

Sunday, December 25, 2015 – Christmas Day
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14

Made to Go

I remember feeling, as a child, how incredibly wonderful it was that there was this thing called Christmas. You looked forward to it all year—and a year seemed a long time to wait. But then, there was also the wonder that it happened every year. I loved it.

I loved Christmas Eve—growing up, that’s when my family opened presents. My husband, on the other hand, grew up opening presents on Christmas Day. He and I had to have some serious negotiations about this when we started a family of our own. Ultimately I was won over—our children open their gifts on Christmas Day—but that’s not what we did in my family of origin. It was Christmas Eve that was exciting, for that was when you opened gifts. There they were, all wrapped up in pretty paper and piled under a tree, special things picked out just for you, generosity in excess. My siblings and I would see which ones had our names on them, pass them out and rip them open. The living room would be strewn with wrapping paper and we would stay up late playing, talking, eating.

But then the next morning, Christmas Day, was a bit of a disappointment. I would wake up, groggy. The morning light seemed harsh, the house was a mess, I was tired and we had to go to church.

Was anyone made to go to church this morning?

I suppose our organist was. Perhaps you who were assigned to be readers and worship leaders today, in a way, you were made to go church today, too. I guess by becoming a pastor I am now making myself go to church...

Christmas Day can feel like a disappointment. I think this can happen whether you open presents the night before, or if you open them the morning of. Ultimately, I don’t think when you open presents makes a difference. Whether Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, there will come a time when you feel disappointment.

Perhaps that time comes even while you are still a child; perhaps it comes some time later. You may have some wonderful memories of Christmas, and you may have some not so wonderful ones, too. Maybe you didn’t get the gift you really wanted. Maybe you don’t get as many gifts as you wanted, or any gifts. Maybe you do get things, but then they get broken. Maybe it is something else that is broken, maybe the thing that is broken is your family. Or maybe the thing that is broken is your body, your health. Maybe your heart is broken, maybe your hopes. Maybe, in the harsh light of morning, you are just tired.

And... you were made to go to church.

I mean that, but in a different way. Not in the sense of an authority figure telling us to get up and get dressed, the car’s leaving in 20 minutes. (Although, looking back I probably owe my parents a much delayed thank you.) I mean it in the sense of what it means to be human, how we have in us this longing, this ache. It comes, sometimes, as a feeling of disappointment—maybe with what you have, maybe with what you don’t. You were made to go to church if you have ever felt that, if you have ever felt a sense of something missing, or something broken. You were made to church if you have ever felt a need for solace, comfort, consolation. If there is any part of you that experiences sadness, along with the cheer; if there is a part of you that yearns for some silence, amidst holiday noise; if there is a part of you that feels a sense of emptiness amidst

the litter of wrapping paper, if you have a sense of what I am talking about, you were made to go to church.

We all were. We've all been made to go to church in that we were created with this sense of longing, a yearning. Often our yearning comes up against the limitations of life, the limitations of those we love, the limitations of our own selves. These limitations, these broken structures, crumble around us, and we stand amidst their ruins, like the people of Jerusalem, as spoken in book of the prophet Isaiah.

To them, to us, today, the good news is proclaimed, "Break forth in to singing, you people of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people... Your God reigns!" We were made to hear these words. We were made to be in relationship with something bigger, something deeper, something greater than our disappointment—whether those disappointments are childish, or much more profound. We were made to hear the good news of this day, Christmas Day: "in these last days, he has spoken to us by Son...through whom he also created the worlds." That's who made us: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

We were made for this, we were made to be filled with good news of great joy, we were made for wonder. Children get that, they get that about Christmas. Children feel that anticipation, that sense of generosity unbounded and especially for you. May we all feel it, today, in the silence and in the song, in the prayers and in the peace. May we all feel it, evening and morning, year in and year out, for God's years will never end. God's love is given to us; today and forever, and we were made to receive it. We are made for love, and love has come.