

Christmas in Seven Carols, Part 6: A Stable Lamp Is Lighted December 30, 2018

by Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander and Dan McCollister
Scriptures: Luke 19:39-40

I. Living into the Promise

Scripture: Luke 19:39-40

And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, "Master, rebuke the disciples." And he answered and said unto them, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

This series of Seven Carols began during Advent to describe our journeys together as we waited for the realized promise of God to be with us (Emmanuel) in a new way: a baby lying in a manger. God is with us through meekness and vulnerability rather than how the world tends to see the Almighty. Our first hymn, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* represented a weary world calling for God's presence to be made known in our midst. *O Morning Star* showed us where we might intentionally be seeking God among us: in the steadfast, predictable love in the world all around us that is often seen in unpredictable ways. *Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming* taught us how hard it is to describe how God works among us through the Spirit, but to trust in the scents or nudges we get even if it leads to illogical places or decisions. *Down to Earth* helped us reconsider how we recognize the presence of God with us as a baby lying in a manger and how that changes all of the other assumptions about God that we carry with us, blocking us from seeing the activity of God in our midst.

Silent Night and *Joy to the World* proclaimed the presence of God in our Christmas celebration. And today, we reflect on how we live into and with God's promise as we take our next steps into a new year, a new church building, and a new way of being church with one another and the community around us.

Our Carol is *A Stable Lamp is Lighted* based on a poem written by Richard Wilbur in 1961. It is the proclamation that God's presence is alive among us in a way that even if we all were to remain silent about the wonder and majesty of this birth, the very stones themselves would cry out.

A Stable Lamp is Lighted Poem: By Richard Wilbur

A stable lamp is lighted
Whose glow shall wake the sky;
The stars shall bend their voices,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry,
And straw like gold shall shine;
A barn shall harbor heaven,
A stall become a shrine.

This child through David's city
Shall ride in triumph by;
The palm shall strew its branches,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry,
Though heavy, dull and dumb,

And lie within the roadway
To pave his kingdom come.

Yet he shall be forsaken,
And yielded up to die;
The sky shall groan and darken,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry,
For hearts made hard by sin:
God's blood upon the spearhead,
God's love refused again.

But now, as at the ending,
The low is lifted high;
The stars shall bend their voices,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry,
In praises of the Child
By whose descent among us
The worlds are reconciled.

This hymn reviews the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as the “descent (of God) among us” through whom “The worlds are reconciled.” God’s promise of steadfast love and presence with us, is fulfilled again and again, reconciling us to step out into new ways of living that might defy logic, but brings us into God’s abundant kingdom.

At Countryside, we are living into this illogically abundant life ourselves, as we step out into Christmas, beginning our journey to a new way of being church as the Christian partner of the Tri-Faith Initiative. We have been planting seeds and building relationships over the last 60 years that have brought us to this new place, to be intentional neighbors with our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. But we are not alone in this illogical living, there are people all over the world, breaking the rules, ditching stereotypes and expectations, to get back to the foundational gifts of being alive and being in relationship.

People just like you and me are reaching out, trying things in a new way, hoping for different results. Planting seeds of new vision that will take generations before the fruits of their labor are visible. This is how the baby in the manger shows us God. The invisible is visible in the activity of living. God is doing a new thing in this baby and in so doing, frees us up to step out without fear into a life of love and joy, living into who God created us to be.

II. Gathering Community

Video of “Crop Swap”

Dan McCollister preaches about planting seeds that bear fruit later, and how his work is planting seeds for a new way of being in community with each other and with the earth.