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Hi Folks!

Last year Lee and I did something that was an important reminder in our household. Rather than pack up all of our manger scenes (we have several) we left one of them out on the bookcase at the entry of our house. We did this for a reason.

Christmas is a "season" of good cheer, giving and family, all the "cozy" part of our traditional thoughts about the season. But the New Year comes and it's easy to forget about the baby in the manger. We enter the world of our human issues and seem to leave the world of a God who came down to us wrapped in "human" flesh. So, we left the manger scene up all year.

Each day of our second season of the Christian Year (Epiphany in which we remember Christ came to reveal Himself to all people, including Gentiles) we were greeted by the Christ child. It was January last year and as I thought about resolutions I resolved to be a more obedient Christian in 2008.

Then came the Lenten Season (pre-Easter) in which we reflect upon God's goodness and our failures to reflect Him in our lives. I asked the baby in the manger for forgiveness (many times) as I realize I had not done life God's way.

At Easter I starkly realized that that little child, not unlike my grandchildren and my children, grew up. As I expected the world to treat me with respect and dignity I had forgotten that "God with us" (Emmanuel) was treated with disdain and misunderstanding. That little baby became the man killed on a cross, for my sin and yours!

At Pentecost (40 days after Easter) I remembered Jesus' promise of a power and a comforter that would come and indwell His Church. I thought about how many times I had made decisions in fear and anxiety, and I asked forgiveness that I had let my eyes lead me away from faith in God's promises. And I asked His forgiveness for our tendency to base our obedience on the performance of our 401K instead of our Lord and Savior.

Now it is Christmas again, the season of the Advent of Christ. We've been working on a church budget that is being proposed at 75% of last year's budget. Our nation's finances and the fears that have gripped people around the country have seemingly impacted the Church of power and promise on that day of Pentecost, where God added thousands to the number of people who called upon His name.

Over the Thanksgiving holiday I stopped to read a book given to me by a friend from Good News. In that book was a story about a man who lived in times far worse than those we face. He was a farmer who sat one evening trying to decide whether to plant seed in the "dust bowl" or save the seed for more certain times. If he planted the seed he would be risking the same crop failures he'd seen for the previous six years. It might just ruin him! So he sat and thought and maybe he prayed some.

A few short months later he looked to the fields of his fellow farmers. They were laying fallow, waiting for the time when the harvest would be certain. Then he looked at his fields into which he'd invested the lifeblood of seed that spring. There was grain for as far as his eye could see, the best harvest his area had ever seen. He thought of what his harvest time would be like if he'd taken the "safe" path. Then he smiled and began the hard work of getting in the crop.

We are also given the work of the harvest and the responsibility for planting in trust. We are asked to see the fields from God's perspective and to plant "in season and out of season."

So I walked into our house from our Thanksgiving trip and saw the manger once again. I remembered, Jesus said, "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." "Lord of the harvest. Let your church here at Good News be faithful to believe Your promises instead of buying into a faithless world. Let us invest our seed into what is most important, Your harvest. Let us not be pulled-down by the fears that swirl around us. Let us remember Your example of faith in us as You wrapped Your Son in sinful, damaged flesh and sent Him into a world to redeem ALL flesh. Let us at least glance at You in the manger as we invest our energy in each day. May our investment be in planting Your good seed. May we place Your Church (Your "reflection" in a world that needs You desperately) in its proper priority, first. Because it is in the action of trusting You and giving You first place in our lives that we begin to see the miracle of that virgin birth over 2000 years ago."

In the words of Michael W. Smith from the song, "Welcome to Our World" (our theme this Christmas) "so wrap our injured flesh around You, breathe our air and walk our sod, take our sin and make us Holy, perfect Son of God, welcome to our world."

May you and your "stuff" belong to God this Christmas!

In Christ's Love, Pastor Randy

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