

Piedmont Presbyterian Church



5760 NE Cleveland, Portland, Oregon 97211
503-285-5348

December 19, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Christmas Eve finds many of us in places we don't want to be. We want to be gathered together at church, instead of home. We want to be around a table with friends or family, not eating by ourselves. Even if we can appreciate the blessings of where we are this Christmas, there is an awareness of the difficulty we are in together as a people. We want to be in a place where it is safe to be closer than six feet apart, without masks, where thousands of our fellow brothers and sisters aren't suffering a deadly illness. We want to be in a place where everybody has safe shelter, and plenty to eat, where the each brother and sister is regarded with the love and respect as being made in God's image.

It occurs to me that Mary and Joseph, when Jesus was born, probably wanted to be somewhere else. If I was in their shoes, I would have wanted to be home, surrounded by family instead of in a strange town. I would have wanted the baby to be born in a safe, clean room, instead of a place where animals slept and ate. They did not choose their circumstances any more than we are able to choose our circumstances today.

In the place they did not want to, be in a situation they would not have chosen, Jesus came into their lives. The angels still sang, the good news still went out, the star still guided the wise men. Even as we find ourselves uncomfortable, and mourning, God's plan is still in action. We celebrate at Christmas because what God has done for us, because God has come close to us, even in our desperate circumstances. We celebrate because Christ is enters into the dusty, less than presentable places in our lives. In the darkness, the light still shines, even if we cannot always sense that it is there.

Usually, we gather to worship together to mark this occasion. We sing and read scriptures that are so familiar to us, we almost know them by heart. We retell the story of Jesus' birth, and we say that it is still the story of today: of God coming

near, of people receiving good news with awe and wonder, of God's plan of salvation being worked out among the us in ways we could not have possibly come up with in our own human plans.

It seems strange to have a Christmas, where out of love we are saying: don't gather, don't get close, stay at home. There are a few church members are making plan for small observances around the building: ringing the bell on Christmas eve, putting battery lit luminaries on the church lawn, belting out Christmas carols solo in a flash, worship-by-one moment on the church steps. But most of us will be by ourselves where we live, given an opportunity to figure out our own worship and celebration with God who promises to be with us, wherever we are, whatever our circumstances.

No matter how different this year, the important things, the main things, are still true. God has still come to us as Jesus, Emmanuel, God-is-with-us. God is still lifting the lowly up, and giving the hungry food. We may be a people scattered, but the true bonds of love in the Holy Spirit are as strong and connected as ever. We are still called to minister in this love, seeking to do as Jesus did, to "to proclaim good news to the poor...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (from Luke 4:18-19). The Christmas Eve offering we are collecting is for this end: to feed our neighbors through the NE Emergency Food Project.

I hope and pray this Christmas that you feel the awe and the wonder of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. I pray that the love, hope, peace and joy of the gift we have in Jesus our Savior abounds and overflows in your heart. I pray that the Spirit inspires and leads you in worship and service in this coming year.

The love of God, the light of Christ, and the joy of the Holy Spirit abide with you this holy night and forever.

Pastor Sarah

