

“Neither Gone nor Forgotten”

Luke 2:40-45

January 5, 2020

One thing that I enjoy a lot at Christmas time, and maybe you do too, is to receive cards and letters from friends that are not heard from much of the rest of the year. It's good to catch up on old times, and to relive memories while learning what is new and exciting for others.

Occasionally I get mail from someone whose message leaves me breathless. It seems that they have packed so much into one year that they have lived an entire lifetime in just twelve months.

Now don't get me wrong. It's not that my own life is slow, or unfulfilling. Or that I haven't been to a few exotic places, seen a number of strange things, and done my share of living. But every once in a while I hear from someone whose days seem so crammed with activity and fun that I wonder if life hasn't somehow passed me by.

It's like living in your own little Lake Wobegone, the little town that time forgot, and that the decades can't improve. In the rush of Washington events, or the self-importance of Wall Street, or even the cultural prowess of a Boston, one wonders if we, here, in Colebrook, have not been forgotten in the tumult of world politics, finance, and society.

Some might say that we haven't been forgotten, because no one had ever heard of us in the first place. And I suspect that the overwhelming majority of the world's people have felt like that not just one time or another, but through most of their lives.

Think of it: if you lived in a sleepy little town miles from the provincial capital, and weeks' journey from the center of the empire; if you had never left your tiny village during your entire lifetime, except for maybe one pilgrimage; if the only contact you ever had with anyone in any kind of authority was the extort taxes from you, or to claim your firstborn for military service, or to remind you that no, you cannot go into the part of the church because you aren't good enough, or clean enough, or dressed well enough - well,

you might think that you were one of the forgotten thousands that history would never remember, and about whom no one would really care. And I think you would be right.

But, it was into that kind of place that Jesus came. It was to that kind of world that God reached out. It was to restore, or rather, to give for the first time, the respect and dignity and joy of living that every human being deserves that Christ made His purpose.

That is what the prophet Isaiah meant when he spoke of a certain Someone who would say to the prisoners, “Go forth!” and to those that are in darkness, “Show yourselves.” That is what God promises when He states that “they shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them, for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.”

For God has a purpose. His purpose is Love. That is God’s sole intent. God does not intend that anyone of us should be left abandoned, or lonely, or estranged. And God seals the promise by asking, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”

Interestingly enough, it is the very image of a mother forgetting her own child that forms the central image of today’s Gospel lesson in Luke. It is almost an illustration of Isaiah’s truth of God that Luke tells his story about Jesus in the temple.

No matter which way you look at it, Jesus was forgotten by his parents. It’s hard to believe, but it did happen. This child about whom the angels made so many promises, the person to whom the wise men brought gifts, the boy whom the shepherds praised, was left behind by a mother and a father who had had angels speak to them concerning the special nature of this child, who had undergone persecution from the Herod because of the child, and who had heard prophecies years before in that very same temple, from Simeon and Anna.

No matter which way you look at it, no matter how you slice it, Jesus was forgotten, and forgotten by no one else than his very parents. But God did not forget.

God did not leave him to fend for himself. For even at that tender age, God gave him a house in which to live - God's house - and a purpose to pursue - God's business. In fact, it would appear that Jesus barely realized that he had been forgotten.

That is what God promises for us. If we do not feel at home because society does not accept us - we have a home in God's house. If we feel abandoned by this world because we seem unimportant - God has work and purpose for us: work that only we can do, goals that only we can achieve.

Do we feel a lack of joy in living, while the rest of the world seems to happily go on its merry way, ignoring all those who cannot take part because they aren't pretty enough, or self-confident enough, or well-heeled enough? It is to us that God came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

And for those of us who do not feel as if the world has passed us by, who live comfortably, at least according to the world's standards, who seem blessed with status, or worldly goods, who are the ones described by Madison Avenue advertisers as impossible to buy for at Christmas - we, perhaps more than anyone else, realize that money, wealth, riches are not everything ... that spiritual needs are just as acute, that issues of faith, belief, and true religion are just as pressing. That just because we are not needy in the eyes of the material world does not mean that we are not needful in other, more profound ways.

None of us - not one - have been forgotten, even if at times we, like Mary and Joseph, have forgotten our Lord and our God. This time of year, especially, we have come to revere the Holy Family, and to set them as a standard of perfect behavior - a Mary who said "yes" to God's archangel Gabriel, a Joseph who stood by his betrothed even when the eyes of the world would judge him negatively for doing so. And yet they were, in a way, not too different from yourself and myself: forgetful of God, neglectful of His work, too self-centered to focus on duty to others, especially those whom God has specifically placed in our charge. Mary and Joseph were as needful as we are, and God

did not forget them. But don't think that just because we are needful or desiring special treatment that we are going to get everything handed to us on a silver platter. To receive the gifts of God there is one string attached. Only one. But it is an important one. And Paul lays it right on the line in Romans, when he writes, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

And then, to make clear the implication of doing just that, Paul goes on to say, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

God has not forgotten us. God has not forgotten anyone. In fact, God holds each one of us in such high esteem, He finds each one of us so valuable, so worthy, that He wants each of us for His own.

Let us pray: