

**December 24, 2014**  
**Christmas Eve Homily**  
**Titus 2: 11-14**  
**Pastor Marsha Brown**  
**New Horizons Presbyterian Church**

“The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people. It educates us so that we can live sensible, ethical and godly lives right now by rejecting ungodly lives and the desires of this world. At the same time we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us in order to rescue us from every kind of lawless behavior and cleanse a special people for himself who are eager to do good actions.”

We have heard the story of baby Jesus being born, we have sung familiar carols on this Christmas Eve, and here among those readings and messages is another-less seasonal message about sensible, ethical and godly living. And salvation that is brought to the whole world!

The message that I have received from scripture tonight for us is that God is here-now-with you and me- and giving us what we need if we stop and pay attention to what is in front of us. This passage from Titus is shocking in its simplicity. This salvation from God is practical and real and this worldly....not waiting for when we die and go to heaven.....Titus tells us that we are created to do good actions. Wow what a message. How do we get it so mixed up with who is in and who is out, trying to argue our ways into a reward in heaven, when what matters is now....here.... This present moment.

Jesus came as a vulnerable poor baby in an oppressed time. He really was from a lowly life. The shepherds were the first to notice his birth and they were the lowest on the social totem pole of people. Stinky, smelly, irresponsible, poor shepherds paid homage to this baby. That tells you something. Jesus came that ALL may have abundant life. Not just those of us who are members of this church, but ALL people-everywhere. And he came that ALL may have peace and joy and love. And the way to that kind of ethical life that Titus tells us about is to love our neighbor-whoever that is.

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Give them what they need-that is love.

Treat them as you would want to be treated- that is love.

Give them limits and give them basics-that is love.

Cut them a break and make exceptions and expect them to be responsible- that is love.

We are all the same here on this earth. There are no 'sinners' and 'saints' we are all sinner/saints, every one of us. And we are all forgiven and loved beyond anything we can measure.

At this time of the year, I think the baby Jesus brings us a symbol of Hope. Our world is a mess right now. We have violence and pain that is beyond description. We don't even know where to start to bring peace to racism, and bombing of schools and executions of police and citizens....it is overwhelming. We need a voice of hope. Hope is not something that you wish for or a feeling- it is a DECISION that is based on faith or moral conscience. Baby Jesus is a symbol of hope.

A good friend told me a story that I am going to share with you because we need examples hope in our lives. My friend and I we were talking about Christmas and I asked her how many siblings she had. "well there are two of us now. I said, oh yeah? "Yeah, my younger brother died a few years ago". "I said, illness or accident?" She said, "well, it was a suicide." Oh, I said. "I bet that was hard and probably still is". She said "yes, especially at this time of the year". I said, "what happened?" She told me the story: her brother had been clean for many years-hard work in AA and NA had brought him sobriety. His wife had also been in recovery for many years-until her found a stash of drugs that she had just started taking again. They had been through many years of working to be sober and it was not easy. Now she had completely relapsed and he was

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devastated. So devastated that he did not see a way out. He overdosed on her antidepressant pills and he died. Before he died, he wrote a long letter to everyone to tell them of his total despair and utter hopelessness at what faced him with her using again.

I asked, "So what happened to his wife? How did she live with the knowledge that her relapse had affected him?" She smiled and said, "You know everything happens for a reason". I said, "yeah?" And she told me the rest of the story: her grand mother was in assisted living and one day one of the CAN's looked familiar. It was her brother's wife. She had gained about 30 pounds and looked healthy and she didn't recognize her at first. The former sister-in-law didn't recognize her grandmother either. She had made a decision to get off drugs again, remarried someone who supported her in this new life, and become trained to be a nurse assistant. She got her kids back when she was sober and now they have a good honest life. She had taken what could have been the most hopeless situation ever and turned it into a loving household with a partner who made sure she went to her meetings and supported her recovery and my friend, her former sister-in-law back in her life and in her kid's lives. The power of living, active hope as a decision in our lives can be the difference in life and death-physical and spiritual. Good came out of bad. That is God. That is the miracle of life that we are given in this world when we accept that God loves us as we are and forgives us of all we have ever done and wants us to live good and ethical godly lives by choosing to hope.

This Christmas, take a minute to consider the symbol of a baby being born in you, to give you hope. It is what incarnation is all about- God being born in us! It is a powerful symbol! For God can do impossible things! Things that we do not think could ever happen. No matter how bleak things might seem for you and for our world, God can work in our real lives. Believe it. Live it, now. Amen.