

Advent 2C, December 5, 2021 Luke 1:68-79; 3:1-6
Epiphany, Winnipeg

“In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in fear and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace” (*Luke 1:78,79*)

Did you notice all those dates and names at the beginning of that short story from Luke? In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee....All these stories in the Bible, they happen in real places with real dates and real politics and real life and real people. In the fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius, who ruled the Roman Empire, an Empire that ruled most of the known world, that ruled the place that Jesus called home...and Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, and he governed with such violence that he was eventually fired as governor, and Annas and Caiaphas were in charge of religious affairs.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, while Pilate was the governor of Judea and Herod ruled over Galilee and Annas and Caiaphas ruled over the temple...the word of God came...not to all of them but to John...in the middle of nowhere the word of God came to John, who had no home that we know of or power to call his own. The word of God came to John just like it came to a young woman named Mary who had no big accomplishments to her name, just like it came to unknown shepherds in a field who were just killing time on the night shift. The word of God came to the middle of nowhere, to people with no power and who were not in the news.

And the word was as simple as this: Turn away from looking out only for yourself, turn away from using your neighbour to get what you want, turn away from greed. Turn to generosity, turn to kindness and mercy, turn to forgiveness, turn to caring for one another. Turn away from the god of bigger and more, turn

away from gods of power and war, and turn to the God who forgives you and gives life to you and who is coming into the world to give life to the world.

This word of God came to John; the word of God comes to us. It's as simple as this: In the seventh year of the reign of Justin over Canada, in the twentieth month of the coronavirus pandemic when Heather was the premier of Manitoba and Mayor Brian was in the eighth year of his reign in Winnipeg, and Susan and Jason were bishops and Elaine ruled church council, the word of God came to a church on Dalhousie Drive. Not that the word of God doesn't come to the Heather and to Justin and the Bishops, but the word of God came to a church on Dalhousie Drive, and that word spoke to a young boy named Waylon. Right there. Right here.... Spoke through all those people gathered together, and that word of God said, "Waylon, welcome to the love of God, welcome to the love of the God who has always loved you and who always will." The God whose tender mercy is given for the life of the world spoke to Waylon and said, "Welcome, Waylon, welcome to this hodgepodge of people who are being led along paths of peace, who are trying to live with tender compassion in the world because what the world needs more than anything most of the time or all of the time is tender compassion."

God of tender compassion brings Waylon in today to be one of these people who seek to live with tender compassion. It's tender compassion that might sometimes look like this place today: a collection of people who promise to care for each other and care for a small child they've all met for the very first time. It's tender compassion that looks like someone bringing a casserole to a young man who grieves the loss of the one he loves the most, or gracious love that comes to a University student as she works late late late on a project and her friend comes to talk her through the worry and fear. Sometimes it will sound like righteous anger

that calls for injustice and hatred to move aside and make way for mercy and love. The tender compassion comes as a nurse begins a long late night shift, another in a long string of too many long late night shifts. While Brian was mayor and Paul was the pastor the tender and compassionate word of God came to a woman and her kids in the shelter, where they received a safe place and gave their gratitude in return. The tender compassion of God comes to a crowd of people and to someone in solitude, who sits in a quiet space while two candles on a wreath light up a dark room.

It's Advent again....It's my favourite time of year; favourite enough that in our house a small Advent begins in early November while we get excited about waiting for the real Advent to come. There is something sort of exciting and calming about just being still and waiting. We wait for Jesus who has come to give life. We wait for Jesus, who will come again, to finish that work. We wait for Jesus, but we know that his birth sets him on a path to his own cold and fear, where he joins all those others, us others, who wait, and who die, and who wait again.

While we wait we turn to one another and to the world around us, and we practice the love and the kindness that were first given to us by the one who gives us life. We look for signs of warmth and light in our songs and our prayers; in water and the word; in this bread and this wine. We look for signs of warmth and light where we see warmth and light between people, wherever they are.

And we never wait all on our own. We are part of this procession of people through the ages, the same procession of people who welcome Waylon to come and walk with them – with us - along the way. As far back as we can see and as far

into the future as we can see, we find ourselves in this great crowd winding through the hills and over the flat places, through valleys and over rocky terrain, making the way a bit smoother for one another. We wait and walk with the ones who are weak and the ones who are strong; with the ones who have much and the ones who have nothing; with people we call friends and with those we've called enemies; with those we expect and with those who are a surprise. And right there in the middle is Jesus, who has already come; whose warmth and whose light will cast out all the fear; whose warmth and whose light wake us up to a new day.

AMEN.