

“*Making the best of things*”

December 26, 2010

Text: Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:13-23

I.

Well, how did it go yesterday? Christmas can be a complicated time. There’s so much happening on multiple levels.

There’s the religious part; then, there’s the sharing of gifts with the family part. There’s always the food component and of course all kinds of wonderful family traditions around all of the above.

It’s a lot to expect that everything goes 100% the way we want it to at Christmas.

There’s the story of an 8-year-old little girl who had a most disappointing Christmas, it turns out. She apparently didn’t get the gifts she’d hoped for. She’d been arguing with her older brother and, in general, making everybody’s life miserable. Finally, her mother put her to bed, almost two hours before her normal bed time on Christmas day.

When she began praying the Lord’s Prayer, which she always did before going to bed, it came out a little different:

Our Father who art in heaven ... give us this day our daily bread ... and forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us.

Anyway, I hope you didn’t have anyone *Christmasing* against you yesterday!

II.

At Christmas, with our families—unavoidably—there’s a lot going on with expectations. And so, right away, things can get complicated because our families are always in flux, in the grip of some transition: new family members ... new life-situations with regard to careers and where we live.

And on top of this, there’s so much swirling around us in our life context. For a moment, think about all the change we, as a culture, have been through in the past decade!

9/11 ... two wars ... a new identity as a *debtor nation* ... all the realities and implications of new technologies and of the *information age* in which live; speaking of which, do you know who was on the cover of the December 27th issue of TIME Magazine?

Have you heard of **Mark Zuckerberg**, the 26-year-old founder and CEO of *Facebook*? No doubt, many of you are already *on Facebook*. With all the free sharing of personal

information, it is emerging phenomenon like *Facebook* that is changing the way we live.

As we approach the second decade of the 21st century, the world we live in is in many ways a scary world. It's a world where you have to pay attention or, easily, you'll get lost in the shuffle.

And because of this, one of the skills that is most in demand is the skill of *adaptation*—adapting to the whirlwind of change that surrounds us everyday. In this emerging world, if you're too set in your ways, you may wake up one day and discover you've become an anachronism.

Adapting and adjusting ... adapting and adjusting is the way of things; and if we want to survive we have to ***make the best of things***.

III.

A pastor colleague was remembering some wintry times up north ... in Lowell, Massachusetts. At the time, he was a teacher ... and he had the custom of waking up each morning to a radio talk show that—during the snowy days of winter—would inform the listeners in the events that school was cancelled that day.

On this particular snowy day, a lady called in complaining to no end about the city ... and why weren't the sidewalks clear of snow. She went on and on with her complaint. *The city this and the city that.*

A few minutes later, another caller called in with a response to the lady's complaint. *To the previous caller, he said, Lady, I don't know what your deal is; we ARE the city. For crying out loud, ***pick up a shovel!****

MAKE THE BEST OF THINGS. Pick up a shovel! Don't just sit around and let the world beat you up as the winds of change blow. Pay attention ... and do what you need to do so your life-situation works.

IV.

Look at all that Joseph and Mary—Jesus' parents—had to contend with! In our tendency to romanticize and sentimentalize the Christmas story, we easily forget—or don't remember—the dangers that surrounded them.

Right away, after Jesus' birth, they had to flee to Egypt. Apparently, the wrath of Herod (who had a pattern of violence) had been riled and Herod didn't tolerate any perceived *rivals* to his power.

Later, after Herod died, Joseph and Mary were told they could return to Israel. But

Herod's son, Archelaus—also known to be brutal—was ruling in Judea, where Jerusalem is, and so—afraid to go there—they ended up settling in Nazareth in Galilee.

The point is, all the time in life, there is a lot to contend with. Our lives are not easy. We all have to make adjustments along the way. It's called LIFE: paying attention, being honest and truthful about our life-situation; and *making the best of things* as we are able.

Part of the message of the Bible is how God's protective hand hovers over our human situation. At least, that is the intent and it's important that we know this. God *wills* our safety and health and ultimate well being. And, of course, we are God's agents in helping to realize this hope.

V.

Dr. Kark Menninger, the famous American psychiatrist, once gave a lecture on mental health and was answering questions from the audience afterwards. One man asked,

What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?

People were expecting him to answer something like, **consult a psychiatrist, or something like that.**

To their astonishment, he replied, *My advice would be to leave your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone who is in need, and do something to help that person.*

What a concept! If you want to improve your mental and spiritual health, *go love somebody. Do something for someone else. Give yourself to the love of others.*

In other words: **Make the best of things.** God works in and through our acts of love ... our acts of compassion and generosity. God also works through our spirit of hope and promise as we embrace the future. That's why our being positive and hopeful in life, adjusting and adapting to new circumstances—always with the larger picture in mind—is so important.

If we want to change the world ... help make the world a better place ... the kind of world where we would want to raise our children and grandchildren, we do it through our daily acts of kindness and love and through our commitment to excellence.

VI.

Arise and shine, says the prophet, Isaiah, *for your light has come. And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

That should be our attitude, our disposition, every day of our lives.

Isaiah, here, was speaking during the time known as the **Restoration**, the period after the Exile where the Israelites were free to go back to the land of Judah and to Jerusalem, the holy city.

But this was a difficult transition. Fifty years had passed ... a lot had changed ... and it was tough to try and start over. But still, a new day was on the horizon, new possibilities loomed ahead and Israel had to rise to the challenge.

This was not the time to be defeatist or weak-willed. It was the time to stand up and be counted, trust in the future and in God's providential guidance and, then, *go for it*.

Arise and shine, for your light has come. For although darkness has covered the peoples, the power of the Lord will arise upon you ... and God's glory will appear over you.

- Nations shall come to your light ...
- And kings to the brightness of your dawn ...

Lift up your eyes and look around ... it's already happening ... your sons and daughters are coming from far away.

VII.

Friends, we have to believe in the power of the future ... because—always—that future is full of the high hopes of God.

In the New Year that is before us, our prospects are as great and as high as our imagination and determination to see them in light of God's purposes.

Whatever our life-situation, friends, let each one of us determine to **make the best of things**. Working together, sticking together; doing for one another, going the second mile; making the necessary sacrifices, aiming high and expecting great things.

Arise and shine ... your light has come.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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