

“This Will Be a Sign: #morelove”

All of us have seen signs. We see signs every day, if we get out of our homes. Signs are sometimes very helpful, especially traffic signs such as bump or dip or lane ends or exit. However, very few of those signs continue to have a lasting impact on our lives after the situation to which they were posted is in our rearview mirror.

During this Advent Season – this time of preparing for Christmas, we have focused on the appearance of angels to people connected to the Christmas story. Today’s Scripture Reading includes an angel announcing a specific sign. The previous Scripture Readings during Advent were not so overt but, indeed, they also provided important signs. For example, after the angel, Gabriel, told Mary that she would become pregnant with the Son of God, the heavenly messenger informed her of a sign of the Divine Parent’s ability to fulfill such a promise. Gabriel told Mary her much older cousin, Elizabeth, who had never been able to become pregnant, was herself already pregnant. Mary went to check out that sign and discovered it was true! With that knowledge, the young, unmarried, Jewish woman was encouraged to fulfill her role in God’s Plan for the Birth of the Messiah – the Son of God.

Today’s Scripture brings an important sign much closer to us because it was announced to people with very little power or prestige in Jewish Society, the shepherds. So, the sign was intended for all of us as well! The creators of the Angels Among Us Advent Worship Series have said, “The sky was brighter than usual that night, making it easier to keep track of the sheep. And then it got really bright. You would have thought that all that ‘glory’ shining would have been ‘the sign.’ That’s what most of us look for – great big obvious clues about God’s presence. But instead, the angel says that a baby... a newborn helpless baby in a feeding trough was it – the sign. In a flash, the message was that” **“#morelove is found where you least expect it and perhaps is already there residing in the ordinariness of your life.”**

Let’s take a few moments to consider the angel’s revealing of the sign in today’s Reading and flesh out how it is that message means “#morelove is found where you least expect it and perhaps is already there residing in the ordinariness of your life.” **It is stated in verses 10-12, “And the angel said to them, ‘Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.’”** To whom was this message intended? It was for “all the people”!

Does that include you? Does it include all of the people around you at your table? Does it include the persons you are most uncomfortable with? When the babe in the manger had grown to be a man, his answer in his words and his actions was God’s message was for all people! **Indeed, the Gospel of John reported in 3:16, how Jesus told Nicodemus, “For God Agape Loved the world so much that He gave His Only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”** Sending God’s Son in the person of that babe in the humble manger was a powerful demonstration of the greatness of the Divine Parent’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for everyone in the whole world!

The authors of the Angels Among Us Advent Worship Series also remind us, “The opposite of Love that derives from fear” is “Grandiosity”. “Fear breeds ‘one-upmanship.’ Fear says that I have to be better than you to feel worthy. Fear says that I must use power in all the stereotypical ways in order to gain the approval I need. The angels say ‘do not be afraid’ and show us how everyone matters by giving the message first to shepherds ...” **“True power and the possibility of loving deeply comes with simply being open and vulnerable and being truly yourself. God can work with that!”**

The Pharisees were among those, who during Jesus’ Public Ministry judged everyone to be inferior, who was not like themselves. They used legalistic claims to appear to have greater value, while they denied God’s Agape Love for many others, especially those rejected by society – those they called “sinners”. Unfortunately, religious folks are very tempted to become modern day Pharisees because, it seems, they fear God will not love them, unless they can offer up someone else as undeserving of the Almighty’s Agape Love.

Through the angel in our Scripture Reading, our Divine Parent has made it clear – the Son of God – the babe being born in a stable and placed in the manger is a sign to all people, including us, that God’s Agape Love is for everyone – even you and me! When the lowly shepherds received this Good News from God through the angel, they responded by accepting the task of validating the sign – finding the babe in the manger, and then, they followed the lead of the angels and became bearers of the Good News to others, including the baby’s mother, Mary.

How will you and I respond to the angel’s Good News of the sign? **Will we confirm God sent the Only Son into the World for us and all people because of our Divine Parent’s Agape Love for everyone?** Will we demonstrate that confirmation by living out God’s Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love in our own relationships and with all people?

Will we demonstrate we are heeding the angel’s comforting words of “Do not be afraid” as we boldly interact with all people with respect and self-giving love? Will you and I joyfully follow the example of the shepherds by singing and proclaiming, as reported in **verse 20, “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”** Let’s also share – be God’s messengers of how we have witnessed agape love in our lives – in the life of this community of believers. Let’s invite others to live in God’s Love – in the #morelove of Round Grove United Church! Yes, I believe there are angels among us. **We can be messengers of love, flying in the face of fear, for we are the Body of Christ.** Amen.