

Pastor Diana couldn't be here today, so she asked me to share her message with you.

Her message is entitled, "The Work of Christmas" based on the poem by the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman. Rev. Thurman's theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists, and he was a key mentor to leaders within the civil rights movement, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

What comes to mind when you think about the work of Christmas?

For most of us, I suspect, it's things like shopping, wrapping presents, decorating, cleaning the house, buying groceries and cooking Christmas dinner. It's getting ready for Santa and opening presents. It's getting to church or the computer on time for the start of the Christmas service. I know for some it's a lot of work just getting through these days. They're hard days of grief, sadness, depression. This has also been a time of activism, calling or writing our government representatives about the extreme need for families losing their housing, not having enough food and many lost jobs with unemployment benefits running out.

For some the work includes planning the liturgies and preparing sermons. And this year a lot of people worked hard making videos and ensuring that the technology worked. We do a lot of work leading up to and in anticipation of Christmas Eve.

And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if on Christmas Day, after the child has been born and after the dishes have been done, there's a collective sigh of relief that our Christmas work is done. But what if it's really not? What if that's when "the work of Christmas begins?"

That's what The Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman writes in his poem entitled "The Work of Christmas."

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Have you ever thought that maybe “the work of Christmas” is what it means and looks like for the Word to become flesh and live among us (John 1:14)?

Maybe the Word becoming flesh and living among us is a momentary kind of thing, happening only in the moments when “the work of Christmas,” is being done. Maybe it’s less about a particular person and more about a way of being and living with each other.

I think most of us hear about the Word becoming flesh and living among us and we immediately assume it’s about Jesus. I don’t disagree with that. We see him enfleshing the Word of God throughout his life; enfleshing forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, gentleness, nonviolence, wisdom, compassion, healing and generosity. That was his way of being and living.

So, yes, I do think the Word became flesh in Jesus. I just don’t think it is unique or exclusive to Jesus, as if Jesus is the only one in whom the Word became or can become flesh.

What about you and me? What about the Word becoming flesh in us?

Maybe the Word can and is intended to become flesh in us to the same degree it was in Jesus. Maybe that happens every time we offer compassion or mercy, in every moment when we do “the work of Christmas.”

Have you ever loved or forgiven another? Have you ever reached out to another with compassion or gentleness? Have you ever responded with nonviolence and peace? Have you ever fed the hungry or cared for the sick? Has someone else ever done those things to or for you?

If you answered yes to any one of those questions then you can also say, “And [once again] the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

It’s a few days after Christmas and

... the song of the angels is stilled,

... the star in the sky is gone,

... the kings and the princes are home, [and]

... the shepherds are back with their flock.

So, what about you and me? Where do we go from here? What’s next for us?

What is the Word of God desiring to become flesh in you and me? As our District Superintendent Blake discussed last Sunday, to rejoice, to commune deeply with God, to companion each other in study, worship and prayer. and then go change the world. Coming together via Facebook and celebrating the Holy Communion is one of ways we rejoice and are entering, even soaking ourselves in the grace of God. Communing with God in our souls. As one young person said, hanging out with Jesus, worshipping God and allowing our hearts to be re filled. For the spiritual well to be refilled. This is essential for our spiritual lives. As those of you not on City water know, who have your own well on your property, there are dry times when you need to allow your well to recover. Give the aquifer, the source of that water time to rise up again.

One way that is expressed is in the poem of Howard Thurman when he writes of “making music in the heart”. Spending time in prayer, being out at the ocean or in the forest, listening to good music, looking a great art. Reading some poetry.

Really being with and in nature. Catching the glimmers and glimpses of the indwelling of God all around and within ourselves and in one another. All these are ways of nurturing our spiritual selves. It takes commitment to nurturing our Divine connection. And we find that if we neglect those ways of refreshment, we can become a bit dried out, a bit disillusioned, perhaps because we are trying to do things to serve others on our own steam, with just our own energy. If we do not continually fill up spiritually, we do not have much to give. So as we celebrate the coming of the New Year, let's consider a re commitment to spending time letting our souls delight and be joyous in God, awakening to the glory and love that is all around us and from that place of refreshment we will be guided in how to serve and share that love of God for everyone. Amen.