

## January 24<sup>th</sup> – Epiphany 3

**Rev. Laura Blazek**

Do you recall the snow we had a few weeks ago? It was the perfect snow- a gentle snow that was light and fluffy and contained just the right amount of moisture to make a perfect snowball. I know because I went out into the snow sans coat, hat and gloves to catch snowflakes on my tongue, and I scooped up a handful of snow to check its packability. The snowball made a satisfying “smack” as it hit the house and had an acceptable spread pattern. I scooped another handful and ate it. New snow tastes so good.

As I stood in the snow, I began to reflect on how our view of snow and our relationship with snow often changes over time. Most kids love snow. It is exciting and fun. They are so eager to go enjoy the snow that they don't care about the donning of hats, coats, and gloves that their frazzled mothers are trying to bundle them into. And once they are outside delighting in the glory and wonder of the snow, they don't want to come back inside. They will stay outside until their cheeks are bright red from the cold, their pants are frozen stiff from snow, and their fingers are numb. Every snow bank calls their name. Hills beckon to be slid down. They have snowball fights, make snow forts and snow men, and try to create the perfect snow angel. Having learned that no two snowflakes are alike they catch the individual snowflakes and compare them marveling in this wonder only to then shrug and say, “It's still snow.” And they allow the snow to cushion their body as they fall backwards arms outstretched and stare up into the heavens. They let themselves go and just be. Do you remember those days? Some of us still experience them.

But then we grow up. For many of us snow loses its excitement and wonder as it becomes a chore, something to be at best tolerated but more likely loathed and hated. We grumble and bemoan the fact that we have to go outside into this mess as we don hat, gloves, scarf, boots, coat, ear muffs, and toss a blanket in our car for good measure in case we slide into a ditch. It is something we have to slog through to go to work because as adults we don't get snow days. It is cold and wet and not fun at all. Snow has lost its wonder and beauty. It is no longer glorious and we are eager to see it gone so that it no longer burdens our life.

And the longer I stood in the snow thinking all these things I began to see a parallel with our Christian lives. We begin with eagerness and excitement. Going to church and learning about God and our relationship with Jesus is fun and filled with wonder. We let ourselves be filled with the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But somewhere along the way it becomes a chore, something we do because it is expected and we can't wait to get back home and turn our attention elsewhere. We lose the sense of wonder of God's word and Christ's glory. Perhaps you are feeling that now or maybe it was years ago or maybe it is yet to come.

Consider for a moment our reading from Nehemiah where all the people of Israel gathered together to hear the word of God and to listen to Ezra help them understand what they heard. They listened from early morning until midday. That would be approximately four hours. When was the last time you didn't start to fidget in your seat or wonder how much longer when a sermon began to run over ten minutes? When was the last time you didn't feel like bolting out of the church after one hour? We've all done it if we are willing to admit it. And lest you think that church services only lasted for hours in a world long ago and faraway, bear in mind that there are lots of churches today where sermons and services last for a really long time.

The joy of the Lord is our strength, but we have to let ourselves go and be present in the moment. We have to forget about the clock and the demands of the world. Like children playing in the snow, we need to fall back, stare up into the heavens and just be, as we allow the love of the Lord to surround us.

The love of the Lord is also seen in all of creation. Our Psalm reminds us that all of creation declares the glory of God. The world around us is a wondrous thing and His words and commandments revive the soul, rejoice the heart and give light to the eyes. But do we delight in that glory and wonder like children playing in the snow?

In *Life on the Mississippi* Mark Twain writes that when he became a riverboat pilot he stopped seeing the glory and wonder of the river's face as he learned what all the dimples, lines, and swirls meant. He writes, "...the romance and the beauty were all gone from the river. All the value any feature of it had for me now was the amount of usefulness it could furnish toward compassing the safe piloting of a steamboat."

As we grow up and learn about the big bang theory, meiosis and mitosis, how the color of the sky is caused by the scattering of light, and how the difference in snowflakes is the result of variations in temperature and humidity, we may stop seeing the wonder and mystery of creation or even perhaps even question the existence of the creator, God himself. We close ourselves off to the glory of God. We stop hearing the call of Christ to come and see, so that the joy of the Lord can fill our hearts. The value of our Christian lives becomes one of usefulness to our own means and ends instead of one of usefulness to God.

Even the reading from Corinthians reminds me of the difference between the way kids and adults tend to view snow. Paul writes, "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free... Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many." Each snowflake is unique and different, yet as children tend to say, "It's still snow."

When my kids were much younger we took a trip to San Antonio and went to a local park while we were there. The playground was filled with lots of children of a variety of different ethnic backgrounds and abilities. Within two minutes my kids were running, jumping, and playing tag with all the other children and could call them by name because all they saw was another kid not a Latin American or an African American or a disability. What were the adults doing? Standing

or sitting at different tables and benches eyeing one another warily steadfastly avoiding any interaction at all.

As we grow up, the world teaches us that differences matter. Differences separate us. We stop seeing each other as another child of God, part of the body of Christ. When we see another person we don't see a person, we see the differences. Paul reminds us that no matter our differences we are still people, children of God, of equal value and all worthy of the love of Christ.

And here, at this table, we see the fulfillment of that love. Christ's sacrifice releases us from the bondage of our sins and restores us. His grace is for all people. Everyone is welcome at Christ's table just as everyone is welcome to play in the snow. The question becomes one of how we will accept Christ's gift of love. Do we accept it with eagerness and joy as we delight in the glory of Christ or do we accept it with grudgingly stretched forth hands seeing it only as a means to an end? The choice is yours.

Amen