

Houston Congregational Christian Church

February 17, 2008

Pastor: James Manuel

Title: A Love for All Seasons

Call to Worship: Psalm 107:8

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:10-12, Matt. 27:22, Luke 24:5-7

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto You O Lord on this Your day.

Message:

It seems only a short time since we celebrated Christmas. And now here we are beginning the Lenten season. Christmas and Easter is about a Love that's for all seasons. A Love that meets all our needs forever. Phil. 4:19, 'And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.' Christmas and Easter is a Love song in 3 parts.

The first stanza begins with a birth Luke 2:11, 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you He is Christ the Lord.' Christmas is a reminder that God has come to be where we are. Right into the midst of all of our lives, our confusion, our suffering, the troubles of this world. God has come to pitch His tent right next to us. He has come to look us right in the face and say, 'I know you, I know who you are and I know what you need.' Jeremiah 1:5 says, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.' We have the assurance that God has not forgotten us.

At Christmas God sent us a gift, wrapped with our names on it, addressed just to you and to me. As we open it it is Christ. As we see Him the angels sing what God wants us to know, 'I Love you and I will Love you forever.' Jer. 31:3, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love.' Now that's a song worth hearing. With shepherds and Wise Men we should join together in worshipping this

precious Christmas gift. Luke 2:14, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will to men.'

The second stanza is a song about death. Babies do grow up. Christ left that cradle and became a man. As He went about doing God's will He got into trouble with the religious leaders. John 11:57, 'But the chief Priest and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out were Jesus was he should report it so that they might arrest Him.' They would not have fellowship with sinners Jesus ate with them. They were judgmental of sinners Jesus forgave them. They lived hypocritically playing at religion, Jesus was the man who had integrity of Word and deed. Jesus was who He said He was. They loved only a few Jesus loved them all. They asked for a cheap price to pay keeping the rules. Jesus came calling for total commitment of life it was the only way to live.

It's no wonder that finally a cross had to be lifted up. This tiny Baby Boy who had grown up to be the man Jesus had to be crucified. Matt. 27:22-23, 'What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? Pilate asked. They all answered---Crucify Him. Why? What crime has He committed? Asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder---Crucify Him.'

When Jesus died on that hill, called Calvary, it was His way of telling us how much He understood us. He had come to live in our shoes and to face what we face. There is nothing in the world that you and I can face that Christ has not already faced Himself. Suffering, Jesus knows suffering, He hung from a cross and knew the physical and the mental suffering of that. Loneliness and rejection? He knew that to. The crowds turned away from Him His own disciples left Him and on the cross He felt forsaken by God. Mark 15:34 Jesus cried out, 'My God My God why have You forsaken Me?' He was alone.

Doubt? Jesus wrestled with doubt, asking the Father to remove the cross. Matt. 26:39, 'Going a little farther He fell with His face to the ground and prayed---My Father if it is possible may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will but as You will.' Misunderstanding?

Jesus was misunderstood not only by the crowds and His disciples but by His own family who thought He was crazy. Mark 3:21, 'When His family heard about this they went to take charge of Him for they said He's out of His mind.'

And death? Jesus faced death too. Christ comes to look us in the face to say, 'Look, I know the way to live and if you follow Me I'll give it to you.' And we tell Him, 'But look Lord it's too tough, too difficult, it hurts. Lord we run into too many problems. Lord you just don't understand.' Jesus turns and says, 'Oh But I do understand, I was there. I walked through it. I faced it. I know how to come through it because I did it. If you trust Me I will help you come through it. Jesus tells us in John 14:1, 'Let not your heart be troubled trust in God trust also in Me.'

For you see that's where the Baby who came chose to dwell, in the midst of human suffering, human hurt, human need. Jesus dwells where we are. We can know that each step of the way we go there is God. GOD who understands the pain and the struggles as well as the joy. He loved us so much that He went through it all Himself so we would know we are understood. John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believed in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' God understands us.

Stanza three is a song about Resurrection. Luke 24:5-6, 'In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground but the men said to them---Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He has risen.' You know if Christ had not been raised from the dead we wouldn't have Christmas nor Easter to celebrate. If Jesus had not been raised He would have just been another good man who died a memory but not a Savior. Christmas and Easter is a joy to us because Christ grew up to be the Savior who conquered all that would defeat us.

Jesus conquered suffering. We don't understand suffering but how we detest it. We wonder how we can get through it. But Jesus did. He is a Christ who conquered sin. Sin is so powerful it drags us down

and destroys us. It can even cause us to crucify the Son of God. But He defeated that and death. We don't like to think about death either, it seems so final. We all have a date with death but how we fear it. But Jesus conquered death.

This is the joy of Christmas and Easter. We can't have Christmas without Easter. Easter and Christmas mean that those who face suffering, who face difficulty, who are struggling under insurmountable burdens have a Savior who knows the way to help us triumph over it all. Easter and Christmas mean that in our struggle with sin there is forgiveness for our failures. Luke 23:34, 'Jesus said, Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' There is strength and courage to get up and try again.

Easter and Christmas mean that death is not our end but a door that leads to that which is beyond. Jesus said in John 11: 25, 'I am the resurrection and the life he that believeth in Me though he were dead yet shall he live.' What is beyond we do not know. Who is beyond we do know. Jesus tells us in John 14:2, 'In My Father's house are many rooms if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.' This Christ who came is there. He is a Christ who sets us free. Nothing can stop us because nothing could stop Him.

That's what it all means. Christ now and forever. If we don't remember that and worship Him then no matter what tomorrow brings it will not be enough. My hope and prayer is that you have remembered. We need to hear this in the world in which we live. Because this world is a world that speaks not so much of Christ, not so much of Hope, not so much of Love, but we know better because we know Christ, we know God and 'God is Love' 1 John 4:16

Christ is here. He's Alive and He's everywhere.

Christ Jesus is a Love for all seasons. Amen. 2/17/08