

Advent Through the Lens of Hollywood

Week 3: *Un-Scrooged* | December 11, 2011

Scripture

Isaiah 61:1-3

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

Matthew 2: 1-8, 12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Questions

- 1.) Charles Dickens was inspired to write A Christmas Carol when he visited Cornwall and saw children being exploited to work in the mines. This is reminiscent of a century before when John Wesley witnessed the working poor primarily in Bristol and London. Pastor Sandy expounded on how poverty is often generational, and we must continue to work to help people out of poverty. How is God inviting First Church to participate in ending poverty? What can we do individually or with our families this year for Jesus' birthday to care for the poor?
- 2.) Pastor Sandy pointed out that A Christmas Carol is a juxtaposition between the wealthy Ebenezer Scrooge and the poor child Tiny Tim. The turning point comes when Scrooge asks the ghost: "Will this child live?" In the Matthew story, we see Herod using his power to soothe his jealousy of Christ. He massacred every boy in Bethlehem under 2 years old. There are many examples of tragedy in our current time that lead to the loss of children's lives. What are some ridiculous ways in our current world that children are either exploited or dying? What are your emotional reactions to this reality: shock, futility, sadness, numbness, etc.?
- 3.) It is in our rich Methodist tradition that we believe that spiritual transformation includes, among other things, ethical and economic transformation of the world around us. What are some means of grace to mould us into workers for this transformation? Are there spiritual practices that can orientate us towards God's vision of a just world?
- 4.) Tiny Tim gave a benediction by saying, "God bless us, everyone". We are so blessed. God wants us to bless others with what God has given us. How can we encourage each other and our kids to distribute our wealth?

Prayer: *God, we are both Scrooges and Tiny Tims. We have much yet we are still in need of your love and wisdom to spread the wealth to needy children of God. Help us to be blessings to everyone and to shine light on injustice. In Jesus' name, Amen.*