

“You Don’t Need To Worry or Hurry”

Psalm 96

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-20

This is Christmas Eve. Tonight, we light the last candle, the Christ Candle. The Christ Candle represents God coming into the world. Yes, Jesus was born, fully human and fully God, bringing the presence of God into the world. Let’s not worry or hurry, but glut the hunger of the soul with the presence of God.<sup>1</sup>

In his book *The Faces of Jesus*, author and pastor Frederick Buechner reflects on an early scene in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. There are three characters. Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo are keeping watch at night, discussing the possibility of having seen a ghost. While discussing their bewilderment regarding what they may have seen, they shift to a discussion about the night of Christ’s birth. In his book, desiring us to understand Shakespeare’s writing style, Buechner offers a summary of the trio’s conversation.

Marcellus offers a stunning thought about the power of the Advent of a Savior:

On the dark battlements of Elsinore, Marcellus speaks to his companions of the time of Jesus’ birth. It is a *hallowed* time he says, a holy time, a time in which life grows still like the surface of a river so that we can look down into it and see glimmering there in its depth something timeless, precious, other. And a *gracious* time, Marcellus says—a time that we cannot bring about as we can bring about a happy time or a sad time but time that comes upon us as a grace, as a free and unbidden gift. Marcellus explains that Christmas is a time of such holiness that the cock crows the whole night through as though it is perpetually dawn, and thus for once, even the powers of darkness are powerless.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 51-52.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Buechner, *The Faces of Jesus* (Paraclete Press, 2006), 14.

God pursues us with unconditional love. We pursue God with a desire to experience God's presence in our life. This mutual pursuit is the good news of Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve we can be intentional about receiving the One who is always present. In this regard, Bobby Schuller, the pastor of Shepherd's Grove Presbyterian Church in Irvine wrote *Creed of the Beloved*: "I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. *I am the beloved of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry. I don't have to hurry.* I can trust my friend Jesus and share his love with the world."<sup>3</sup> God is with you. You are the beloved of God.

Isaiah 9:2-7 testifies to a new world of change and transformation which culminated at the birth of Jesus. The new world demonstrates light confronting darkness, the dismantling of oppressive structures and Jesus being God's liberative gift. Psalm 96 makes it clear that the birth of Jesus necessitates the singing of a new song, a song of hope, peace, joy and love...a song of salvation where righteousness and justice prevail. Titus indicates that the self-offering of Jesus to anyone and everyone is grace, love, peace and mercy in action. And Luke 2:1-20 tells us that Jesus' birth guarantees we are not alone in a world that seems to be spinning out of control. Jesus is with us. We can move forward in faith, boldness and courage.<sup>4</sup>

The birth of Jesus offers a new beginning for you and for me. Salvation is at hand; yours, mine, and anyone else who will believe. You are a child of God. You are the

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<sup>3</sup>Bobby Schuller, *You Are Beloved* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2018), 16.

<sup>4</sup>In the paragraph of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Stephen Breck Reid, Christian De La Rosa, Gail Ramshaw, Joel B. Green, Andrew Clark Whaley, Eric D. Barreto and Lynn Japinga in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 68-71, 71-72, 73-74, 75-77, 77-78, 79-81 and 81-82.

beloved of God. Yes, you are saved for eternal life, but you're also saved from worry and hurry. Again, Bobby Schuller writes,

Relax, rest, and have fun, or even the smallest things will wear you out.... Today, go against the habit of the heart to hurry, to worry, and to manufacture or control the outcome. Watch how as you walk at the pace of Christ in a slow, trusting, and wise way much good comes to you. You will be more productive, not less. You will be kinder. And you will have clear eyes to see the bright future in store for you.<sup>5</sup>

Seize your belovedness. Act with hope, peace, joy, love and the presence of Jesus in your life. Love God. Love others. Show others their belovedness. Be Christmas Day people every day. You don't need to worry or hurry. Merry Christmas! Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Thursday, 24 December 2020, Christmas Eve, by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>5</sup>Bobby Schuller, *You Are Beloved*, 141, 152.