

## In The Land of Beginning Again.

Texts: Isaiah 7:10-16

Romans 1:1-7 (Series A, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent) Ps. 80:1-7, 17-19

Matthew 1:18-25

Prayer:

One night, the Six O'clock News financial reporter said, among other things, "*The stock market gained today, and the value of the dollar is up.*" Hearing this, a seven-year-old asked her father what it meant when the value of the dollar went up.

The father tried to give his young daughter the simplest possible explanation. He said, "Since the value is going up, you can buy more with a dollar now than you could before".

The daughter thought about this for a while, then she asked, "*Do the stores know this?*" In just a few hours, we will be celebrating the Event that raised the value of our human hopes and aspirations infinitely.

But as we look back over the weeks of preparation for this Event, we might well ask, not only "*Do the stores know this?*" but also "*Do we know this?*"

The world around us is filled with Christmas sounds. If you listen with your outer ear, you will hear carols and bells and laughter, and now and then, perhaps, someone crying here and there. If you listen with your inner ear you will hear the lively whisper of the eternal World.

The world is filled with the sights of Christmas. If you look with your outer eyes, you will see tinsel trees, glowing candles, blinking stars and, perhaps, even a cardboard Nativity Scene.

If you look with your inner eyes you will see the Light of Love in your own heart. In his autobiography, author *John Stuart Mill* says that his father recognized that he was a very gifted child at his early age and proceeded to cram his head with all sorts of knowledge.

However, since his father had no religious faith of his own, the he would not allow anything religious to become part of his son's education. Basically, he stayed away from anything religious.

Years later, after he had achieved fame and fortune, *John Stuart Mill* looked back on his education with a deep sense of loss. His mind was crammed with information, but his *soul was starved*. He said in his autobiography, "*I was left at the commencement of my voyage with a well-equipped ship ... but no sail.*"

I have no doubt, on this Sunday before Christmas, that at least some of us can identify with John Stuart Mill's complaint: "*a well-equipped ship ... but no sail.*" (In St. Ansgar, the ship hanging from the ceiling).

We need something to push up the value of our hopes and dreams. We need something to push us up and over the waves of emptiness that keep pounding our tired and dreary souls. We need something to give us new life. We need something to get us sailing again toward fruitful Christian life-goals.

In the poetic words of Louise Fletcher: *I wish that there were some wonderful place Called The "Land of Beginning Again," Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches And all of our poor selfish grief Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door, And never be put on again.*

Well, my friends the answer lies in the event of Christmas. Christmas comes inviting each and everyone of us into that "*Land of Beginning Again.*" Jesus comes saying, "We can begin again. We can sail right out of that sea of emptiness and sail right into the nurturing, life-enriching Presence of God.

No matter how far down our spirit have fallen, we can raise it back up to even greater heights than ever before. Because I have come as your Saviour, because I am 'Emmanuel,' which means, God with us, we can set your sights on Him – Jesus says: "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" (John. 14:6).

The following announcement is taken from a Church "Sunday Bulletin": *The Ladies Aids Rummage* sale will be held on the second Saturday of next month. Anything worth selling will be gratefully accepted.

Please, ladies, look around your households for objects you may no longer want to keep but would rather sell than throw out. Don't forget to bring your husbands!"

A wise person once said: "You have got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there." We all need to have goals ... but ... if we don't know where we're going, if we don't establish our life goals within the context of God's Plan for our ultimate destination, we might never get there. When we are pursuing sincere Christian life-goals, we discover that the happiest people in the world are they *who tailor their lives to God's purpose*.

The stores may not know it, Santa may not know it, even we may not know it, but Christmas is coming to put back the joy that is missing in our lives. Christmas is coming to give us a fresh sense of Christ's Presence in our lives. Christmas is coming to restore the genuine value of our hopes and dreams for our lives.

The Season of Advent is nearly over once more, the 4<sup>th</sup> and final candle, signifying *Love*, is lighted. As the waiting time is going, the activity level in many households dramatically escalates in anticipation of the *Coming*. For young children, the anticipation of the *coming* is about Santa and gifts.

For many of us adults, the preparation is about planning, the shopping, the baking, the cooking, and the celebration with friends and family, cleanup, and tiredness. What really stands out is the love God has for us. "Love one another as I have loved you!"

Once, perhaps, we placed our fondest hopes in the message of the "*heavenly host*" in Bethlehem on the first Christmas Day: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people " (Luke. 2:14).

Once, perhaps, we set all our life-goals within the context of an unconditional "Yes!" to: "*Make love our aim!*" (I Cor. 14:1). But as time went by, we discovered that our dream house was built on sand, "and the rain fell; and the floods came; and the winds blew; and the *allure of money* and things beat at the door; and the *clouds of self-centeredness, egoism* and *pride* cast their shadow over everything; and the *roar of discontent*, and even *disbelief* shook the foundations; and the house fell; "and great was the fall of it" (Mt. 7:27).

Christ is no longer with us in the form of a newborn Babe. Christ is King now! But He is still with us now! Emmanuel! He comes to us in His Word. He comes to us in the Sacraments, wine to heal our wounds and Bread to give us Life.

But He will not allow us to enthrone Him strictly within the confines of our chapels and sanctuaries. He will not be bound by any words of ours that seek to undo the Mystery of His Presence. He comes to us wrapped in the swaddling clothes of human events.

He confronts each and everyone us in the faces that reflect human needs. He meets us and greets us in the person of our brothers and sisters everywhere ... all God's children.

But Christmas is coming to present us with the deed to the "*Land of Beginning Again.*" Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us) (Mt. 1:23).

Rejoice! God is with us in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Rejoice! In and through Jesus Christ, God will restore the genuine value of our *hopes* and *dreams* for our lives! Rejoice!

Advent the season of Hope and Expectation: *Hope, Peace, Joy* and *Love*. Let us celebrate! And don't forget to bring your husbands -- and your wives, and your children, and your sisters, and your brothers, and your friends. And don't forget to tell them that the happiest people in the world are they who tailor their lives to God's purposes! Blessed Christmas to you all.

**Amen.**