

The news on Monday (12/21) showed a snowball fight in Washington, D.C. (no, it was not in the Senate!). This was a planned snowball fight. It was planned over the internet, twitter and cell phones—with all the snow in the Capital area someone thought a good old-fashion snowball fight would be in order. Because of the all the immediate contacts the net provides, etc., a good number showed up with cameras to record the event. However, one or two of the snowballs hit a passing vehicle and the owner of the car, a police detective, got out of the car with his gun drawn (Now, I know these are difficult days for police but with a snowball fight visibly in progress this seemed a bit much.) Apparently it was all cleared up quickly; no one was hurt nor were shots fired. As I watched this play out and listened to those involved I thought about the text for this morning and wondered about Christmas (Christian) hearts. Is this how Christians should snowball fight!?

For me, both the Psalmist and Paul, as he writes to the Colossians, give us a prescription for Christmas hearts – or what it means to live out our faith in the world. Something has triggered the Psalmist to praise. There is a mood of celebration in the Psalm – maybe a glimpse of the coming Christmas glory. The Psalmist looks at how worthy God is of our praise: the angels praise God; sun, moon and stars are reflecting God’s glory; all of creation is involved in praising God. (Thought of the recent picture in the Times of a plane landing at sunset at SeaTac and the beauty of the sunset – creation praising its Creator.) The Psalmist reminds us that we are called to be a people who praise our God.

Christmas is a reminder that God is worthy of our praise. The door was opened for us to enter what in decades past had been closed. Who would have dreamed that we would receive such an invitation? The Psalmist is praising God for what God has done – Christmas should be our praising God for God’s coming in Bethlehem with our invitation to join in the praise and celebrations.

As we move to the Colossians passage we find Paul giving his prescription for living a Christmas filled life... Paul is always practical. Yes, he does have some difficult theology in some of his letters but he always brings it home with practical applications of how life should be lived. We are members of the family of God and as members of this family this is how we should conduct/clothe ourselves. Here is how the family should live, even in snowball fights.

Paul wants us to know what attributes we should have in our lives, how we should clothe ourselves. He includes in this letter some of the attributes he feels should be part of our lives: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. This is not an easy list and some days it is harder to live out than others. But Paul does not stop there – to this list he adds forgiveness. Corrie ten Boom writes, “You never so much touch the ocean of God’s love as when you forgive and love your enemies.”

Why should we add forgiveness to our list? Paul says it simply, “*Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*” (3:13b).

Unfortunately we do not always see these attributes being lived out in the lives of members of the family of God.

Paul is not through; he continues. We need to add another layer, another coat to our clothing: our outer coat must be one of love. It is love that binds all the others together. We should strive to live in perfect harmony. Now perfect harmony is not easily attained. Just ask any musician, singer, choir director – to attain perfect harmony you need practice, practice, practice! And then more practice!

Remember, Paul is working to get Jews and Gentiles to live and worship together. They have been separated by decades of misunderstanding and hatred. The road is not an easy one. Each has their traditions and they have grown up not trusting one another. Misunderstandings abound. So Paul says, when all else fails there is always love – love one another as God has loved you and for good measure toss in the concept of peace – the building up of the body of Christ.

Paul speaks from his own life. He grew up as a Pharisee. He knew the Law and the separation required between Jews and Gentiles. He knows the miracle it takes for the two to co-exist together, the work it takes.

We are to do all things in the spirit of the 148th Psalm. We are to praise and thank God with prayers, hymns and spiritual songs – all things are to praise God. We are to celebrate what brings us together: manger, stable, Bethlehem and Calvary. These assist us in growing in wisdom and understanding of God's nature and love. We are to keep before us what God has done for us, Christmas hearts. We are the results of Bethlehem and Calvary and for that our God is worthy to be praised and deserves our praise.

We are to let Christ's mind be in us – to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. Paul has learned this peace – and it has not been an easy lesson for him to learn. He is now able to be content in whatever situation he finds himself. He seeks the best for those around him and works to tear down barriers that divide and build up and encourage those who are called Christians. He expects a great deal from those who are called by God into this new family of faith. He is expecting Christmas hearts to be the daily norm. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." Can you hear Paul's, AMEN!

We are called to keep Christmas in our hearts throughout the year. Following this prescription of Paul and the Psalmist we are to keep praise foremost in our lives. We are to be those who live a life of love, peace, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.

Why not make this passage in Colossians our theme for 2010? Copy it and paste it somewhere where it can be seen and read daily. Let it become a part of who we are in the coming year.

Paul's concern is that the people of God, the Church, would learn how to live together with each other and with the world. So far we have fallen short of his dream, this mandate. In fact, we may be further away today than the Church was in Paul's

day. But that does not mean we should stop trying and not keep this as our goal—that daily we demonstrate to the world what it means to have a Christmas heart – even in a snowball fight!

Hear again the words of Paul from The Message:

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989
NIV, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989
Peterson, Eugene, The Message, Zondervan, 2004, 2006