

Christmas Year B 2011

But the angel said to them “Do not be afraid: for see, I am bringing good news of great joy to all the people.”

I just heard recently a talk by a sociology professor named Brené Brown. The talk was sent to me by a parishioner. I’ve seen a couple of these talks before....they are called TED talks....that stands for technology, entertainment and design, an odd trilogy....It’s a non-profit organization that started out in the early nineties in Silicon Valley mostly having to do with new and bright ideas within the high tech industry....but its mission has broadened, and their mantra has become, “ideas worth spreading.” Over the last ten years or so they have invited an incredibly diverse array of great thinkers spanning diverse disciplines to share their ideas for the good of humanity....believing that great ideas have the potential and power to change things for the better.

Professor Brown teaches at the University of Houston and she has spent much of her life’s work studying cultural dysfunction and the chronic ennui that accompanies those who struggle to cope in our post modern world.... And she compares this control group with those whom she describes as whole hearted...people who seem to be able to walk through the mess and the dark that affects us all, but with a certain joie de vivre, what she calls whole heartedness...she associates that term with the word courage, whose root is found in the word “Coeur” which means heart... courage literally translated is something like: heartfulness...and what she has discovered over the years and a lot of time and interviews is that these so-called whole hearted people all had something in common ...and that was, she discovered, that they all had a predisposition of vulnerability... vulnerability... being open to what the world brings to us, being open to each other, our follies and others, our imperfections notwithstanding, being open to change(that’s a big one), possessing the knowledge or believing that though life is certainly at times painful, there is always potential for new life...this group had also developed over their life experience the ability to live in uncertainty....but vulnerability for this group of people is the key marker....openness; empathy; humility; and the courage to be who they are, no matter what life throws at them....vulnerability a necessary rudiment of being authentic.

Now the other control group all had something in common as well. They all said in describing their lives that what most occupied them most was fear and shame....Dr. Brown is not alone in that assessment...fear and

shame is pervasive in our culture....we all are subject to them. So I thought, this will preach, because in Luke's birth narrative he sets this coming of the light of the world against a vast backdrop of a dark world, a world dominated by fear and shame.

So dear people of God, what I want to say to us on this night of nights is that unto us is born the empowering light of our own vulnerability, the infant Jesus and his mother the symbols thereof....Jesus the savior doesn't come in the clouds clad for cosmic battle or accompanied by armies of angels to topple violently the oppressors of the world as was expected by the apocalyptic writers and political zealots of his day....no, he comes in great humility, not into the courts of kings, but on the margins of existence, in a lost corner of the world, and for the lost of our world....the mother and child both consummate symbols of vulnerability...and it is that vulnerability born that night, this night, born again and again, born no less in us...It is vulnerability that saves....vulnerability that saves....saves.... salvation..... words we throw around a lot in Christendom...but saved from what is the question?....The angel in this bucolic scene over the centuries has tipped us off....we are saved from fear...throughout the gospels and the letters of Paul the chief exhortation is to live without fear, and the coldness and disconnectedness it brings.....and we are saved from shame...shame the heavy burden that we all bear whether we want to admit it or not...these the two things that prevent us, and others all across the ages, the two things that prevent us from living into our true humanity.... which is to live free from fear and shame...we are created to live open to the beautiful and dangerous and joyful and risky propositions of creation....we are saved to live wholeheartedly as imaginative and ingenious and fearless bearers of God's life.... God, Godself vulnerable to the risks and possibilities of life...open to the wounds and dangers, but with the knowledge through practice that vulnerability will engender love which will draw all things to this new born light. Imagine a world in which vulnerability...unguarded openness to each other personally, communally and globally...Imagine what a world that might be....surely it would be one of unimaginable joy.

In the midst of a dark world at this its darkest time of the year, the light of Christ is born...The light which is the great I am, but not some great vengeful warrior, some aloof king in the heavens, but great vulnerability among us...The glorious revelation is at hand: God the vulnerable...God like a child, God like a mother...God the whole hearted for us and for all, for the disconnected ones for whom there is no room at the table....this is God the vulnerable one who banishes fear and shame, God who sets us free in love.... and it is for us to bear that light of freedom born of vulnerability to a

world shackled by fear and shame...bear this light brothers and sisters,
protect and nurture this new child...bear this light with courage and honor,
with heartfulness....and own your worthiness to be so called...for in the end
the brightness of this light we bear, will save even the darkness.