

"A Love Song in the Wind"

Rev. David Gregory

December 26, 2021

Christmas 1



Shepherds Drawing - Chuck Van Frank

Readings

Still In the Wind

Kahlil Gibran

He knew the mountains
as eagles know them,
and the valleys as they are known
by the brooks and the streams.
And there was
a desert in his silence
and a garden in his speech.

To tell of the speech of Jesus
one must have his speech
or the echo thereof.
I have neither the speech
nor the echo.

I beg you to forgive me for
beginning a story
that I cannot end.
But the end is not yet
upon my lips.
It is still a love song
in the wind.

Luke 2:12-20

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

"Look for this, a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger." At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to everyone on earth.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what has been revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were astonished.

Mary kept all these things to herself, though, holding them dear, deep within herself. But the shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

We welcome you on this First Sunday of Christmas, and we trust that this time of celebration is bringing you a deepening peace, one that surpasses human understanding. And it does take something beyond our understanding to get us there.

It's nothing new; the world is pretty crazy right now. The news outlets are keeping us apprised of the pandemic, a highly contagious variant, cancelled flights, and redirected holiday plans. All of the things that have polarized us continue to do so and then some. Politics, social media, and the very nature of truth itself—it all seems up for grabs. And so we are tired, worn out, and weary of the relentless nature of the world as we have come to know it. In the last two years, we've wanted nothing more than to move on, to find a bit of order in the chaotic existence we've come to expect. But this vision continues to elude our grasp as we keep returning to the same questions. How long must we continue this journey? When will we find some lasting relief from these common struggles? And the longer this goes on, what will become of us, of our family systems, our cultural experiences, and our religious institutions? So far, the only answer is that we just don't know yet. And as we live in the not-knowing, we celebrate the Nativity once more, telling the stories of hope and deliverance that have sustained people for generations.

One of those stories is about some shepherds who were out in the wild places one night, tending and protecting the sheep committed to their charge. All of a sudden they were confronted with an array of angelic messengers giving them a sign of something hopeful. And what is more hopeful than an expression of new life, warm and innocent, wrapped in blankets and cradled? Could this be the answer they were searching for? Could this be the sign that all of their messianic hopes could be realized? Today as we read the story again, we can feel their sense of anticipation. If an angel choir sent us a signal that things were about to get better, we'd probably run with haste just like the shepherds did so we could see it and believe it for ourselves.

Whatever Christmas may mean to you, whether you are a religious person or not, this is the season when we make these hopeful gifts to each other, when we find nuggets of wisdom in the ancient stories, and instead of hoarding them for our own enjoyment, we pull them out and offer them to each other as signs and signals of something better. Like the shepherds, we rush to the places where this kind of sharing exists, in conscious awareness that no such gifts should remain unopened. Every day is a new opportunity for connection, alignment, and solidarity with the love that empowers the universe. That is the message of Christmas: "Look what I found. You can have some too."

Like Joseph and Mary, unhoused except for a stable, unable to provide anything but a makeshift bed in a feeding trough for their newborn son, we've come to inhabit an environment that seems nearly as tentative and unsure as that stable, and yet each day we're offered something helpful to keep us grounded and moving forward. This past week I was handed a copy of a poem in a newsletter published by our church more than fifty-five years ago. The piece, entitled "Still in the Wind," is the work of Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese poet and philosopher living in the overlap of the 19th and 20th centuries. It's a poem about Jesus, the Son of God, but written in simple human terms, unadorned with any theological agenda or historic reference point. This poem was a sign for me, something I sorely needed, even though I was unaware of that need. It came to me in the form of a gift, an expression of the grace of someone who received it, who was moved and altered by it, and therefore

felt compelled to share it. In turn, I felt compelled to share it with you today, because I found within it something that brought me the peace I keep talking about, the kind that is beyond human understanding.

In a world that may not seek to hear or understand the words of ancient teachers or wisdom traditions, we often find ourselves being asked, “What difference can a church make? Why keep the traditions alive? Why continue year after year to follow the cycles of reading, preaching, and worship that don’t seem to connect with the real world of COVID, ecological collapse, and civil strife? What is it about this Jesus that has us still talking about him after 2000 years?” The poet helps us to understand that none of us can know what Jesus truly said. We’re relying on messages that have evolved from oral traditions, told and retold many times before they were finally written down. There exist a myriad of translations, a sifting and sorting of gospels—some included, and others cast aside depending on competing agendas. Our human minds create systems of understanding in order to find the final answers to our questions, to build on the bedrock of propositional truth. . . as if that bedrock ever truly existed. Gibran tells us something that we already know. We have neither the speech of Jesus nor its echo, but we tell the story anyway, over and over. We take what little we do have, and we listen for the rest—something that he calls “a love song in the wind.”

For many years now, our denomination, the United Church of Christ, has been identified with the little motto “God is still speaking.” The whole point of that phrase is to signal to ourselves and to each other that we are a community of a “continuing testament,” a story that is still being told, a journal entry that has yet to be completed, saved, and published as a final PDF. It is a story that we cannot—and I think should not—ever pretend to have completed, and therein lies the beauty of it in the first place. We walk by faith and not by sight. For the shepherds in the fields, seeing was believing, but the lesson here is that believing is seeing.

Throughout history, the great teachers and influencers have been people who set out on a journey to an unknown destination. They began a story that had no ending. They gave attention to the path that they were on. They were steeped more in practice than in words, and because of that, they had the joy of seeing it all unfold. I have no idea what the new year will bring us, but I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to enjoy its unfolding, and to hear the “love song in the wind” that will guide us in a daily way toward the next step and the one after that, and the one after that. My sense is that God will always be speaking. My desire is that we will always be attuning ourselves to what is spoken. And the tuning of it will bring us peace.



Self Portrait and Muse
Khalil Gibran