

## McCabe United Methodist Church

December 13, 2009

“It Begins With Love”

**Zephaniah 3:14-18a**

Pastor Art Scanson

One Mom says that when her children first received a video of Walt Disney’s Cinderella, they watched it almost nonstop for three days. Since it was warm outside, the family kept their windows open. Their neighbors were having their roof re-shingled by three burly men. As the Mom went out to get the mail one afternoon she heard a roofer singing, “. . . put it together and what do you get?”

From the other side of the house came a chorus of two more husky voices: “Bibbidi bobbidi, bibbidi bobbidi, bibbidi, bobbidi boo!”

This third Sunday of Advent is a day of singing. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with us. Listen to the scripture for today. Read Zephaniah 3:14-18a.

Listen carefully to that 17<sup>th</sup> verse again: “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” Do you get that? God takes such delight in us that God sings over us. We have seen it portrayed, a mother hovering over a crib singing quietly to her infant. But can you imagine God singing over us?

Some people truly believe; others merely hope. Still, this is the testimony of Zephaniah: God sings over us!

I am reminded of a Christmas carol when I think of this - God singing over us. The little carol - “Do You See What I See?” It starts like this: “Do you see what I see, said the night wind to the little lamb?”

The story of the song goes like this. It begins with the night wind, and the night wind sees what Christmas is all about. So the night wind tells the little lamb, and then the little lamb sees what Christmas is all about, and goes to the shepherd boy. The shepherd boy sees the meaning of Christmas, and he goes to the mighty king and he says to the mighty king, “Do you know what I know?” Then the mighty king says to everyone, everywhere, in a deep, gruff voice, “Listen to what I say.” Then the king makes this announcement to his kingdom: “A child, a child, will bring you goodness and light.”

Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear? If we listen closely maybe we will hear the voice of God singing over us. Now you may wonder why we sing at Christmas time. And furthermore, why in the world would God sing over us?

Well, **it begins with love**. Love always makes the heart sing. It begins with God’s love for us. This, in turn, results in our love for God. This, in turn, leads to love for one another.

Pastor Roy T. Lloyd tells a story that takes place in the midst of the Great Depression when a family of three - Mom, Dad, and six-year-old Peter – had

absolutely no money for store-bought presents. Nevertheless, they were very creative in celebrating Christmas. They decided to make pictures of the presents they would like to give one another if money were no object. So they drew pictures or cut out pictures from catalogs and magazines. They put the pictures into boxes, stuck some old bows on them, and put them under a scraggly Christmas tree. On Christmas morning the tree was heaped with riches. The gifts were only pictures, to be sure, but they were symbols of Christmas giving. There was a shiny new car for Dad and a red motor boat, some golf clubs and an all-weather coat. Mom found her dream house and a diamond necklace, dresses and a vacation cruise.

Most of the make-believe presents were for little Pete. There were pictures of a camping tent, a new bicycle, a pedal car, and all those kind of toys and games.

Now, of course, Mom and Dad didn't expect anything from little Pete. But Pete, with a squeal of delight, crawled under the tree and pulled out a gift he had prepared all by himself. He handed his present to his parents with a smile as they opened it. They found a picture-gift more precious than all the others. It was drawn with first-grade crayons. It was a picture of three people standing together with big smiles on their faces. They had their arms around each other. And under the picture, little Pete had printed a single word—"us."

A story that needs to be told at Christmas. If that doesn't make your heart sing, nothing will. Our lives are filled with love. God sings over us. And we sing of the wonders of Christmas. It begins with love.

The climax is found in the manger of Bethlehem. God took on human flesh. God came and dwelled among us. And to think - very few recognized him, but God was there in a lowly stable, reconciling the world unto Himself. I know it is an outrageous thing to say, but that's what happened there! And people are still singing about it ever since.

There was a revealing story in the Washington Post sometime back. It was told by David Devine and it goes like this. It was about a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved tee shirt and a baseball cap who emerged from a subway station in Washington. He positioned himself against a wall beside a trash basket. From a small case, the young man removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money. Then he swiveled his case to face the people who passed by, and began to play. "In the next 43 minutes, as the violinist performed 6 great classical pieces, 1097 people passed by. Almost all of them on their way to work in mid-level Government jobs. No one knew that the violinist was one of the world's leading classical musicians, Joshua Bell. Bell is an acclaimed musician, who fills concert halls. On this Friday morning Bell played on one of the most valuable violins ever made—a Stradivari valued at \$3.5 million. The train station provided good acoustics for Bell's performance and his beautiful music filled the morning air.

"A reporter stood observing and recording the event. In the first 3 minutes,

63 people walked past without seeming to notice the great musician. Then a man stopped, looked and quickly walked on. Across the 45 minutes Joshua Bell played, 7 people stopped to listen for at least a minute. 27 people gave money. Usually, in concert, Bell gets paid \$1000 per minute. This day, in total, he received \$32.17. At the end of each piece, there was no applause—just silent indifference. The master musician was ignored. People walked past musical glory without giving it a second glance.

“Except for two people. A postal worker named John—described as a ‘smallish man with a baldish head.’ John had learned the violin as a youth. He recognized the quality of Joshua Bell’s performance and stood enjoying it from a distance. And then there was a demographer named Stacey. Stacey had seen Bell in concert just 3 weeks before. She recognized him. And here he was, the international musician, sawing away, begging for money. She had no idea what was going on, but whatever it was, she wasn’t about to miss it. Stacy positioned herself 3 yards away from Bell, front row, center. She had a huge grin on her face. The grin, and Stacy, remained planted in that spot until the end. Stacy told the reporter: “It was the most astonishing thing I’ve ever seen in Washington. Joshua Bell was standing there playing in rush hour, and people were not stopping, not even looking, and some were flipping quarters at him! Quarters! I was thinking, Omigosh, what kind of city do I live in that this could happen.””

Just think of it. One of the world’s great musicians playing on the street for coins. Yet, only a few recognized him. Do you notice something familiar here? Yes, only a few recognized Jesus the Christ in the stable in Bethlehem that first Christmas. Those star-struck and lowly shepherds. Later there are some magi from the East that come to notice that humble carpenter and his bride-to-be and the baby Jesus. Not many. But, listen to this! It is an event that has turned the world upside down! It was enough to start the whole world singing. And why not? Why shouldn’t all of creation sing? After the God of all creation sings over us. Can you hear it? It is the song of everlasting love, hope, peace and joy. It is the song of Jesus Christ. And it begins with love – God’s love for each and everyone of us!!