

**Yr. A, Christmas Eve**  
**December 24, 2019**  
**Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan**  
**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
**925 Words**

**Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-7**  
**Psalm 96**  
**Titus 2:11-14**  
**Luke 2:1-14**

The sidewalk was straight and level, about 100 yards from the parking lot to the seminary building. It was not a difficult walk, but it could be uncomfortably cold on blustery, winter mornings. It was a long enough trek for me to long for the average-tasting, but hot coffee in the student commons room.

Every weekday—before Morning Prayer in the chapel, before coffee and brief fellowship with friends in the commons, before lectures and theological debates in the classroom, I encountered the love of our living God, holding hands with my youngest as we walked together down that sidewalk at her pre-school pace.

I'm not going to lie; on the days when it was icy cold or pouring rain or when I was running late for chapel, I would pick her up and carry her to the seminary's pre-school *at my pace*.

That is just one of the ways God and I are different. When it comes to questions of personal convenience, I very quickly switch to 'Plan B' (which means 'Plan-Me').

Still, those of us who know how to get things done...we also know in our hearts that there is no fairer beauty than to slow down, hold hands, and *be...together*. I believe the most important gift of Christmas is God's willingness to be inconvenienced...to slow down...to *come down* from heaven...in order to *be...together...with us...at our pace*.

“Shepherds in the field abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God-*with-you* is now residing; yonder shines the infant Light...”

On this holy night, we hear of the ancient hope among people who walked in darkness for a powerful, triumphant God. We hear of a nation's deep longing for a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, an Everlasting Father, a Prince of Peace.

And then we hear of *all things* a hapless story of massive inconveniences—disruptive government decrees; dislocations of Jewish families; long, difficult journeys; and an untimely pregnancy.

Can you imagine the patience of Joseph? Maybe. Can you imagine the patience of Mary? I doubt it. Can you imagine the patience of God? Of course not.

It is easy to be together when things are going smoothly and on schedule. It is much harder to be godly when we are disrupted, dislocated, and beset by forces beyond our control. How is God so patient with us? How is Love so patient and kind, and never boastful or arrogant or rude? How can Love *not* insist on its own way—even though it is the right way?

*The most important gift* of Christmas is God's willingness to be inconvenienced...to slow down...to *come down* from heaven...in order to *be...together...with us...at our pace*. God's gift of incarnation—as Marie preached so powerfully on Sunday—is that he walked in *our shoes* for a while.

The fair beauty of Jesus Christ as Emmanuel—God-with-us—is revealed *because* he bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things...*together...with us...at our pace*.

A couple of years ago Marie recommended that we add to our Christmas Eve bulletins a more expansive postcommunion thanksgiving prayer. 'Tis the season to be thankful, after all!

I love how this prayer calls us to *slow down* and consider all the things for which we can be thankful—the splendor of creation, the beauty of this world, the wonder of life, and the mystery of love. We get to slow down tonight and give thanks to God for family and friends and loving care which surrounds us on every side. We get to slow down to ponder the challenging tasks and accomplishments of this past year; and we get to acknowledge how our disappointments and failures bring us face-to-face with a loving God-who-endures-all-things-with-us.

That is why—above all, and *especially on this night*—we thank God for the gift of Jesus Christ. We are thankful for this most important gift of God's willingness to be inconvenienced...to slow down...to *come down* from heaven...in order to *be...together...with us...at our pace*.

What I am about to say, I do not say boastfully. I only say it because it is true and helpful to the theological point of this sermon. Kim and I (like many other people) gave up a lot of convenience for me to make a mid-life switch of vocations, and for our family to relocate to Tennessee and begin the long, winding journey toward ordination in the Episcopal Church.

Yet, on the scales all of that is lighter than a breath compared with the joyful privilege of slowing down to walk hand-in-hand on that sidewalk, going to school together with my youngest daughter...at *her* pace.

Maybe all those mornings when I did *not rush* at my own pace with a preschooler hoisted up on my right hip—maybe those mornings offer a little glimpse into what God knows to be true. The fair beauty of this world, the wonder of life and the mystery of love are discovered when we take time to *be...together...with God*.

On this holy night, a young couple's life was totally disrupted, dislocated, and beset by things beyond their control. Mary and Joseph had to be exhausted by a long, winding journey and the labor and delivery of a first-born. So, when they reached down to hold the little hands of the Christ child, The obvious question is—who was holding who?

*God was there...with them...at their pace.*

The Good News of Christmas is that *with God...at our pace, nobody* gets left behind.

As it was in the beginning, it is now, and ever shall be—Love without end.

Amen.