

There will come a moment sometime today when I will look around at all the torn wrapping paper and gift bags, the empty space under the Christmas tree, the Christmas dishes loaded in the dishwasher and leftovers in the fridge and wonder – as I do every year – how Christmas managed to fly by so fast.

From Thanksgiving until Christmas we have this whirlwind of activity – shopping, wrapping, decorating, baking, Christmas parties, family gatherings. There are certain traditions that just have to be observed this time of year – songs to listen to and movies that must be watched. Throw in worship planning, extra services, Sheep Trail, Messy Christmas, funerals, a wedding, and who knows what else around the church plus, for me at least, getting ready to head off for 2 weeks of school, and there's hardly been room to breathe. The climax, of course, was last night, Christmas Eve, with its candlelight and Christmas music – the highest pinnacle of this festive season. It's here! It's Christmas! The most wonderful time of the year. And then it's over. I mean, I know it's not officially over. Today technically marks the first day of the 12 days of Christmas but regardless, I know at some point today, the feeling of finality will hit and I'll think, well that's Christmas.

It's like the morning after your team has won a championship. For all the hype and celebration around the Chicago Cubs finally winning the World Series this year, at some point fans and players alike will wake up and think "We've won. Now what?" In this crazy – and I do mean crazy – election year, with all of the debates, annoying commercials, ugliness, etc, we wake up one day and it's over. What next?

I wonder if that's how Mary and Joseph felt after the angels returned to heaven and the shepherds went back to their sheep. Left holding a crying infant – because I don't care what we sing in *Away in a Manger*, Jesus was an infant – he cried, a lot –wondering, what next? Where do we go from here?

In the prologue of John's Gospel which we read today, John wrote, "The Word became flesh and lived among us" – or as the Message paraphrases it, "the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood." And "we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." The Word became flesh and we have seen his glory. In all of the fanfare of Christmas, leading into our beautiful celebration on Christmas Eve, this is it – We have seen the reality of the Word taking on the flesh of humanity, we have seen the glory of the coming of our Lord, we have seen God's salvation before us. This is it! The championship moment. But as we snuff out our candles, as we put away our hymn books, as the decorations go back into the boxes, and gifts get put away...What next? So this is Christmas, the morning after. Where do we go from here?

Along with all of my other Christmas preparations, I have a few movies that I always try to watch – *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *Rudolph*, *A Muppet Family Christmas*, *White Christmas* – the classics! One that's made the list more recently is a British film called "Love Actually." As I watched it this year, I was surprised when one character said something about Christmas being the time of year when we should tell the truth. He meant this in terms of telling the truth about his feelings for someone. But I've been pondering where the writers got

this idea that Christmas is a time for truth-telling. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that truth-telling is a theme that pops up in a number of Christmas movies. Scrooge is confronted with the truth about his past, present, and future. George Bailey learns the truth about his life. Miracle on 34th Street tells the truth about Santa Claus. The Grinch learns the truth about Christmas.

If ever there was a time when we needed some truth-telling, Christmas 2016 may just be it. At this point, when it's impossible to tell the difference between real news and falsities...when opinions are held higher than facts...when fear is a tool, a weapon...If ever there was a Christmas when we should tell the truth, now is it.

The truth of Christmas is exactly what John's Gospel lays out for us. The Word – the very Word present at the dawn of time – has put on flesh and moved into our neighborhood. The Word did not put on the trappings of royalty or earthly power, though he had every right to do so. Instead the Word put on the flesh of a newborn baby, born to lowly parents and laid in a borrowed bed. The Word put on the flesh of a refugee family fleeing political instability and violence.

The truth of Christmas is that we have in the midst of our Christmas celebrations seen the glory of God's salvation, full of grace and truth. We have seen the glory of the One who so loved this world despite its flaws, despite its brokenness that the Father's only Son left his throne to walk here among us.

The truth of Christmas is that we see this Word among us today in the faces of our neighbors, black, white, brown, with heads covered, with saggy pants, decked out in new Christmas clothes or in tattered rags.

The truth of Christmas is that light broke through the darkness of this world – the darkness of grief, of sickness, of hatred, or fear, of pride, and of greed. And no amount of darkness can dim this light.

This is the truth of Christmas. We have seen it. We have witnessed it.

Today, on this morning after, with torn wrapping paper, leftovers, and all that remains of Christmas day surrounding us, when we look around and think it's over until another year and "What's next" – the biggest question for each of us is simply this: Will we tell the truth of Christmas? We will live every day as people who have witnessed the glory of God's salvation?

Generations before the first Christmas, the prophet Isaiah declared, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says "Your God reigns."

Be messengers with beautiful feet. Go tell it on the mountains. Be people who speak truth in the face of darkness. Tell the truth of Christmas.

In so doing, Christmas will live on, long after the trappings of this day are gone. And every day will be for those of us who chose to walk in the light a very Merry Christmas.