

Taking Down Christmas

1 Samuel 3:1-20

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; John 1:43-51

1/15/12

Peace Lutheran

Last week, we took down Christmas. That's how we often describe the task of removing and storing all the Christmas decorations in the church and in our homes.

Amy and I took advantage of the break we had last weekend and spent much of it taking down Christmas. It always takes a while after that to get used to the seeming drabness of our house. Maybe you have the same experience. All the red Christmas cups and dishes have been replaced by our white dishes and gray cups. The wall displays are much less colorful than what we had on them during Christmas. And, of course, there's no tree brightening the corner of our living room with its lights and ribbons and special family remembrances.

Here at Peace Lutheran, the big tree is gone – the one that greeted us with its lights and other decorations as we entered the main door. All the colorful banners and wall hangings that Jan Harvey created or discovered have been taken down. The two smaller Christmas trees no longer light the chancel; the angel memorials Helen Mae made for us that decorated those trees have been stored away for another year. The pew candles have long since disappeared; and the nave likely will not be as bursting with people for awhile as it always is on Christmas Eve.

We took down Christmas last week. All the glitter and beauty and bustle and joy of the season have gone. The cold winds of a January winter have arrived. Perhaps, like me, you have that feeling of keeping your head down, hunching your shoulders, keeping your arms close to your side and settling down to endure not only the cold but the everyday challenges that life brings us. Challenges we somehow ignored while we celebrated Christmas. We took down Christmas. Now it's back to business as usual.

As we live and move and have our being in the time after Christmas, it's good to get together once a week to hear God remind us that "business as usual" still includes all the best things about Christmas. The good news is that, although we might have taken down Christmas and put it away from our minds for the year, God never does. "Love came down at Christmas," as that quiet carol reminds us. Love came down at Christmas and has never left.

In fact, love came to us in other ways long before that first Christmas. The word of the Lord was rare in Samuel's day, we're told. But young Samuel heard it. Samuel wasn't looking for the Lord. At his tender age, he had little idea what the Lord was like. He couldn't recognize the voice calling his name as the Lord's voice. The Lord came to Samuel before Samuel knew much of anything about the Lord. The Lord came to Samuel, not Samuel to the Lord. The Lord sought out Samuel, not the other way around.

To be sure, the news that the Lord brought to Samuel was hard to hear. We're not surprised that Samuel didn't want to say

anything to Eli. But Eli sets us straight. “It is the Lord,” he said. “Let the Lord do what seems good.” Eli’s words aren’t words of fatalism – “it is what it is” – but of trust, faith in a faithful God because Eli knows that what seems good to the Lord will ultimately be good for the children of the Lord.

We trust God because God has first shown himself to be trustworthy. We speak God’s word to others because God has first spoken to us. We see because we have been seen; love because we have been loved. Jesus found Philip, not the other way around. Then Jesus assures Nathanael that he will see greater things because Jesus first saw Nathanael before Nathanael saw him.

We’re in a season after Christmas called “Epiphany.” Epiphany has to do with light, with revelation. We focus in these weeks on the ways in which God’s light has entered the world in Jesus, how that light continues to lead us, make us certain of its truth, and calls us to reflect that light in what we say, what we do, in who we are in the world and for the world.

And one of the primary truths that that light reveals is that God first sees us, loves us, comes to us – all of us (there is no “them” in this) – and calls us to follow that light, reflect that love in how we live in the world and amongst others. We may take down Christmas – not just literally in terms of how we decorate our spaces, but spiritually in how we hold back our welcome and become less generous with our gifts to others. We may take down Christmas from time to time. But God never does.

The Psalmist knew that truth centuries before Christ. “*Lord you have searched me out. Oh Lord you have known me.*” You know me through and through and still you care about me, you care for me. In Jesus, God comes to us as one of us, one with us, one for us. And invites us – not forces us but invites us – to reflect that light to show those who have not yet seen the light, the source from which that light, from which all good things come.

We have an annual meeting of the congregation today. I look forward to spending this additional time together this weekend. We basically have been a healthy congregation. It’s appropriate to gather and thank God for that gift. We have our challenges and our shortcomings. Too few of those who consider themselves members exercise the responsibilities or avail themselves of the gifts we have to offer to our community. But of those who do, we’ve acted in healthy, loving, generous ways.

But we must never lose sight of the fact that this is God’s church not ours; we are God’s people not our own; we are free to do not whatever we feel like doing but what God calls us to do, to be the people God loves us into being. We are so, we do so, in order to have the courage – and the assurance – that when others ask who we are and what we’re about, we can reply with confidence – “come and see.” Christmas may have been taken from our walls – but, tanks be to God, it can always remain in our hearts.