for us if we’re struggling. The expectations of this season are heightened – that everyone has the picture perfect family or set up for a celebration. But that’s not how it is, and that’s not how it started. We’ve sanitized the story of Jesus’ birth so much that we forget about the pain and uncertainty surrounding it.

For hundreds of years before Jesus, the people were waiting for a Redeemer. God promised someone to deliver them, and they were waiting and hoping. Isaiah says

it feels like they're walking in darkness before they see the power of light to dispel it. Isaiah lifts up the birth of a child who will rule well – with good counsel, holy wisdom, with love and peace. We claim this prophecy as a description of who Jesus is and how he rules in our hearts.

Matthew's take on Jesus' birth centers around Joseph, who receives news he's not ready to hear – that Mary is pregnant – and he has to make a decision that affects them both. It's a revelation in a dream when Joseph learns of God's plan to come into the world to bring salvation – and God will come in this child that Mary carries – Jesus, who comes to save.

Joseph believes in the promise of the Messiah and follows God's direction – through Mary's pregnancy and the birth, and after as he does what he has to do – fleeing to Egypt - to protect Jesus from King Herod. It wasn't an easy, safe, or quiet time. It was difficult, dangerous, and chaotic.

I share this because Christmas is a celebration of the Incarnation – the Word made flesh – God coming to be with us in our humanity. Jesus knows deeply and intimately what it means to be human – what it feels like to experience the greatest happiness and the greatest suffering, struggle, and worry. We can take some comfort in that Good News - that Jesus gets us.

We may not get answers for the many times we ask, "Why?" We may still struggle to feel God's presence, but God is with us. This time set aside will not instantly change our situations, make us happy, or alleviate the pain of this season, but there is comfort in knowing that, ultimately, we are not alone. Tonight when we light candles, I'll offer my prayers for my family – for health concerns and worries for them, for my friends, each of them in the midst of challenging situations, for the struggles and pain of many people, for our country and for God's wisdom to guide us, and for our world.

God knows you and knows your heart. God loves you and is listening when you pray. God offers forgiveness. God gives us grace and strength to sustain us. God gives us hope for a better day. We can trust in it. We can depend on it. We can give thanks for it. Thanks be to God. AMEN.