

“Who Are We, What Do We Want, and What The Heck Is Going On?”

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer... Amen.

One of my favorite Christmas movies has always been, with profound apologies to Charles Dickens, *Scrooged*. In it, the Ebenezer Scrooge character is transformed into Frank Cross, a heartless television executive who swears like a sailor, played with sadistic verve by Bill Murray. He's the heartlessly cheesy sort of 1980s character who fires someone on Christmas Eve, who instructs a stagehand to staple antlers onto a mouse, who swears at Christmas carolers. His brother, the voice of compassion and reason, says to him, "You know what they say about people who treat other people bad on the way up?" Frank's response is, "Yeah, you get to treat 'em bad on the way back down, too. It's great. You get two chances to rough 'em up."

I love the story of Frank Cross for many reasons, not the least of which is its sheer immersion in the culture of its time. If you're old enough to remember the 1980s, you'll remember the sheer shiny volume of the time. Hair was taller, buildings were bigger, money was flashier, and music was louder. Frank is smart, sleek, shiny and well-fed. He's also vicious, sarcastic, and morally empty. He tells his former girlfriend Claire, who runs a homeless shelter, that there's only one person she should be looking after. He says, "I'm gonna give you a little advice Claire. Scrape 'em off. You wanna save somebody? Save yourself."

Frank is visited first by his old boss, a moldering John Forsyth. Then he is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past, a profane taxi driver from Brooklyn. The Ghost concludes his depressing trip through Frank's past Christmases by saying, "Frank, let me sum this up for you: you don't know who you are, you don't know what you want, and you don't know what the (heck) is going on."

Today, we celebrate this first Sunday of Christmas, and we look toward the beginning of 2010, which is just around the corner. We come together today, and we ask ourselves those same questions. Who are we, what do we want, and what the heck is going on here? We've walked together through Advent, the season of preparation for Christ's birth, and now it's

Christmas. We've heard the good news just as the shepherds did. Today we hear the awe- and grace-filled words from the prologue to John. Those words are about the light, and the coming of light and grace into our lives. They tell us that it's time – time to live into a life filled with the light of Christ, newly born in each of our lives.

So, who are we today?

We are an imperfect people. We try, we hope, we make mistakes. We stumble, we fall, and we get up and try it again. But, even in our imperfection and brokenness, we are a people who are loved beyond our wildest dreams. We are assured of our place in the world by the words from Galatians. We are no longer slaves to the law, but children of grace and faith. We are not imprisoned, but free. With that freedom comes the burden of choice. We are each free to choose the way we live our daily lives. Do we live that life in fear, or in joy? In darkness, or in light? Do we choose to live our lives in isolation, or do we reach out to form relationships, to live into the community of the family of God? Believing in an incarnated Christ – a Christ who was born, who walked, slept, and ate among us, a Christ who died - means that we believe that God became one of us. Became someone just like us, someone who knows what it meant to be hungry, who knows what it means to be tired, and rejected. Someone who knows exactly what it means to struggle with making daily choices in a difficult world.

What do we want?

Well, there we have to be cautious. We all want lots of things. Every time I told my mother I wanted something, she'd say, "I want a million dollars, but I'm not getting that either." Or, as she would probably prefer I say, there are wants, and there are needs. We are a people who have trouble making that distinction. What I would ask more clearly is, who are the people we want to be? Do we want to be a people filled with fear? Do we want to be a people who live lives governed by worry, anger and hatred? Do we want to spend our lives dividing ourselves into us vs. them? Do we want that kind of life for our children? We all wake up in the morning, and wonder what's to come in the day, and life, to come. We are human. When we are empty, we want. We want for light, to hold back the darkness. If you are searching for that light, you're not alone. People of all ages, races, stations and places have tired of the dark, and looked to the light.

The prologue to John, our gospel reading for today, speaks of that light. It speaks of the same Jesus, born into a stable, of humble parents, who taught, who loved his friends, who lived, and died in terrible fashion. That same Christ – the incarnated Word of God - has

existed since the beginning of time, exists now, and ever shall exist. It's hard to wrap our heads around the idea that time has no meaning in the kingdom of God. We are human. We are a finite people who can only live our lives in forward motion. But God sees and works in what we think is past, works now in our present, and sees and works in the future, in those things which are yet to come.

Also, the prologue makes it quite clear: "what has come into being in him was life, and that life was the light of all people." All people. For the Jews, and for the Gentiles. For those who are free, and those in bondage. For the rich, and for the poor. You name the divisions among us, the convenient boxes we assign everyone to, all the us vs. thems we can think of, and the divine and incarnate Christ overcomes them all. "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." That is what we celebrate this and every Christmas. We wait for Christ to be born, to come to us, to every one of us, in turn.

It also sends a clear message to those who live in fear, particularly those who aren't sure what tomorrow will bring. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." The light shines – even now. Even in the darkest of times, in times of great fear or trial, Christ's light is ever present, ever in the present. It cannot be put out, nor can it be defeated.

Frank Cross, in his pseudo-Scrooge role, takes a harrowing journey through the suffering around him in the present, and is shown a speedy fast forward to the silent, empty end of his future life. He sees who he really is, sees the person he wants to be, and reaches his own moment of repentance, when he realizes that he wants to live, to really live in a way that has substance and that gives light and life to others. He describes Christmas as

the one (time) of the year when we all act a little nicer, we smile a little easier, we cheer a little more. For a couple of hours out of the whole year we are the people that we always hoped we would be. It's a miracle.

Frank Cross, in his bumbling way, is pointing the way to a great truth. Part of the empowering light of Christ is that it gives us a glimpse of the holy...hints at the things which are just beyond us, which reveal a bit of holy mystery.

As the year begins, I would ask each of us live into that holy mystery a little - to look at who we are, and at what we want our lives to be as we walk through our life together. We will come together in a moment to baptize Austin Madigan, and receive him into the household of God. As we live into this Christmas season, I can think of no better way to unite with Christ than to renew our own baptismal vows. I would ask each of you to lis-

ten...to truly listen to the vows that you make. I encourage you to not just to hear, but to listen, and to say them as if they were new to you, as Christ is new each day to each of us. If you haven't noticed before, we make big promises...we vow to accomplish things that are almost impossible to achieve on our own. But in each day, even in each moment, we can be assured of Christ's enduring light and presence, of the love of God our creator and parent, and of the sustaining, sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ, our savior, the true light, who enlightens everyone, has come into the world. All we have to do is to choose to open our eyes every morning, and see it.

Amen.