

Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 2:1-18

## The Sounds of Christmas

For some reason whenever I think of the sounds of Christmas it is carols and hymns that first come to mind. When I started writing this sermon it was the song Silver Bells that I thought of with the lyrics

City sidewalk, busy sidewalks  
Dressed in holiday style  
In the air there's a feeling of Christmas  
Children laughing, people passing  
Meeting smile after smile  
And on every street corner you'll hear  
Silver bells  
Silver bells  
It's Christmas time in the city  
Ring-a-ling  
Hear them ring  
Soon it will be Christmas Day

Strings of streetlights, even stoplights  
Blink of bright red and green  
As the shoppers rush home with their treasures  
Hear the snow crunch  
See the kids bunch  
This is Santa's big scene  
And above all the bustle you'll hear  
Silver bells  
Silver bells  
It's Christmas time in the city  
Ring-a-ling, hear them ring  
Soon it will be Christmas Day  
Soon it will be Christmas Day

That song seems to describe for us all the sounds that we have come to associate with Christmas even if it is not exactly what each of us experiences for ourselves. The movies certainly make us believe that is what Christmas is supposed to sound like.

Many of these sounds would have been true to in the time of Jesus birth. There would have been many sounds of activity. Remember, the scripture tells us that this was at a time of a Roman census. Now there appears to be no evidence to suggest there

actually was a census going on in this time period. On top of that, to propose that everyone go back to register as ancestors of certain people from certain places would have been a logistical and procedural nightmare for the Romans. But what has been handed down to us is this story, and often there is somewhere in these stories a beginning, is that there were likely many people gathered for some reason and this has become part of the origin story of Jesus.

If there were many people gathered it would be like our shopping season here, and like our family gatherings over Christmas when people travel to be together, whether near or far. Some like, Ken and I, gather people together who, like ourselves, do not have family close by and so create a family for Christmas. The conversations and music, laughter and the busyness of preparing a meal, all of these things and more become part of the sounds of Christmas.

Amidst the sounds of the activity surrounding the birth of Jesus was also the sound of silence. While people were hustling and bustling there were places of stillness, a field where shepherds lay keeping their sheep, and a stable where a mother and father found shelter against the coolness of the night, protected from the elements. And though baby Jesus would have cried, many of us know the special moments of cradling a sleeping child in our arms and the absolute peace and stillness of those moments.

Then there are the sounds of joy. For many of us it is those things already mentioned, the music, the conversations, the laughter. At the birth of Jesus we are told that the stillness of the night was penetrated by the sounds of angels sharing the news of the birth of the Saviour. The news given to those most unlikely to receive it if brought against the standards of importance in which we have a tendency to rank people. Yet, the shepherds were the ones that God trusted to hear this news and to act upon it, to receive it. And they did receive it, they trembled in fear as any sane person would upon seeing such a sight, but they still accepted it and decided to go see if what had been spoken and sung to them could really have happened. The shepherds then shared their joy as they returned from their trek to the stable “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Christmas also holds the reality of sadness and suffering in the world. The story of what is called the Massacre of the Infants is playing itself out in front of our eyes each day as we see the war against Hamas in Gaza. The innocents that are being massacred is more than most of us can begin to imagine. I am not going to comment on the politics of this war or the war on Ukraine other than to say that God help us. We are watching children die, caught up in the adult decisions of who can become collateral damage. Our Prince of Peace Jesus must be crying just as the weeping for children happened in the time of Herod. Jesus nearly being one of those innocents had it not been for the fact his father got the family out of there and they became displaced people in Egypt.

Think about that a little when we judge those who are people displaced or refugees in our world because power has not cared for the needs of those more vulnerable. Jesus

was displaced, a refugee in another land, and he is our Saviour, our Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God with us in our lives, but particularly in our suffering, as Jesus knew what suffering was all about, from childhood into adulthood, and to death on a cross.

If you are grieving this Christmas, grieving a death, the loss of income, the loss of friends or family, the loss of mobility, love, and life as you know it, you can trust that Jesus is there with you because Jesus knew suffering. He did not step away from suffering in life or death, and because of that we can trust that he does not step away from us, but walks with us.

This world is broken. It feels broken beyond repair, still God calls on each of us to live in ways that heal brokenness, our own and that of others. God's love is one of transformation. It is a pathway to healing and wholeness even when our lives and the world seem utterly and hopelessly drawn to despair.

As you celebrate this Christmas season, pay attention to the sounds that are around your and in our world. Hear the joy, the music, laughter and conversation. And choose to hear the grief, the tears, the sounds of war and pain in our world. May we be people who stand together to bring hope and healing into the world. The same hope that came with the birth of the Messiah, Jesus.

Don't despair that there is not much you can do, but rather do something. Reach out. Bring hope, peace, joy and love into a world desperate to know that these things are still possible. Be the people of God for yourselves, for family and friends, and for the sake of the world. Amen.