

Evil fights back

Sunday after Christmas

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It was an invasion in every sense of the word, but what a strange invasion it was. It didn't begin with the thunder of artillery or the roar of planes and landing craft. It didn't involve tens of thousands of infantry or marines. It didn't in its first few hours leave the beaches soaked with blood or littered with broken bodies. This invasion wasn't announced in the headlines or news stories around the globe, yet it was an invasion. In fact it was the invasion of all times - yet how different from the invasions of humankind.

It began quietly, silently with the birth of a baby - a boy. The only sound was the cry of the newborn as for the first time his lungs filled with air. Some astrologers saw an unusually bright star, some shepherds claimed they heard angels sing - but you can suspect the reliability of shepherds. Probably less than fifty people were even aware that an invasion had begun, and few of them had any indication of the significance. But the forces of evil rose up against him, and the co-lateral damage was the young lives killed so mercilessly because they were there. Jesus coming began the Silent Invasion. The birth of Jesus, was the breaking of God, forcefully, purposefully, into His fallen world. Like the invasion of "D Day", the purpose of this invasion was to liberate, to free, to overthrow. Hebrews 10:9 puts it this way "He abolishes the first in order to establish the second." God had come to free his people who were living under the bondage to fear and death. Again, from Hebrews 2:14-15 "*Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he [Jesus] himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, {15} and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.*"

Jesus came to free his people who had left the garden and replaced it with the numberless battlefields of history where death had been the only victor. From the calm seas of eternity God landed on the beaches of time. He did not come as God in awe and majesty, but as a human being in his most helpless vulnerable state - a newborn infant. A baby, not born in the safety and security of a sterilised maternity ward staffed with doctors and nurses, but rather in a stable or a dugout a place fit for and occupied by animals. The strong of the world would laugh at the thought that the birth of Jesus almost two centuries ago was the beginning of God's invasion into this world. It was so silent, so ordinary, and seemed to change nothing.

But we know, we believe differently. For through the Word of God we are able to watch that baby grow into manhood. We read how his touch and his words were able to heal, to make whole, to turn around, to transform, to forgive. We see how Jesus' teaching and actions of unconditional love troubled and upset those who were in authority in the religious, political, and cultural establishments. We see how they try to embarrass and shame him. We see how they tried to out argue him and trap him with clever questions. They failed time after time and finally quit trying.

They decided to stop him by having him put to death, by having him mocked, beaten, humiliated and finally nailed to a cross. They then sealed his tomb with a rock and placed guards outside the stone. We see his followers, those he touched and loved captured by grief, despair and hopelessness. But then comes Easter - the rolled away stone, the empty tomb and the Risen Christ! This one of God could not be stopped. The invasion of God could not be repulsed. God's power and force moved off the beach and on to the mainland. It moved to the cities and villages where people lived their lives. Death could not stop its movement, nor has time been able to outlast it. God is still liberating, healing, forgiving, loving through the ones who bear the name and cross of the babe born in Bethlehem.

Christmas is the celebration of God's successful invasion into his world - into our world. An invasion that nothing could or can stop though it seems so weak and easily buried. Even though the magnificently simple quiet story of Jesus' birth doesn't seem to stand a chance against all the demanding, blaring voices of our time, it will be heard. The other voices will one day fall silent, and we will hear the angels sing the good news of birth to never-ending life. But we are not there yet.

The successful invasion means that ultimately - finally, the victory will be won by God and his love. The enemy, the forces of evil, know this, but there will be no surrender. It will be a fight to the end. If anything, the battle grows worse as the force of evil seeks to hold some ground, to hold some lives.

The weapons of fear and death are still being used effectively. Racism, sexism and nationalism are growing stronger and continue to enslave and destroy. It seems to be getting worse hour by hour, day by day. But don't let that fool you. The Silent Invasion could not be stopped then and it will not be stopped now. Do not join the forces that would destroy and tear apart and hurt. Look again to the manger.

See the infant and parents. Know that this is the beginning of an invitation to you to follow, to walk in the narrow way that leads to life. It is the invitation stand on God's side in the struggle against evil and death that is still going on.

In this world there are no innocent bystanders. We are either on God's side, spreading his word, receiving his power, or we are used by the force of evil to confuse, cover up and to betray. God's side will win with life, and the evil will ultimately be consumed by the death it uses.

Which side are you on? Will you be filled with life or consumed by fear and death? The silent invasion - Christmas was the beginning of the end, and the beginning of the beginning simultaneously. The birth of Jesus was the initial victory that brought resurrection the ultimate victory. Death could not stop this one who invaded time from eternity, and it will not stop those who live his way. If we are on God's side, victory - life - peace, and joy are and will be ours.

I want to conclude by giving you an opportunity to see and hear the hope and promise of the birth of Jesus. To see you have to close your eyes, to shut out all the distractions even of this holy place. To hear you have to silence the thoughts about your unfinished Christmas presents, meals, relatives, parties, travelling and so on. With your eyes closed imagine the nativity scene. See the baby, Mary and Joseph and some animals. Now imagine yourself standing there in the scene taking in the awe and wonder of it all.

Notice that the baby is looking at you and he seems to smile. Then imagine a voice that hear not with your ears but with your heart saying to you all that this birth means, using phrases like:

"Don't be afraid." "I am with you." "I won't let you be destroyed." "You are forgiven and freed." "I will always be with you, even when you die." "Follow me." "I have always loved you."

You may open your eyes. If you saw; and if you heard; if you felt, even for an instant - then you know what the silent invasion was all about. It is a never-ending embrace from the Creator of the universe who created each of us with delight. He created us to relate to him, each other and all in love and peace, even in a world that seems to be blowing apart. Don't let anything keep you from experiencing this truth.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come, the Lord has come, the Lord has come.

AMEN

From thoughts of Pastor Larry Warren.