

West Hartford United Methodist Church – 13 January 2015

Luke 2:22-40 “Why Christmas? Because We Need To Give” by Pastor Ric Hanse

Forty Days

Forty Days after Jesus’ birth Joseph and Mary take their baby on a five-mile journey northeast from Bethlehem to the Jerusalem temple. At the most sacred place in Israel they perform three ceremonies in order to stay faithful to God’s laws found in Exodus and Leviticus. First Joseph and Mary go through the ritual of purification required forty days after birthing a child. Joseph goes through the ritual because he helped Mary deliver her baby and so Joseph also needs to be cleansed. Next the couple presents their firstborn baby boy to God. Finally, Joseph and Mary dedicate Jesus to the Lord’s service.

Joseph and Mary are committed to keeping God’s laws because they are faithful Jews who love the Lord with all their hearts, souls, minds and strength. While at the Lord’s Temple in Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary meet two people who have given their lives to wholeheartedly loving and serving God. First they meet the wise older man Simeon. Simeon has spent his long life to enjoying a close friendship with God, and to waiting for God’s promised Savior. Forty days after Jesus is born, Simeon experiences Christmas. Taking forty day old Jesus in his arms, Simeon’s heart soars as he holds his God, His Savior, his source of everlasting life. During this most wonderful moment Simeon declares, “You may now dismiss your servant in peace.” Simeon is ready to die because he has given himself to the One who is everlasting life. In that moment, Simeon experiences the highest level of contentment.

Seeing this scene playing out, Anna the 105-year-old prophetess who has spent her life living in the temple races over to Joseph, Mary, Jesus and Simeon. Delighted to be alive to see the Savior of all creation, Anna begins telling everyone in the temple about Jesus who is born to bring God’s people forgiveness, healing and life that lasts forever.

Simeon and Anna – two wonderfully wise Israeli elders who have given their lives to walking with God. Who are the people in your life who have given their lives to loving, serving and walking with God? Give thanks to God for these wonderful people. For the odds are good that you would not be here today were it not for them.

Why Christmas?

Why Christmas? Because we need to give – we need to give ourselves to Jesus. Just as Simeon and Anna gave themselves to Jesus, we need to give ourselves to Jesus. We give presents to each other at Christmas. Have we given Jesus the gift of ourselves? Simeon gives himself to Jesus when he takes the forty-day old Savior in his arms. Anna gives herself to Jesus when she declares to everyone who will listen that Jesus is the anointed Savior of the world.

Giving Jesus Our Minds

Christmas is so central to who we are because Christmas – more than giving gifts to others, is about giving ourselves to Jesus. Giving ourselves to Jesus is involved, and takes time. We give ourselves to Jesus when we give Jesus our minds. Giving our minds to God means inviting Jesus to purify, shape and inform our thoughts. Think about the thoughts that fill your mind. Those thoughts – all those thoughts – need to be given to Jesus. Don’t worry – Jesus is strong enough to receive all of your thoughts, and not one of them will shock or surprise Him.

Giving Jesus Our Desires

Giving ourselves to Jesus means giving Jesus our desires. Each of us is a web of desires. Some of our desires are pure and right and beautiful and good. Some of our desires are impure, wrong, and not good. When we give our desires – all of our desires – to Jesus, He goes to work within us growing the good desires and delivering us from the desires that get us into trouble, and that isolate us from God, others and ourselves.

Giving Jesus Our Dreams

Giving ourselves to Jesus means giving Jesus our hopes and dreams. What do you hope for in life? Have you given these hopes to Jesus? What dreams fill your heart? Have you offered these dreams to Jesus? Jesus wants to be at the center of our hopes and dreams. When we give our hopes and dreams to Jesus, He transforms our selfish and unfaithful hopes and dreams into hopes and dreams that are good and right and beautiful. Jesus also receives our broken hopes and dashed dreams and heals them – bringing through them something very, very good.

Giving Jesus Our Failures

We give Jesus the gift of ourselves when we offer Him our fears, our flaws and our failures. Each of us is a bundle of fears, flaws and failures. When we give Jesus our fears, He heals the irrational fears, and works good through the good fears so we can navigate faithfully through life’s difficulties. When we give Jesus our flaws we are admitting that we are not God, that we can never be God and that we need the gifts of humility and forgiveness. When we give Jesus our failures, we are failing forward. Failing forward is choosing not to be crushed by our failures but rather to learn from our failures, and to look for how Jesus is bringing something good out of our failures.

Giving Jesus Our Devotion

Finally giving ourselves to Jesus means giving our Savior our entire devotion. Is Jesus the most important person in our lives? Is Jesus the One we want to love, please and adore more than anyone else? I suspect that we all have some growing to do in this area of our lives.

Contentment

When we give ourselves to Jesus we receive in return a wonderful Christmas gift: Contentment. Contentment is much more than accepting the status quo of where we are financially, relationally and spiritually. Contentment is knowing that whatever happens in our lives – Jesus has the final say – so everything is going to be well. When we offer ourselves to Jesus we come into a strong and constant friendship with our Savior who makes it possible for us to see beyond our worries, to see beyond our fears, to see beyond our failures, to see beyond our diseases and to see beyond our deaths to a wonderful future. A future ruled by Jesus who brings good out of bad. A future ruled by Jesus who promises us that in Him we have full, meaningful, wonderful abundant life. This is the contentment Simeon experiences when he says, “Lord you may now dismiss your servant in peace.”

Why Christmas? Because we need to give ourselves to Jesus.