THE REDEMPTION OF SCROOGE

 “The Power of Love”

Rev. Ron Dunn December 22, 2019

It is, when you stop to think about it, a preposterous story. The very idea that God would make God’s Presence known in this world by taking on the flesh, blood and bone of a baby, born to a peasant woman in a cattle stall—well, that’s an idea that tests the boundaries of our imagination! And yet, it is this preposterous, astonishing, and astounding idea that brings us together on this Christmas Sunday morning.

For some strange reason, we find ourselves irresistibly drawn to this story that has now been remembered and celebrated for over 2000 years. For some strange reason, we can’t seem to get it out of our system, can’t seem to let go of it, can’t seem to forget its simple and humble premise—namely, that the Creator of the Universe would choose to approach to make an overture to humanity not from a position of power and might, but a position of vulnerability and love.

To our way of thinking, it would make more sense for God to come to us as a King, surrounded in splendor. But that was obviously not the way God chose to see it. No, God, for some reason, chose to make a guest appearance in the form of a baby, a peasant baby, born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. God, for some reason, God wanted all of God’s children to know and understand that, ultimately, it would not be power , prominence and privilege that would prevail, but instead, it would be love—simple, humble, vulnerable love that would remain after the so called “mighty empires” would rise and fall.

That is essentially the message that the baby, born at Bethlehem, embodied and inspired. When all is said and done, Jesus would teach us, it will be love that remains…love that wins the day…love that stands the test of time.

This is a message, of course, that has been told and retold in hundreds and even thousands of the stories that humanity has told, over the centuries, about Christmas and its meaning. While the story lines and the characters may vary, the punch line remains the same: It is love that finds a way…love that points the way…it is love that **is** the way that leads to the life that God intends for us all.

Certainly, this is the underlying message of Dicken’s “A Christmas Carol.”

Over the past three weeks, we have witnessed the journey of Ebenezer Scrooge as he has been forced to come to grips with his greedy and self-serving way of living life. Through the visits of Marley and Marley and the Ghosts of Christmas Past and Present, he has learned that his choice to always put his fortune first has had some devastating consequences. He has discovered that, in many respects, he hasn’t really been living, but only going through the motions of living.

All of this has “set the table” for the final visit that Scrooge receives—this one from the Ghost of Christmas Future.

Unlike the earlier ghosts, the appearance of this ghost is ominous and foreboding—bearing a direct resemblance to the Grim Reaper. Not only that, there is no cheerful chatter or helpful explanation about why things are the way they are. Instead, there is only silence and a deliberate pointing to the various consequences that Scrooge is likely to experience for his life of selfishness and greed.

The ghost proceeds to take Scrooge on a tour in which he can observe the reactions of various individuals to the news of an unnamed individual’s death. Without fail, each of these reactions is one of gladness and even joy—not of sorrow or grief. Even though he might have already had his suspicion, Scrooge wants to know the identity of this recently deceased individual whom nobody seemed to miss. They then make a visit to the home of Bob Cratchit where Scrooge learns to his horror, that Tiny Tim has died because the family didn’t have the money to take care of him properly.

Badly shaken, Scrooge presses the Ghost of Christmas Future to reveal the identity of the one who has died—the one that no one seems to miss or care about.

The Ghost then points in the direction of the cemetery where Scrooge discovers a snow encrusted tombstone with the name, “Ebenezer Scrooge” etched upon it.

**It is, for Scrooge, the breaking point in which all of his fears have come home to roost.** He collapses in grief and remorse, pleading with the Ghost to spare him this fate. He insists that he has learned his lesson from the visit of Marley and Marley—and from the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. He promises that, from this point forward, he will live his life differently—valuing the people that he previously either ignored or treated so poorly.

Suddenly, Scrooge finds himself alone and in his own bed. The terrifying Ghost is gone and Scrooge comes to the realization that his plea has been heard and that he now has a second chance to live the life that he had promised to live. Without any reluctance or hesitation, Scrooge proceeds to make good on his promise.

Suddenly, a life that had been more burden than blessing, more stressful than joyful, is changed—and changed dramatically! What we observe in the character of Ebenezer Scrooge is nothing less than complete redemption and joyful transformation. He is a new man with a new agenda for living—an agenda of kindness, generosity and love.

As he makes his way, with turkey in tow, to the home of the Cratchit’s, he is quick to make amends with those he has shortchanged in the past. And those that he meets along the way are stunned to learn that stingy and greedy Ebenezer Scrooge has now become a kind, loving and generous man who embodies the essence of Christmas joy and love.

**It is important to keep in mind that the literary genius of Charles Dickens is at work here, doing its best to remind the people of Industrial England with all of its greed, self-centeredness and injustice, that there is another force at work in the world, a force that holds within it, the astonishing power to change a man’s life. Dickens is writing about nothing less than the power of love.**

While the essential message of “A Christmas Carol” is not an explicitly Christian message, it is not at all difficult to connect the dots. The story of Scrooge’s transformation by the power of love is one that lives at the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Jesus speaks clearly about this transforming power of love in the parable he tells about the shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the fold in order to find the one sheep that is lost. The parable tells us that God’s love for us is so great that God will not rest until the one who is lost is found. And then, when that lost one is found, all heaven throws a party. Indeed, there is more joy in heaven, says Jesus, over the one sinner who repents than for 99 righteous people!

As we move now into our final preparations for the celebration of Christmas, I would like to invite you to consider the transforming power of love that was born into our world at Bethlehem. It is, in fact, an astonishing thing to consider that a baby, born into a peasant family in a remote region, would grow up to wield a power far greater than any King or Ruler could ever possess.

I am speaking, of course, about the power of love that Jesus unleashed upon our world in his willingness to set his own interests aside in favor of the needs, the hurts and the hopes of others. I am thinking about the power of love that Jesus made tangible in his choice not to draw lines or boundaries to exclude, but to draw the circle wide enough to include any and all: Red and yellow, black and white, gay and straight, liberal or conservative—they are all precious in God’s sight.

I think that you will agree with me that this is a message our world needs to hear—in fact, a message our world longs to hear. The problems that Charles Dickens wrote about are problems that continue to haunt and plague us in our own time. Greed, injustice, self-centeredness—they are now, more than ever, part of the landscape of our lives. And there are times in which it appears that there is nothing that can be done to stop the rising tide of conflict, chaos and hatred.

But I am here, this morning, to suggest that there is something that can be done. For there is, you see, a force that is greater than all of these dark forces combined. It is the force of love born into our world in the flesh and blood of a baby, a baby that grew to be a man—a man who would change our world, one life at a time, through the extraordinary power of his love.

Those of us who have tasted this love know that it holds an extraordinary power—the power not only to redeem and transform us, but the power to redeem and transform our world. This is, I believe, the “Good news of great joy” that we celebrate in a baby’s birth, the “Good news of great joy” that we commemorate when we choose to be conduits of this love, bearing witness to overwhelming power of forgiveness, grace, mercy and peace.

**Bishop Desmond Tutu,** the South African Bishop who was so instrumental in helping his country move forward from the horrors of Apartheid, once offered his reason for choosing to live with an unflinching sense of hope for his people. He said simply, **“I’ve read the end of the book…and love wins!”**.

Indeed, if you have read this book that we call the Bible, you will understand that, when all is said and done, it is, in fact true: **LOVE WINS!** It is simply our task—our assignment, if you will—to live in the bold confidence that it is so.

I think it only fitting to conclude, this morning, by showing the final, joyous scene that wonderfully illustrates love’s victory in the life Ebenezer Scrooge. We pick up the story as Scrooge finally knocks on the door of Bob Cratchit. It is a scene that makes me smile…one that makes me laugh…and one that reminds us all of the astonishing power of love.

**Amen!**