

God Has A Surprise For You...New Neighbor!

John 1:1-14

December 24, 2018

Christmas Eve

I am going to challenge you this Christmas Eve with a new Christmas decoration that will last all year long! You will see it up in your neighborhood through out the year. My hope is that when you see this Christmas decoration it will remind you of Jesus! Here is that new Christmas decoration! (Hold up a FOR SALE... FOR RENT signs)

What images or reactions come to your mind when you are surprised to see a "FOR SALE" sign or a "FOR RENT" sign being posted in your neighbor's yard?

If you have known your neighbor and they have been a great neighbor then you are naturally sad to see them leave the neighborhood. However, if they were not a good neighbor you probably helped them load the U-Haul to get them out of the neighborhood as quickly as possible!

As you wave once last time to your neighbors as they drive away, now what? You begin to wonder who is going to move into the neighbor's old house. Who is going to be your new neighbor?

I remember as a kid, when a moving truck pulled up into a house in the neighborhood, the alert went out. All my friends and I jumped on our bikes and went to watch what was unloaded from the truck. We would watch for the bicycles. Were they small trikes or big bikes? Were they boys or girls? You can tell a lot about a family by what comes off the moving truck.

As adults we are more sophisticated than our kids. How much did the house sell for? What kind of car or truck do they drive? What kind of taste do they have in furniture? What do they do for a living? Where are they coming from and why did they move here? Will we share the same values and views of life?

Finally, the moment of truth comes...you actually meet your new neighbors! First impressions are not always the best impressions to make regarding a new neighbor. After all, you are going to be living in the same neighborhood for years to come. You might sense this is going to be a great person or family to have as your neighbor. Or after your first introduction you might be thinking to yourself..."There goes the neighborhood!"

The surprise of a new neighbor brings challenges, concerns, responsibilities and perhaps a new great friend for life! What kind of neighbor will you be to your new neighbor who is thinking the same about you as you are about them? They chose the house and the neighborhood without really having much information about their new neighbors. Surprise! You both have a new neighbor!

For the past few weeks of Advent we have been taking a look at the surprises God had for some of the main participants in Jesus' birth. We talked about the surprise He gave to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah. Mary responded by trusting God's will and was ready to serve, knowing that He would get her through it.

We saw the surprise look on Joseph's face when he was told that Mary, his fiancée, was pregnant and he wasn't the dad! God surprised Joseph with a change of plans. We learned that it was a quiet confidence of peace that Joseph accepted God's change of plans.

We were affirmed, by the shepherds, of the simple simplicity of God's hope, peace, love and joy for us. We were challenged to Keep It Simply Simple as we live our lives for Jesus.

So what is the surprise God has for us this evening, this all too familiar Christmas Eve celebration of the coming of Jesus?

It is not to found in the familiar Christmas story that the gospels of Matthew and Luke provided for us. It is instead that one verse out of John's gospel that brings to us our Christmas Eve surprise God has for us.

The big theological word for this surprise is INCARNATION! Simply put this means that the world was not saved by a man who became God. Rather the world is loved by God who became man.

The name God gave for this surprise is IMMANUEL, which means, "God with us."

Both of these surprises are summarized in the truth, ***"The Word became human and lived here on earth among us."*** (John 1:14 NLT)

I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrased that line in The Message,
"The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood!"

God's surprise for you and me is that we have a new neighbor!
Jesus!

Jesus is not someone who is simply coming over for a Christmas dinner or party. He is not some family member or friend who is home for the holidays and then will be leaving when you take down the Christmas decorations. Jesus didn't simply stop by because he was in the neighborhood. Jesus has moved into your neighborhood!

Surprise! Jesus is your new neighbor!

According to the gospel of John, the Word, Jesus, took on human form and moved into the neighborhood. In a deliberate parallel to Genesis, the first book of the bible, John presents God as speaking his saving love into existence.

In the creation story, God spoke creation, light, darkness, land and sky, animals and food, male and female into existence. After He created it all, He said it was "good."

Now we find God speaking into existence His saving love. This time God's word takes on human form and enters history as Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. Surprise! God loves us so much He sent Jesus into our neighborhood to be our new neighbor!

In other words, God not only entered the world for us, but God has chosen to be near to us, as near as a next door neighbor. Also, God has chosen not only to be near but to be accessible to us. He will not leave us or forsake his love for us.

How amazing is this surprise of love! The God who created the universe has freely and lovingly chosen to relocate from heaven and to move into our neighborhood and be our neighbor..no matter if our neighborhood is a gated community, the suburbs, the inner city, out in the country or on the streets. He desires a daily relationship with those He loves, wherever they live.

"This is how much God loved the world; He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

God didn't go to all the trouble of sending His Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.

Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why?

Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him." (John 3:16-18 MSG)

How have you received, welcomed, accepted your new neighbor Jesus?

There is a way to find out?

Remarkably, God not only invites us to receive the light and life of Jesus; God also calls us to BE life and light. No matter what neighborhood we live in and no matter what person we live next to...we are to share the light and life of Jesus' love.

Jesus explained this lease agreement or HOA policy to his disciples one day when he told them,
"If anyone loves me, he will carefully keep my word and my Father will love him---we'll move right into the neighborhood! Not loving me means not keeping my words." (John 14:23 MSG)

So much of our society teaches us to move away from those not like us. There is such hatred and divisiveness today. There is uncertainty of what may happen next in our world, country, work places, schools and neighborhoods. There is confusion, fear, hatred and little joy

But God has a surprise for us! The Jesus, who chose to move into our neighborhood, tells us, calls us, challenges us to something altogether different. He tells us, like he did Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, **"You have nothing to fear!"** He sent to us a new neighbor, His Son, Jesus, the Light of the world.

He gave to us that promise, **"The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out."** (John 1:5 MSG)

Surprise! Jesus brings the light of hope, peace, love and joy into our neighborhoods of life. There is no one that can extinguish His light!

Christmas is the season we remember how Jesus put on flesh and moved into the neighborhood. Jesus being born in a barn reminds us that God shows up in the most unlikely neighborhoods of life.

Wherever we come from, whatever neighborhood we live in, Jesus teaches us and calls us to be his light. Jesus came from the town of Nazareth that people said nothing good came from that neighborhood.

Have you ever had anyone tell you that you will amount to no good?

Surprise! Jesus calls you to be His light in this difficult neighborhood of society we live in today.

Jesus knew suffering from the moment he entered the world as a baby. Joseph, Mary and Jesus were refugees to Egypt for two years before being able to return safely to their home country. He knew poverty, pain and suffering. He was tortured and executed.

This is the Jesus who has moved into our neighborhood that we are called to be neighbors with each day. We learn from his coming to ***"love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Matthew 22:36-39)

But what if Jesus meant your actual neighbors? You know the one whose dog barks all the time and the family whose kids are loud and the one who doesn't have the same political, religious or life values as you. He can't be serious can he?

What if he is? This would change everything as we now know it and live in it. The profound truth is that Jesus moved into the neighborhood and loved us when we were unlovable. (I John 4:19)

God has a surprise for us! He wants us to be the Light of Jesus in our neighborhoods, the people we come into contact with in our daily lives.

He challenges us to see Jesus in others and for others to see Jesus in us.

There is no divide between the meaning of Christmas and the daily living of our faith. There is no property line between the sacred and secular, the messy and the ordinary. God has moved into our neighborhood and his name is Immanuel, God with us.

How will you receive your new neighbor?

"He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn't even notice." Will you notice your new neighbor Jesus?

"He came to his own people, but they didn't want him."

Will you welcome Jesus in your neighborhood?

"But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, He made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves."

God has a surprise for you...a new neighbor! Jesus! Do you welcome him, believe who He is, and will do his will?

In a few moments, we will light our individual candles and sing Silent Night. Afterwards we will blow them out and sing Joy to the world the Lord has come into our neighborhood! Then we will head back home to our neighborhoods. Will you carry the light of Jesus back to your neighbors? Will your neighbors, family and friends, and even strangers, experience the hope, peace, love and joy of Jesus in and through you?

Look for the year round Christmas decoration in your neighborhood. Be Jesus to them!

God so loved us that He sent Jesus to move into our neighborhood. Celebrate the each day the "surprise God has for you...your new neighbor...Jesus.

