

“Embrace Jesus”

Ephesians 1:3-14, 1 John 1:8-9, John 1:1-5 & 10-18

Pastor James York

January 1, 2017

Pastor Tom Steagald’s friend’s grandfather was a passionate preacher, stern and strict. The message he preached was uncompromising, and he preached it with thunder, lightning, and hellfire. The preacher had two children, one of them a daughter who in the course of time was found to be pregnant. She was unmarried and unsure as to whom the baby’s father might be. The preacher was furious—and also deeply wounded. He kicked her, immediately, out of the house and did not speak to her again. She had fallen short of her father’s expectations. The preacher, drowning in grief, knew his anger and failure to forgive was wrong...but all of it was hidden under his hard shell of his uncompromising theology. So his daughter was out on her own. Rejected, she found a place, somewhere to bring forth a child. And some days after that, long months later, she came home in hopes of coming home again. She and her child stood at the door and knocked, hoping to find forgiveness and shelter under her father’s roof. His wife answered the door. She told her husband, the preacher, that his daughter had come home. He did not speak, just turned his chair away from his wife and his back to the front door where his daughter stood weeping, cradling her baby. The preacher’s wife went back to the door and took the child from her daughter’s arms. She walked back into the room where the stern preacher sat with his arms folded. She put the baby in his lap, and she said, “This is your grandchild.” Now it was the preacher who was weeping. He took hold of the child and rocked the baby for a while, the tears streaming down his face...rocking and crying. It would be nice if the baby and that moment had changed everything, had melted the preacher’s heart and mended that poor family, so broken by anger and grief and shame. But the baby changed nothing, not really. For a moment...but then the moment was gone. There were tears but the tears did not cleanse the wounds or soften the preacher’s hard heart. In fact he remained to the end of his days as stern as he ever had been, refusing to welcome home his daughter; when he died, they were still estranged.

Pastor Tom preached, “The baby changed nothing, really... and let those with ears, hear. Let those with eyes, see: what God is doing. God is trying to put a baby on the world’s lap, in hopes it will change us, really change us. God is trying to put a baby in the church’s lap, too, in hopes we will not only shed a tear or two over the beauty of the angel’s song—“Peace on earth, and goodwill among all God’s children”—but also that we will begin to live into that benediction, let go our anger, our fear and our shame so that we can embrace the Baby.”

Christmas is not over rather Christmas is God’s invitation to refresh our relationship with God; to embrace the baby, God with us; to embrace the light and let go of our darkness so we too can shine; to embrace love for all people, God and ourselves.

All of us sin. We all make mistakes like the stern preacher. First John states, **1 John 1:8-9** “**If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to God, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.**” Will you embrace the baby Jesus so you can be forgiven, healed and drawn into the light?

Just eleven verses into the gospel of John we are asked to embrace Jesus, to accept the Word and participate in a continually renewing relationship with God. The gospel, the good news, of John is some people will embrace Jesus thereby becoming new people, entering a forgiven, healed, restored, joyful, abundant loving life. **John 1:select verses** “**Jesus was in the world, the world was there through Jesus, and yet the world didn’t even notice. Jesus came to his own people, but they didn’t want Jesus. But whoever did want Jesus, who believed Jesus was who he claimed, and would do what he said, God made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves. These are the God-begotten, not blood begotten, not flesh-begotten, not sex-begotten. The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son. Generous inside and out true from start to finish, full of grace and truth.**”

Perhaps you are thinking, “I have embraced Jesus so I am in good shape.” The stern preacher partially embraced Jesus. He believed in Jesus. God forgave him. He is in heaven today. The stern preacher served all his life and did ministry in Jesus’ name. He blessed numerous people. Yet, he was unable to fully embrace Jesus. He had that one dark, joyless area of his life, his relationship with his daughter and grandchild. Jesus, full of grace and truth, longed to heal that relationship and restore love and joy to the family; however, the stern preacher pushed Jesus away from that corner of his life.

What is your dark corner? What sin are you holding onto that is hindering you from fully embracing Jesus? How can you let that dark area go, so you can embrace Jesus and God’s light can illumine you today? The joy of Christmas in time will be fully realized. Notice the tense on the verbs. **John 1:5 “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”** Jesus is shining today and will shine forever. Jesus wants to shine light into your dark areas. All the darkness from the beginning of time through eternity tried to overcome Jesus, but the darkness did not overcome Jesus, past tense. In time all your darkness will be overcome with the light. The question Christmas asks is: will you fully embrace Jesus today, so you can be renewed and joyful today or will you procrastinate, only partially embracing Jesus, pushing God’s healing grace away from certain hurts, delaying your restoration?

In the dazzling glory of God’s light we often become aware of our darkness making us afraid. Fearful that we will not be forgiven, that we will not have an opportunity to love the way we intended. Over and over again God tells us, “Do not be afraid.” God is grace. God forgives. God will right every wrong. God will mend every relationship. The angels said, “Do not be afraid,” then sang, “for I bring you good tidings of great joy for all the people...” Did you truly hear that deep down in your soul? Do not be afraid? For God has given us God’s Son, a Child, for all the people. God has put a baby in your lap, in hopes that you will welcome Jesus deeper and deeper into your heart, so you can receive from Jesus’ fullness more and more of God’s grace, glory, life, joy, hope, and every blessing. God wants to be born again in you and in your thoughts, feelings, service, career, politics, giving, in every aspect of your life. God did, and is doing, amazing things in the world, and everyone is invited to hold the Child. There is plenty of darkness around us, in others and in ourselves; however, Christmas reveals that God will renew us with grace that no darkness can overcome.

The gospel of John reveals the power of Jesus to disperse all our darkness, to atone for all our sins, to fully identify and relate to all our struggles, pain, and grief. John explains how Jesus was fully God and at the same time fully human: fully God to have the power and authority to pay the debt of all our sins; fully human to be our representative, to make atonement on our behalf.

John describes Jesus as the Word, that is wisdom and knowledge. God is attempting to communicate to you how much you are loved. The Word is the agent of revelation and salvation that took on flesh to reveal God’s grace, God’s forgiveness that can forgive everything and redeem everyone and everything. The Word is present physically in human flesh. God is with us. The Word is God’s self, communicated in our midst, as one of us. The Word is creative, the source of all goodness, love, joy, peace and beauty. We are created in the image of the Word so all pure science, philosophies, inventions, art, music all flows from the Word. We are the image of the Word made to receive abundant life by being in relationship with God, by fully embracing Jesus. The Apostle Paul declares every blessing is accessible through the Word.

The gospel of John is full of accounts of how Jesus transformed tragedy into joy, how darkness was dispersed by light. For unto us a child is born. Will you fully embrace Jesus every day in 2017 and beyond? Amen.