

## **All I Want for Christmas Is...**

Advent 2020

Message #2 – “All I Want for Christmas Is...A Mulligan” (Joy)

Luke 2:22-34

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown

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Hello and welcome, once again, to St. Paul’s Church. We are so excited that you’ve joined us for worship. Wherever you are today – you might be in a coffee shop, a beauty shop, or workshop... Or maybe you are watching us on a big screen in a family room in a watch party with your neighbors and friends, or on a small screen somewhere by yourself... Or, if you are reading this manuscript, may the presence of God be with you today.

I have the joyful and humble task of sharing God’s word with you today. Before we begin, would you join me for just a moment of prayer.

*Gracious God, Invade this space.*

*Prepare our hearts for what You would have us hear. Amen.*

We are in the middle of a message series that we are calling “All I want for Christmas is...” In this series we are celebrating the Advent season through which we prepare our hearts for Christmas—the time of year every year that we celebrate the birth and life of Jesus Christ—God’s only son—our savior. During the four weeks of Advent, we reflect on the year behind us and look to the year ahead of us—remembering how much God has done in our lives and praying for his provision in the year ahead.

Our sermon title for this week is, “*All I want for Christmas is... a mulligan!*”

Earlier this year I began a message with the disclosure that I am not a great golfer. In fact, at my very best, I finished absolutely dead last when trying out for the Davis Middle School golf team. Mulligan, for those of you who don’t know, originated as a golf term, which means “a do-over.” In a friendly game, if you shank an opening drive, or drop an approach shot in the water, you can ask those you are playing with for a do-over or a mulligan—as if to say, “that previous mistake doesn’t count. Take another swing”. During that middle school golf team tryout there were several times that I would have benefitted from a mulligan! But these were not friendly rounds of golf. They were competitive. So, every shot, every shot, counted. No do-overs.

I was on the ninth hole of the second day of tryouts for the middle school golf team when I landed in a sand trap. In front of two stroke counters and three of my classmates, I took 11 swings just to get out of that sand trap! With each unsuccessful swing, the embarrassment and shame of inadequacy welled up. I

wanted nothing more than a do-over... That or a shovel so that I could dig a hole big enough to hide in that sand trap.

There may be times in our lives that we want nothing more than a mulligan, or a do-over. We might ultimately come to the conclusion that we need salvation because we are looking for a do-over, but here's the thing,

### **Through Jesus we don't get a do-over, we get a new life.**

The joy that comes with that new life is transformational. It doesn't mean that we will live a life without pain, but our life will change. So much so we will never live life the same way ever again.

Imagine with me that you are simply going about your day. It's a normal day and you are going through your normal routine. You prepare for a day at the office, or at school. Maybe your office, your school and your home look very similar these days, but nonetheless you proceed with what appears, by all accounts, to be a normal, ordinary day. Then, without notice, out of the clear blue day, Jesus interrupts your routine. In his own way and with his specific timing, he invades the space you are in to bring hope, peace, joy and love.

What does Jesus say to you? What does his arrival mean?

If you've ever had an experience like this, you know the answers to these questions may vary depending on the day or the work that may be happening in your life.

From the Gospel stories, we have an experience of one man named Simeon, who, like many of us, was going about his day, and had an encounter with Jesus.

We're going to take a look at Luke's Gospel, Chapter 2, starting around verse 25. I invite you to read along with me if you have your Bible nearby, or maybe you like to read in the Bible App on your phone while listening. While you're turning or swiping to Luke Chapter 2, let me set the scene for you.

Mary and Joseph, in adherence to the to the law of Moses, go to the Temple for their purification. According to the Jewish Law at the time, a new mother would wait 40 days after delivering a baby and then they would go to the Temple and make a small sacrifice of purification and dedication. And it was at this appointed time that Jesus's parents brought their oldest son, Jesus, to the to be presented at the Temple. An analog to this practice in our modern church is when babies or young children are brought before the congregation to be dedicated to the church. In doing so, parents are effectively saying, "God, this child is yours. Help us with the community of our church to raise our child for your purposes and plan."

In doing so, Mary, Joseph and Jesus encounter a man named Simeon, and this is where our text picks up in verse 25.

**<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of**

***Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup> "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*** (Luke 2:25-32)

There is a lot that is said in this segment of scripture, so let's break this down to see what the text might say to us.

First, can you hear the joy in Simeon's voice when he encounters Jesus? You can just imagine him, being guided by the Spirit, walking into the Temple—maybe not knowing exactly why—and knowing without a shadow of a doubt that here, in the Temple, is the Messiah. The scripture tells us that Simeon is a devout and pious man. He knows the scriptures extremely well. He's dedicated his life to the "consolation of Israel," and it is said that the Holy Spirit rested on him. What does that mean? It means he dedicated his life to prayer and fasting and more prayer and more fasting for the day that Israel would be reconciled with God, that the ultimate resolution to the original covenant that God had made with Abraham so many generations ago would be resolved. He had been praying for the day that so many prophecies from the likes of Isaiah would be revealed. Based on this description of who Simeon is and what he says, I think Luke goes almost as far as naming Simeon as a prophet because, it says that he knew with absolute assurance that he would see the Messiah before he died.

Everything that Simeon knew and believed, everything that he had been praying for, arrived that day at the Temple. What does he say as he scoops Jesus up into his arms? Here is why Simeon is so joyful.

1. He sees the revelation of the word of God. The Messiah arrived before his death.
2. He projects the salvation of not just the Israelites, but the Gentiles too. Jesus represents salvation to the entire world.
3. He sees that Jesus's arrival will ultimately be a light of revelation for Gentiles and Glory to God's chosen people of Israel.

This is why Simeon was overjoyed. Joy found Simeon that day at the Temple. The Joy of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the great light of the world, transformed Simeon because while he was praying for the arrival of the Messiah in order to bring Israel back to God, he saw the transformation of the entire world in Jesus's arrival and dedication at the Temple. That is the joy he may not have known that he was praying for, and it is the joy he prophetically saw on that day. And our story, you

and me, is part of this story too. Simeon saw our salvation that day as he held Jesus in his arms.

In this year, the year we will likely remember for some time, you might be looking for a mulligan, a do-over. This year, when compared to all other years stacked on together, has been more challenging, frustrating, damaging and destructive. Chaos has confused so many, mistrust has burdened so many, pain and suffering has branded so many, and to some, hope and joy seem like a distant unreachable destination.

We have a tendency, in our lived experience to focus on the one tile of a larger mosaic, or one brush stroke of a painting or one minor note in a larger symphony, when we are really down. Friends, I encourage you to take on the view of Simeon. Zoom out. Look at how much God has delivered you from in this season. Go through the seemingly tedious process of listing all of the blessings you've encountered these past nine months, praise God for every single one, embrace the joy that has flooded your life and if you are, indeed, looking for a do-over. You are not alone. Because amid joy, there may be more heavy burdens.

In seeing all of this in his first encounter with Jesus, Simeon also sees how people will react to such a radical idea of a world-wide savior.

***<sup>33</sup> And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup> so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."*** (Luke 2:33-35)

In addition to seeing the great light that Jesus would bring to the world, Simeon also saw a shadow. He sees that through Jesus men would rise and fall. He would be a divisive force in their culture and, yes, a sword would pierce the souls of even Mary and Joseph as a result.

Jesus died a painful and gruesome death on a cross. He was convicted and crucified for crimes he did not commit. His death, however, meant that you and I would one day be right here, right where you are, considering these things and their implications on our lives.

**Jesus's life, death and resurrection should remind us  
of the joy that we have not only here on earth but for eternity  
after we are long gone from this life.**

No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter how far you think you are from God today, know this,

**He's standing there, right in front of you,  
with his arms wide open.**

If you are looking for a mulligan this Christmas, a do-over, let me invite you to receive a new life.

As Simeon's prophecy proclaims, Jesus is divisive.

He will separate you from your old life. From the life you once lived in sin and from the life that has restricted you for so many years. How do I know? I am a new life, and I invite you to that new life today.

**He'll divide you from the sins of addiction,  
pornography, jealousy and hatred**

**He'll cast away pride and loneliness and  
he will redeem you completely.**

Through the redemption and transformation of Jesus, you'll see that you begin to serve others before you serve yourself. You'll find new ways to be charitable with your heart and with your time. You will be overwhelmed by the joy, peace, hope and love that you carry with you every single day that you will start giving it away to others, and watch out. When that happens.....a movement begins.

You see, there are no do-overs with God, because

**through Jesus's life, death and resurrection, it is *ALREADY* done!  
You are redeemed. You are loved. You are cherished.**

In Jesus Christ, we find joy. My challenge to you this week is to find the joy in Christmas once again. Find the joy in the people that surround you. And look for those opportunities in this season to share with others. How can you be the source of joy to your neighbors, to your family and to complete strangers?

Let us pray.

*God, You are the very source of Joy in our world. May we be introduced and interrupted by You. May we find joy in the places we don't expect, in the great many ways You've impacted our life, in the remarkable provisions You will make in the year ahead. Thank You for sending Jesus to us. Thank You for the salvation he provides. Amen.*

*Now may the joy of Christ fill your heart. May you be overwhelmed by the Spirit this Christmas season. May you be warmed by the grace of God that surpasses all understanding, the grace that redeems and heals. May God bless you and keep you. May His face shine upon you. Amen.*