

## “Resolve” Sermon for Christmas Eve Candle lighting

Isaiah 9:6-7, Luke 2:1-20

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

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The shepherds had no hesitation. They responded with resolve to God’s revelation. They resolved:

1. Let us go see, let us go experience this for ourselves firsthand.
2. They resolved not to procrastinate as if there would be a later opportunity. They went immediately.
3. They made their experience of Christ known and real to all who would listen.

What had occurred in Bethlehem was the beginning of God's gathering of the human race together around the Christ event.

We must not ignore that it was shepherds that God chose for the message to be delivered to. Why?

Shepherds were definitely not the most respected members of society. They were not at the top of the social pecking order. They were generally thought to have been at the bottom of the rungs of success.

The choice of the shepherds makes sense. As some of the weaker and less powerful members of society, they demonstrated the direction that Jesus was going to take when it started. The shepherds represent a foreshadowing of what was to come.

What a wasted opportunity! To have it happen in Podunk little Bethlehem, in a stable no less? What a wasted opportunity! To have a gaggle of shepherd nobodies be the recipients of the news? What a

wasted opportunity! This is exactly why If you feel weak and powerless, you're exactly the kind of person God likes to use.

- 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.

Because of the way that the world usually works, we presume that the strong and the powerful have all of the advantages. It's just business as usual. Yet in God first revealing the truth of Christ to shepherds, we begin to see that God actually has a preference for using the weak and powerless.

- Consider the words of 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. It speaks of God choosing the "weak things" so that those who have something to boast about will "boast in the Lord."

- Consider the words of 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Paul speaks of his "thorn in the flesh," which causes him to remain humble. He concludes that God's "power is made perfect in weakness." How? Because when

we are weak it forces us to rely on His power. So, Paul says, “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

God turns human judgment and reality on its head. Those who are weak and powerless presume that God can do nothing through them because nothing much impressive happens through them in any other aspect of their lives. Not so. God is eager to use that kind of person. In fact, until we have that mindset, the simple faith of a child, God cannot use us.

Part of our problem as Americans is that we work hard to insulate themselves from people of lower socio-economic classes. We don't want to be around the struggling. We don't want to be near the poor. We want to live in our safe little bubble. But the shepherds remind of us of the nature of Christ's mission among us. If we want to experience more of God's presence, we have to meet God where He

said He would be-among the hungry, naked, the homeless, the despised of human society.

What do we mean by that? We mean when some great change is going on and there is a sense that one side is standing for what is right and the other for what is wrong. Additionally, there is a sense that one side, though struggling, is going to be vindicated in their beliefs while the other side, trying to hold onto their power, is going to be ashamed of what they're now doing.

One of the most obvious examples in American history is the civil rights movement. As African-Americans stood up for their rights and bigots worked to stifle that, there was a sense that one side was on the right side of history and the other wasn't. As Dr. King said, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

There is a temptation for those of us who hold a measure of strength and power to selfishly work to maintain it, even if it results in pain to others. We need to seriously consider Jesus' message in the shepherds: He is on the side of the weak, and it is the weak that God has chosen to bear witness to God's strength in the human context.

Christ is even now, working on behalf of all of us by inviting us to consider which side we are really on. Could it be that we, unlike the shepherds, are we on the wrong side of history? If that might even be remotely the case, then let us resolve to hasten to Bethlehem in the simplicity of faith, where the Christ yet awaits us in joy, forgiveness, power and love. Amen.