

## God's Risking Invites Our Risking

Christmas Eve - December 24, 2011

Tonight, we are going to talk a few minutes about the birth of a baby....Little Johnny's new baby brother was screaming up a storm. He asked his mom, "Where'd we get him?" His mother replied, "He came from heaven, Johnny." Johnny says, "WOW! I can see why they threw him out!"

We have gathered tonight to remember & celebrate the birth of a baby, the expansion of a family & it is a wonderful, almost magical evening. But why is it wonderful? Why is it almost magical? Is the wonder of this season founded upon some kind of shared delusion, a common agreement to suspend reality for a day or two to indulge in flights of fancy & make-believe supported by images of glistening Christmas trees, sugarplum fairies dancing above the fireplace, tastefully wrapped gifts for all under the tree, angelic choirs singing in the heavens above, & delightful carols referencing again & again a story of peace & joy on Earth, or is there something real beneath it all? Is something actually happening in & through & all around us?

In my usual twisted fashion, as I began to think about the birth we celebrate with these wonderful carols & colorful Christmas lights, I began to think of poop....baby poop....animal poop.....humanity-in-general poop. And it occurred to me that poop - smelly, stinky poop - is actually an important source of the joy & magic of this night. Let me explain.

Those of us who have had the experience of risking the expansion of our family by having one or more children know full well two things: (1) where there are newborn babies there are feelings of great joy & excitement as well as the sights & smells of great amounts of stinky poop. It seems, we cannot have the joy without the poop. (2) But we also learn that the joy is not eclipsed or extinguished by smelly diapers nor by the many trips to the changing table. Quite the contrary, in a most surprising & unexpected way, we discover that all of our "poop-encounters of the first kind" only serve to deepen our experiences of connection, affection and love.

Therefore, it is worth our time & attention each year to take the time to retell the story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The story of Jesus' birth is a theological story about God freely choosing to take the risk of leaving the comfort & safety of the heavenly realm to enter into the often uncomfortable & unsafe world in which we live. It is not a story about God expanding His family through clean, neat, antiseptic means. It is a story which speaks of the Sacred expanding the family of God by entering into our world through a

poor, working-class family in the context of an animal stable - an animal stable with its fair share of pungent animal poop. This story deserves to be told, must be told again & again because, each time it is told, it reminds us take the same risk that God has already taken on our behalf; the risk of expanding our definition of family. It reminds to include those we have been excluding & it encourages us to do so in spite of the presence of great amounts of poopy, smelly, unpleasant things that will inevitable come with the addition of new family members.

And who have we been excluding from our family? The best way to answer this question is to think about who we judge the most harshly, who we see as our enemies, who we deem to be expendable people & who, among the people of our community & nation, are usually invisible to us, that is, of little or no concern. For each of, the answers will be a bit different, after all, the answers are very personal. Yet, if tonight is about anything, it is about that Sacred voice in our hearts urging each of us to take an honest, courageous look inside. Who do you judge the most harshly....that unmarried woman with 5 kids living on welfare? Who do you see as your enemy....those who call God by the name "Allah"? Who do we see as expendable....the uneducated immigrant bent over in the fields harvesting our crops? Who are the invisible ones, the one's of little or no concern to us....the women of darker skin working in the sweat shops making our clothes for us?

This night, we are urged to open our hearts & take these into our family, to see them as our brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, mothers & fathers. Does this mean that there will be poop which will have to be exposed, cleaned up and disposed of? Yes. Does this mean that opening our hearts to expand our family will involve risk & occasional difficulty? Yes. And does it mean that including all those currently excluded will cost us something? Yes....Yes it will be risky.....Yes it will be difficult....Yes it will cost us time, money & energy.

But the Good News of this day is that, in spite of all the smelly, rank, pungent, stinky poop we will have to confront as we expand our family, the joy & happiness, the enormous peace & glad-tidings which will inevitably come from living the life God has called us to live, from loving in the way God calls to love, & from giving ourselves away in the manner God has already given Gods-self to us will far exceed our costs & far surpass any unpleasantries we may suffer. This is the truth that lies beneath & gives breath to the joy, wonder & magic of tonight. This is the reality happening in & through & all around us. Thanks be to God! Merry Christmas!! AMEN.