

“Pull Up a Chair”

Luke 15:1-7; John 1:14

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

December 4, 2016

Communion Devotion

A couple of weeks ago Jackie took care of two of our grandchildren while their parents went to a conference in Texas. Christmas came up in one of their conversations, so Jack and Kate decided it was time to write and mail their letters to Santa. Both of them began dreaming about the toys they wanted and writing down their requests.

During this process, Kate reminded Jack how important it is to be good so you will get the toys you want. She looked at Jackie and assured her Santa would be coming to see her because she had been good all year long.

Jack did not say much beyond this point as he continued to work on his list. Jackie could tell, though, he was disturbed about something as he wrote down his final selections. Finally, both of them finished their letters and went to get an envelope.

Kate quickly put her letter in, but Jack hesitated. Suddenly, he opened his letter and added one sentence. Just below his name, Jack Cowan, he added the words: “Kate Cowan is my sister.”

I think it is obvious Jack did not feel quite as confident as Kate about meeting Santa’s standard for good behavior. Surely, he must have thought, since Santa was obviously going to be bringing Kate’s toys, he could also drop off his.

On this second Sunday in Advent, I have good news for you. You do not need to rely on anyone near you to get God’s attention so God will respond to your prayers.

God knows your name, the number of hairs on your head and whether you prefer chocolate cake or some inferior flavor. God also loves you unconditionally, and nothing you have done or might do will make God love you more or less.

Furthermore, God's greatest desire is to have a close relationship with you. God wants to be seen as a loving parent you can trust and look to as you face life's biggest challenges and toughest struggles.

For me, one of the most important parables Jesus told was about a shepherd taking care of his sheep on a lonely hillside. In the evening when the shepherd gathered the sheep to bed them down for the night, he noticed one was missing. Ninety-nine sheep were safely in the fold, but one was still somewhere on that hillside.

How did the shepherd respond? Was he content to have ninety-nine safely in the fold, knowing that one lost sheep would not survive the night alone?

No, he was not. He went looking for that lost sheep and did not return until he had found him.

What message did Jesus have in mind when he told this parable? I am sure there were several, but perhaps this was one of them. If you were the only person in the world who was alone in a dark and dangerous world, God would have still sent Jesus to find you. This is how important you are and how much God loves you.

Do you struggle to believe this? I wonder why?

Do you doubt God's love for you because of decisions you have made that have taken you down the wrong path and left you feeling unworthy?

Has someone convinced you that you are unimportant or inferior and destroyed your self-esteem?

Has someone you thought you could count on when the chips were down abandoned you?

Has someone who made a commitment to love you for better or for worse broken that promise?

Has someone led you to believe if you were the one sheep missing in that fold, no one would come looking for you?

Often, our image of God is determined by the way others treat us or how we feel about ourselves. We see God through these relationships and experiences.

Is this what you are doing?

What difference would it make if you believed in a God who is like the shepherd in this parable? What difference would it make if you developed a relationship with a God who values you this much?

Would it give you a sense of peace and security to know you will never be alone?

Would it boost your self-esteem and confidence?

Would it bring a smile to your face and help you to lift your head up high?

Would it give you the courage you need to face your stiffest challenges?

Would it bring the best out in you and help you to make wiser decisions?

Would it make you more aware of those who feel left out, living alone in a dark and dangerous world?

This is what belief in God has done for so many, including me. This relationship has led to a level of meaning, purpose, peace, security, strength, courage, joy and peace that no other person or possession can provide.

Will you let God do this for you today? I know of no better time than Christmas, the season we celebrate the birth of Jesus, to open your heart and life to the God who desires a close relationship with you.

One of the most important lessons I have learned from the stories of Jesus' birth is that faith is relational. We believe in a God who takes the initiative to come to us and is eager to draw close to us.

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

John reminds us God wants to be known. God wants us to trust him and to enter into a relationship with him that will last throughout all eternity.

God wants no one to be alone in a dark and dangerous world. This includes all of us, not just the rich, the famous, the powerful or those who make wise decisions.

This was why Jesus walked those dusty Palestinian roads listening to the stories of the common and oft forgotten people so he could respond to their needs with compassion and grace.

This is also why there is a chair at this table for you. Join us as we celebrate the love God has for all his children, including you and me.