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“The Messiah is born! Did you hear that? The Messiah is born!”

This line comes from our annual Christmas Pageant—the scene where the shepherds are in the pasture, and the angel who brought good news has just departed. The job of the child playing Shepherd Number One is to take in that astonishing news and urge everyone else to go to Bethlehem—right now.

It can be difficult to get children to give a convincing performance, so every year I spend time asking them what this announcement could really mean today. I say, “Imagine an angel came to you right now and told you that all the worst things in the world were going away, and that God’s peaceable kingdom was on the way instead. What would change? What do you think would be different?”

This year, they were ready. They came up with a surprisingly specific and powerful list of things they wanted God to take care of immediately. Their hopes were local, national, and global: an end to violence, to exploitation, to cruelty, to powerful people acting with impunity.

They came up with this on their own. I didn’t prepare them with a formal lesson or offer commentary about my own political beliefs. These children already carried these anxieties. They had absorbed them from their families, from the news, from the world around them—and they brought those fears with them into Christmas Pageant rehearsal.

I’m also regularly in conversation with parents here at St. Paul’s, raising children of all ages. I often ask some version of the same question: What do you hope for your child? Why do you bring them to church?

When I first started here, the answers were often about community, a safe place to belong, and good friends outside of school. I still hear that. But lately, there’s something more underneath it. Parents are also saying, “I want my child to believe there is good and hope, no matter what. I want them to have something to reach for if the world becomes more unstable.”

All of this tells me something about how we’re doing these days. When children carry fear into a Christmas Pageant rehearsal, and parents are quietly preparing their kids for an uncertain future by grounding them spiritually, it tells me we’re scared.

And honestly, that makes sense.

Things are frightening right now. Especially the violence we’re witnessing in Minneapolis, where people are struggling against cruelty and chaos connected to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. People are being taken off sidewalks without due process, held in unknown places, and in some cases dying for standing their ground. Even though this isn’t happening at our front door, it’s only a twelve-hour drive away, and that proximity is surreal. Surreal enough to make us wonder what kind of world our children are growing up in.

Standing here today, I want to offer you two things: comfort and strategy. Comfort, because fear makes it hard to breathe. And strategy, because fear without direction turns into paralysis.

When I saw the Beatitudes appointed for today, I thought, *Well, this is a gift!*

When Jesus speaks these blessings, he isn’t praising security or happiness. He’s blessing people who are poor, grieving, pushed aside, and worn down.

“Blessed are the poor.”

“Blessed are those who mourn.”

“Blessed are the meek.”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.”

Jesus isn't listing virtues we're supposed to admire from a distance. He's speaking directly to the people in front of him, reminding them that God is already present in their lives—even in their suffering. He wants them to know they are loved and valued, not despite their brokenness, but right in the middle of it.

This is a complex idea. How could suffering ever be connected to blessing? One way the church has tried to name this pattern is with a phrase you may have heard before: *God's preferential option for the poor*. This idea comes from Liberation Theology, an approach to scripture and Christian life that takes the reality of oppression seriously and insists that God is especially attentive to those who are suffering under it.

What this doesn't mean is that God prefers suffering, or that suffering is good. It means that while God loves everyone, God leans toward those who are hurting most, not because they are morally better, but because their need is more urgent.

And Liberation Theology doesn't imagine God fixing the world by lifting people out of suffering while leaving the rest of us unchanged. Instead, God pulls those of us with safety and stability outward, into relationship, into responsibility, into shared life with those who have been pushed aside.

It takes upheaval for insiders to move outward and for outsiders to be brought in. That process is rarely neat. It's uncomfortable. It can be frightening to witness, especially up close. And the Beatitudes acknowledge this too: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing what is right.”

In other words, when God is at work in people and communities, things aren't always calm or orderly.

And I want to be very clear: violence and cruelty are not signs of God's will. They are signs of a world in pain. God does not cause suffering, but God is not absent from it.

So here's the comfort I want you to hear today: God is not waiting for things to settle down before getting involved. God is present in our fear, and in the fear of those most affected. God is already moving, drawing people toward one another, unsettling unjust arrangements, and opening up new possibilities for shared life and change.

So take heart.

Take heart even when it's messy.

Take heart even when it's unsettling.

God is still at work.

And here's the strategy not a checklist, but a way of being. Liberation Theology calls it *solidarity*. Solidarity is the practice of recognizing that our lives are bound together with the lives of others, and choosing to live like that is actually true. As physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson puts it, “We're all connected to each other biologically, to the earth chemically, and to the rest of the universe atomically.”

We practice solidarity in small, uneven, imperfect ways: by calling our representatives; by teaching our children how to tell right from wrong; by showing up here to pray—not to escape the world, but to stay engaged with it; by paying attention to the people placed in our path, especially the ones it would be easier to overlook; by staying open and curious about the places the Holy Spirit keeps nudging us toward.

Fear does not mean God has left. Fear is often the place where God is already working—drawing us toward love, toward one another, toward the dignity of the person in front of us.

When you're afraid or unsure of what to do, let this be enough: Jesus loves the person in front of you. And choosing to care about their dignity—to care whether they have what they need to be okay in this life—is one faithful way fear is transformed into blessing.

Remember: the Messiah is coming.
And he's about to change everything.