

Newsletter Reflections for December

As I write this piece in a few days we will celebrate begin a journey to celebrate our belief that the infant whose birth we will begin anticipating in a week is the King of kings and Lord of lords; in this same intervening week between that celebration at a Table of Remembrance where we will be fed and nourished spiritually by that King who was and is like no other king, there will be a nationally declared Thanksgiving Day where the majority of people will indeed gather around tables and celebrate. There will be a great deal of eating, but very few will truly be devoting the day to recognizing the source of the many blessings found in their lives and giving thanks and praise for them. This year, like the last two, there will be many who will not be as blessed as others, but strangely enough, those are often the people and tables, the places where the sense of recognition of blessings received are most sincerely felt...like the widow who returned her "mite" to the Temple treasury. In many of the homes where there is the most cause to feel blest, the attention is directed toward the national obsessions of football and retail concerns and the "Black Friday" retail events which have actually already begun this year. This year there has been so much concern about the "supply chain" issues that the retail industry has joined with those with various religious concerns who are often voicing the cry about "Christ" being taken out of Christmas. Let me make it very clear the only way that Christ can be taken out of Christmas is by the ones who say they follow him is to become concerned with "supply chain" issues and retail matters rather than following his teachings. Let me say that again: **ONLY CHRISTIANS CAN TAKE CHRIST OUT OF CHRISTMAS.** And the only way they do that is by forgetting what he taught. This taking of "Christ" out of Christmas seems to begin before the Advent season starts; it begins when we forget to be grateful on Thanksgiving Day for the blessings that we receive. It begins when we forget to recognize the source of our blessings and be grateful; it begins when we feel we "earn all that we have;" including God's grace. It begins because of the ways in which we do not honor what Jesus of Nazareth taught us. He taught us not to be looking at what blessing we think someone else may have been given...but to be grateful for the ones in our lives and looking to see what our Lord wishes us to do with them...how we are to share the blessings and gifts we have been given...how we are to use them to witness to his presence in our lives, his love for us and his love others. Even though we have spent this past year studying the narrative of Jesus' life as Mark's gospel records it, and in the coming year we will spend walking through the record that Luke left to us about that life, as we approach this season of retail madness and the concern that somehow Christ is not going to be present in Christmas this year...I can't help but remember that passage from Matthew 25 beginning with verse 31 in which Jesus speaks of the return of the Son of Man who will come and judge the nations...and the basis for that judgment was how while they waited for his return people had seen or not seen his face in those that they encountered who were hungry, or in prisons, or sick, or in need in some way. And this year, as we journey through Luke's gospel we will again hear those parables which Jesus taught which showed God's concern for

the least, the lost, the last. And if you go back to the Hebrew Scriptures which Jesus lifted when asked about the greatest commandments that God had revealed they were very simply put: Love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself. In other words: Give God your loyalty. Then seek to do God's will by loving all that God has created and thus do as you pray the prayer Jesus taught: That God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. If we concentrate on these things all through the season of Advent that will truly help us to prepare for a Christmas with Christ fully present. Advent is a season for us to prepare not for a morning of unwrapping brightly wrapped presents bought at a store. Advent is a season for us to celebrate the gift of love that was revealed when God became flesh and entered history in order to demonstrate and reveal the depth of that love for the creature God had made in God's own image. It is also the season to prepare for that time for which no one knows the day or hour, but which our faith gives us the absolute certainty that it will come. That is how we put Christ in Christmas. In fact, that is how we put Christ in Christianity.

Shalom and Merry Christmas

Pastor Libby