

Stable Time

2014 Christmas message from Bishop Bruce R. Ough

I am Bishop Bruce Ough. Grace and peace to you in this season of expectation and preparation for the birth of the Christ Child—God with us!

I don't know about you, but I am eagerly looking forward to the most silent and holy of nights. I can't wait to sit down and rest in the candle-lit serenity and beauty of a Christmas Eve service and celebrate the birth of Jesus. I am exhausted from the last few weeks of running. Am I alone here?

Running from one activity to another.
Running from one world crisis to another.
Running from the fear of Ebola and acts of terror.
Running from numbing pain and unbearable grief.
Running out of time and energy.
Running out of patience.
Running out of money and gift ideas.

This is supposed to be a holiday season. But the demands of our social responsibilities, the demands of work, the demands of relationships, the demands of our changed world, even the demands of our church and ministries refuse to take a holiday. We long for some simple Christmas cheer, a little peace and quiet, a slower pace, some stability in our lives. We long for "stable time."

There is only one verse in all four Gospels that gives any detail about Jesus' birth. Luke 2:7 says, "And Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." The birth narrative in Luke is more about angels and shepherds than it is about swaddling clothes and mangers. The centerpiece of the entire birth scene is the announcement of the angel and the response from the heavenly chorus. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!" (Luke 2:14).

Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. The Son of God was born in a small, cramped, congested, messy place. The newborn baby was out of place, out of sync amid the dusty animals, the mucky straw, the sneaking vermin, the spilled grain, all the usual smells, sounds, and sights found in a stable.

But the mess is the message of Christmas. There is no stable, no place in our world or in our personal lives that is too poor, too remote, too outcast, too messy, too violent, too afraid that God cannot be born there. Don't be fooled into thinking that God cannot be born in your heart this very Christmas season, this very week, this very day—just because you are too busy, too tired, too afraid, too bored, too sin-sick, or too overwhelmed with the messiness of life.

The great truth and wonder of Christmas is this: It is during these most fearful, most difficult, most confusing, most messy moments in life that God hovers nearest to us. What appears to be our most chaotic, congested, convoluted times are actually our "stable times." For Christians, "stable" moments aren't those days when calm and silence descends on our world. Our true "stable times" are when we look around and recognize that, however unpredictable and unmanageable our mess is, Christ is there. Christ is born into our messy, desperate, chaotic lives. Christ comes—Emmanuel.

If all your circuitry is on the brink of overload, if your heart is overflowing with fear or grief or brokenness, if the angel of the Lord is startling you in this moment, you could be on the very cusp of experiencing genuine “stable time” in your life. For to you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this is your sign. You will find Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a messy manger, doing “stable time.” This is God’s plan. This is the Christmas story.

Dear friends, may your Christmas celebration be filled with the holy expectation that Christ will come to you in the messy stable of your life. Glory to God in the highest heaven!

Come let us go right now and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us. Do not be afraid. Do not hesitate. For the babe in the stable is your Savior.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Bishop Bruce R. Ough
Resident Bishop
Dakotas-Minnesota Area

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