

## Advent 4: LOVE

Isaiah 61:1-7, Luke 1:26-38 [MW20-47]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 20 December 2020

Well we're almost there again

- it's been a very different year, but here we are  
preparations have been made, activities planned, people invited
- we are almost, almost ready to celebrate  
the amazing good news of Christmas once again
- and perhaps this year we need it more than ever

So we have lit the final Advent Candle, the one that marks "love"

- 4 candles, 4 Sundays, 4 special highlights  
Hope, Faith, Peace, Love
- how does that work out in "reality", in "real life"?  
that's what God coming to be with us as the baby born in a stable  
in an animal feed-box  
is all about
- and what difference does it make?

Here's a particular angle on that which I have written

- a disclaimer: I am in no way endorsing the use of a particular  
not legal in New Zealand substance  
just reflecting how life is for some in our midst
- no judgements, just a story of love made real called:  
"In That Part of the City"

[read the story]

## IN THAT PART OF THE CITY

It was not their usual place. Usually they slept in a doorway around the corner from the main street that led to the university campus. But at this time of year, with the extra people and the Christmas rush, it was just too busy. Besides, the store owners said it was bad for business.

So they had to move.

A few blocks away they found a place no one else seemed to have claimed: the entrance to a boarded up garage, next to an empty section where an old wooden warehouse had been demolished. Not a bad area really. Just across the road was the back exit of a church; and there was enough light to make it reasonably safe.

Christmas Eve saw Lou and Robert tucked into the garage entrance. Lou's rusting shopping cart with the remainder of his worldly possessions was out of sight in the shadows. Robert preferred a kit bag, which he used as a pillow; and he always carried a small well-worn suitcase. This he placed beside him like a bedside cabinet. On it he arranged an old wind-up alarm clock, a small book and an aluminium penlight torch.

Things were pretty much like they were most nights for Lou and Robert - except of course for the change of location. Their one concession to the 'Festive Season' was the joint they were sharing.

"Those wisemen were on to a good thing you know," said Lou taking a long, slow drag. "With gold, myrrh and of course the best kind of frankincense ... this kind." He held out the joint, eying it carefully before passing it over to Robert.

"You're getting things out of synch," Robert answered before taking a drag himself. "The wisemen didn't arrive till January six. That's what church-folks call 'Epiphany'. And in the Orthodox church that's when they exchange gifts." He took another long drag before passing the joint back to Lou.

"Thank you O wise one," said Lou in mock seriousness. "Here. Take another drag on this and calm those over active brain cells!"

"Hey. You know I like to read up on these things. History is a

fascinating subject ..."

"Don't go getting heavy on me, Lou interrupted. "Next thing you'll be spouting theology again."

"Yeah. Well. I've got the words and you've got the music." Robert paused thoughtfully. "Pity you had to sell your guitar."

"Pity you sold your books."

"Well we had to eat ... and we've still got each other!"

They both laughed, and then were silent.

"I do have this." Robert picked up the small book from on top of his suitcase.

"What is it?"

Robert shone his penlight torch so the words 'Gideon's Bible' in gold lettering could be seen on the red cover.

"Robert! Don't tell me you stole something!"

"No. They want you to take them. That's why they leave them around everywhere. It tells in here all about Christmas."

"Yeah. Yeah. Sure it does." Lou took another drag.

"For real Lou. Tells about some guys out in the night minding their own business - like we are - and then this angel, actually a ton of angels, appears out of nowhere and tells them the good news."

"Good news," Lou mimicked sarcastically. "And what was that? That they would have a place in the Salvation Army hostel for a month. A roof over their heads and a job?!"

"C'mon Lou. You know."

"Yeah. Yeah. The baby Jesus was born."

"And the angels told them first - and invited them to go and see and be part of it."

They both looked out at the still night. Few stars could be seen over the glare of the city lights.

"Won't find any angels around here," muttered Lou.

"You never know," Robert answered. "Angels are messengers from God. They don't have to have wings and halos and trumpets and stuff. Angels can turn up unawares."

They exchanged the joint and looked out at the night sky.

Footsteps could be heard coming down the pavement. A loud voice echoed in the stillness. Lou and Robert were instantly on the alert.

“You are plain crazy woman if you think I’m gonna do that. No way man! No way!”

Somebody just about tripped over the two men in the entranceway.

“Hey! What’s your problem buddy?”

“Sorry. Didn’t see you there. Just had an argument with my old lady. Man she is so stubborn. Wants everything her own way. A guy can’t even get any time to himself!”

“You had an argument with your wife on Christmas Eve?”

“Yeah! And I slammed the door and walked out. Good job too. Got me so mad I was fixin’ to break something!”

Lou and Robert exchanged a knowing glance and shook their heads.

“Here man. Mellow out already. Take a drag on this.” A friendly hand held out the joint.

“You crazy! That stuff’ll fry your brain.”

“What’s it to you. You’re frying your life - walking out on Christmas Eve. You got kids?”

“Yeah.”

“What they gonna think waking up Christmas morning and finding their Daddy gone? No amount of toys in the Christmas stocking make up for that,” said Lou.

“Yeah. You have any idea how many letters Santa gets from children wanting their families back together?” Robert added.

“You get yourself back home and apologise to your old lady. You make it up to her good!”

“Why? I ain’t the one in the wrong!”

“You have an argument; you slam the door and walk out; you’re in the wrong,” Lou sighed knowingly. “Take it from me, you are sure in the wrong...”

“Here. Take this.” Robert clicked the penlight and leafed

through his Gideon’s Bible till he found Luke Chapter two. “Read up on this and in the morning get your kids together and read ’em what Christmas is all about. You want to give the best Christmas present ever? You stay with their mother - and read this book together - learn from it and live it!”

“You reckon?” The stranger seemed not quite sure.

“Best do as he says,” Lou said authoritatively. “Smartest guy I know on the street!”

“Okay. Okay. Thanks man. And lay off that stuff.”

“Hey - we’ve got no turkey - this is the only Christmas celebration we have. Now you get back home.”

The stranger shook their hands vigorously. “God bless you both.” And he almost ran off.

“Why’d you do that?” asked Lou.

“Do what?”

“Give it away. Your last book.”

“He needed it - and I can always get another one. You’re supposed to give them away to folks that need them. That’s what it’s all about. Besides, I know this story.”

Across the road lights came on. Colours reflected down the side of the building from the stained glass windows.

“Hey look,” pointed Lou. “Our Christmas decorations have arrived!”

A few moments later the sound of carols rang through the still night air.

“May be we’ll have a celebration after all,” smiled Robert.

They listened and even joined in from time to time. Then it went quiet.

“Ah well. That’s the end of it.”

“Time to settle down,” agreed Robert.

“What? You’re not going to wait up for Santa?”

Robert chuckled: “I’ve never seen him yet and I’m not likely to. There’s more chance of seeing an angel!”

“In this part of the city?” queried Lou.

There was the sound of a door slowly squeaking open. A patch of light appeared at the rear of the church. A boy - maybe about ten - came out and began to walk across the street. He spotted Lou and Robert and with all the enthusiasm of youth said: "Hey you guys! We're having coffee and donuts for supper. Wanna come and get some?"

"Thanks kid, but, uh, we're not the kind usually welcome - you know?"

"You sure you don't wanna come," the boy insisted.

"Thanks anyway."

"Okay."

"Coffee and donuts no less," said Robert.

"Not turkey," Lou answered. "But better than what we had planned."

"But we couldn't go ..."

"No. We really wouldn't be welcome," agreed Lou.

There was the squeak of a door, and the sound of slow deliberate footsteps. A boy was coming across the street carrying a tray on which were two steaming coffees in styrofoam cups, and a heap of donuts. "I have to take the tray back but everything else is for you."

Tears came into both men's eyes. They did not look at each other.

"Thanks," they said together.

"What's your name?" asked Robert.

"Uh, Mark."

"Thanks Mark."

"Sure thing," said Mark. He started to walk back across the road.

"Mark!" Robert called. "Here." He gave the boy his aluminium penlight torch. "Merry Christmas Mark."

"Wow! Thanks. Merry Christmas to you guys," smiled Mark.

"I'm not even going to ask why you did that," said Lou shaking his head.

Robert just smiled. "Merry Christmas Lou."

"Yeah. Merry Christmas."

In that part of the city - in the actions and words of a young boy, two homeless men, and even the stranger who went home - it seemed the message the angels first brought so long ago: Good News of Great Joy for all people, was heard once again.

You are important. You are noticed. You are cared about. The Saviour is born and you are invited to take your place in God's new beginning.

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