

**REFLECTION 24<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2023****SUNDAY MORNING 10AM****By Rev. Dr. Fei Taule'ale'ausumai**

Today's 4<sup>th</sup> candle for Advent is Love. The Christmas message and the Christmas celebration centers around God's great love for us, the commitment not to leave us abandoned, not to leave us in the darkness of political, social, or personal tyrannies. The message of Christmas is summed up in that communication made by the angel to Mary at the Annunciation, "You shall call his name Jesus and he shall be known as Emmanuel, which translates 'God with us.'"

And why does God choose to dwell among us? When you look at all the horror in our world, all the abuse that we humans put on one another – why would God want to have any part of us? Why? Because, simply put, God is love and the object of all love is relationship. I'm sure everyone here can relate to a love of their life, a spouse, a partner, a child, a sibling a friend.

The real Christmas memory, then, is not that of a passive Baby Jesus but rather of an active God. Christmas is about God as Emmanuel coming to dwell among us," to be a part of the human condition.

As we prepare to gaze once again at the manger, and we see that at his birth Jesus is surrounded precisely by those little ones, by the poor. It is the shepherds. They were the simplest of people, they found him because they lived in the fields, "keeping watch over their flocks by night" ("Lk 2:8"). They were there to work,

because they were poor. They had no timetables in life; everything depended on the flock. They could not live where and how they wanted, but on the basis of the needs of the sheep they tended. That is where Jesus is born: close to them, close to the forgotten ones on the peripheries of society. He comes where human dignity is put to the test. He comes to uplift and empower the excluded and he first reveals himself to them: not to educated and important people, but to poor working people. Tonight, Jesus comes to fill with dignity the downtrodden and despised. He reminds us of the importance of granting dignity to men and women through labour, but also of granting dignity to human labour itself whatever the task may be.

The message of the gospel of the Christ child, of Jesus of Nazareth is that there is hope for all of us. Hope for the weary, hope for the lost, hope for the forgotten, hope for the homeless, the disabled. Hope came alive for the Samaritan woman at the well, trapped in her state of loneliness, the leper amongst the tombs, considered to be a schizophrenic, the paralytic at the pool, waiting desperately to enter the healing waters. All of these, and numerous other biblical characters were excluded from and condemned by society, at a time when they needed the accompaniment of an understanding and caring community the most.

Jesus' words and action to these and so many others are always affirming and reassuring; and always pointed to life beyond the misery of the moment. Jesus' ministry is always a signpost of hope for the troubled people he encountered then and now; and for those of us struggling to make sense of life's challenging and troublesome circumstances, Jesus is that beacon of hope at this Christmas time. I suggest that Christmas points to the extraordinary gift of God's presence in the

person of Jesus, who enables us to see differently, to claim possibilities and to live our lives in freedom and hope.

Christmas is often a time of despair and struggle when the reality of “not being able to provide and give the gifts that the malls seem to be selling or the music seems to be playing out. For many Christmases is a time of loss and death and grief as loved ones just cannot hold on for another day. The Christmas Carol “O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see Thee lie” informs and inspires us.

...Yet in thy dark street shineth  
The everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in Thee tonight.

Christmas is not just a one-day event, today marks the beginning of the work of Christmas for the rest of the year. Today we are challenged to imagine who is lost, who is hungry, who needs peace in March and April. When the shepherds have gone home, the tinsel and the lights are packed away for another year. Christmas for us has just begun. Remember to surprise and bring joy to another, to find someplace to offer the song of the angels to someone who needs not only in December but also in June and whenever.

Howard Thurman puts it this way in his poem “The Work of Christmas”:

Which we sang last week at Frank Hanson’s request.

When the song of the angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and shepherds have found their way home,

The work of Christmas has begun.  
To find the lonely and the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among sisters and brothers,  
To make music in the heart.

I pray that this Christmas season will rekindle God's love and gift of hope within us and stir us to keep it alive; that the message and meaning of Christmas will resonate with our struggle and search for a life of quality; and that God's miracle of intervention will meet us at the point of our need. Merry Christmas and God bless. Amen.