

December 24, 2020

Christmas is here. Ever since last March we've been lighting a candle and insisting that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it. Today, we celebrate that light! God has showed up!

I love the Christmas story from Luke that Dennis was reading. Maybe I'm just an old farm boy, but I love the stable. I love the sheep and cows and donkeys... I love the manger. I imagine there were probably a few chickens running around.

This is where the Son of God is born. Not in a king's palace, not at the Vatican, not at the ELCA church-wide headquarters, not in a Hollywood studio, but in a barn in the middle of nowhere... This makes it real, for me...

We just got done singing, "Little lord Jesus asleep on the hay, The Cattle are lowing." The Son of God is born to a real person, Mary, in a real place. This is something I can resonate with... I mean, I've got a barn, many of you have barns, you know how barns feel-- a little drafty, a few mice, cob webs, dusty, not the cleanest places on earth... Barns are earthy!

God enters the world in the most vulnerable way possible, in the most unlikely place possible, and in the most "down-to earth" place possible. God's entry into the world is in a lowly place. And God's plan of salvation will reach up to the heavens. What starts out as lowly proposition, ends up as the biggest operation ever! One tiny baby, in the middle of nowhere will change the entire world.

How many of you have nativity sets as part of your Christmas decorations? I think nativity sets are so important to us, because they tell this story of a lowly beginning. And for most of us, that's a story that we can connect with. I was born in a small hospital in a small town in the middle of nowhere...

I grew up on farm; I grew up in an earthy place. I love those nativity sets, and I know exactly the sounds and the smells going on there...

God came down to earth, because He loves us! To demonstrate that He cares for all people. Not only the rich and famous, not only the smart and gifted, ALL of us...

The good news of Christmas is God's presence. And this feels different for me this year. I haven't had an opportunity to hug my kids in a long time. I haven't had the opportunity to shake hands with all of you. I haven't had the opportunity to sit close and listen to your stories. To see your smiles. To feel your presence...

For the past couple weeks, I've started to notice how much I miss everything. And the best way I can describe it is to say I'm feeling "presence" deprived...

Sad little story... I was driving home last week after some errands. And got to remembering last Christmas with all of our kids together. We made lefsa with the Bjornson's equipment... We played dominoes, opened presents, watched movies, feasted, went on walks, stayed up late, talked about hopes and dreams. Just everything a family does. The memory just made me smile.

Then I was suddenly reminded, that wasn't going to happen this year. And I immediately started to wipe away tears. Just a little "pitty-party." It's amazing how close to the surface emotions can be...

And here's the thing, I immediately said a little prayer, right then and there, because I knew, God knew exactly how I was feeling. And it gave me a little comfort and strength.

God's presence feels closer to me this year. Maybe because I'm reaching out in prayer a little bit more... And I suspect many of you know what I'm talking about.

This is exactly what incarnation is all about. God has lived in our skin and knows what we feel. God knows what we're going through. The Son of God was born into this world, in a lowly place, a manger, He showed up and loves us!

And because of that, I have strength to dream of my kids showing up next year. And I will not take it for granted! And, I'm going to give them lots of hugs and kisses...

Because presence matters! Presence communicates more than any words possibly can. And God is with us, today, right now and always. And that is the best news!

Amen, and merry Christmas everyone, God is With us!