

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota

Matthew 1:18-23  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
December 22, 2015

**Every person in this sanctuary knows the grief that comes from loss.**

My wife and I attended the play "**It's a Wonderful Life**" in Brainerd last Saturday. You remember the part played by **Jimmy Stewart** as **George Bailey**. The story starts out with George standing on the edge of a wintry bridge **anticipating suicide**. So many things had gone haywire in his business and because of that, in his life. Now he was almost certainly going to lose his business. His back was up against the wall and because of a life insurance policy; he thought it would be better for everyone if he just died.

You may remember that an **angel, Clarence** shows up there at the bridge. The angel tries several approaches to convince George that he shouldn't kill himself. The whole play is a series of vignettes showing George's involvement in the lives of family and townspeople. He helps a lot of people. Still George is not convinced. He feels like he has let everyone down.

It isn't until George **wishes that he'd never been born** that he starts to see the light. Now the angel **shows him his former family and friends as their lives would have turned out without him** having been there to love and care for them. He finally sees that the world is a better place because he has lived. His family and friends don't want to lose him. They love and appreciate him in their lives. **Finally**, George wants them back. He wants to keep on living. He wants to stay in relationship with them.

Well, "**It's a Wonderful Life**" is just a story, but it contains several truths. Only late in the story does George think to **ask for help from God**. I also sometimes forget about God when I am down and overwhelmed by the world. **Relationships are the most precious thing** we have in our lives. God created us to be in loving, trusting relationships with God and with each other. When our **relationship with God** slips away, we are left broken. When our **earthly relationships**, sometimes built and deepened over many decades, are ripped away from us by death, we are left broken. We may find ourselves sometimes literally hopeless because of the emptiness we experience. A great big hole is left in our hearts. Painful as

our loss is, God is still faithfully there for us. God is **ready to help**. And God is all over **healing broken hearts**. Maybe this Christmas God will help us to **focus less on the loss of our loved ones** and to **reflect instead upon the gift of our loved ones**.

Every one of us knows something about the grief that comes with loss. But every one of us can also be **thankful for the joy and wonder that came from the lives of our loved ones** while we had them with us.

Even though it's been eight and nine years respectively since Mom and Dad died, I still grieve my loss. They are gone. But, they left some things behind for me. I received the gift of **hospitality** from my mom. The gift of **conversation** from my dad. The gift of **hard work** from both of them. The gift of **loving people** from both of them. The gift of **faith** from both of them. And **they loved me**. Do you see it? These are the most important gifts that I have been given by anyone. My life has been so positively shaped by Mom and Dad. That shaping in my life has influenced the kind of children that my wife and I have raised. And it may even impact upon the quality of life our grandchildren experience – never even having met Great Grandma and Grandpa Pedersen. **What sorts of gifts has your loved one left behind for you to be blessed by and for you to pass along?** This Christmas, **celebrate** all that you have received from them.

I miss Mom and Dad so much, but what amazing gifts, stories, adventures, struggles, hopes and dreams we shared together for the many years that I was blessed to have them. Nobody else in the world could have lovingly raised me like they did. I hate that Dad and Mom died. But I am so thankful that I had them in the first place. And I am even more thankful that **death is not the end of our story**.

There will be an empty seat or two at our Christmas table this year. Someday you and I will be gone from that table too. But we have the promise that **another Christmas banquet awaits God's people on the other side of death**. Someone sent me this little piece on face book.

### **My First Christmas in Heaven**

I see the countless Christmas trees around the world below,  
With tiny lights, like heaven's stars, reflecting on the snow.

The sight is so spectacular, Please wipe away that tear,  
For I am spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year.

I hear the many Christmas songs that people hold so dear,  
But the sounds of music can't compare with the Christmas choir up here.  
I have no words to tell you, the joy their voices bring,  
For it is beyond description, to hear the angels sing.

I know how much you miss me. I see the pain inside your heart,  
But I am not so far away, we really aren't apart.  
So be happy for me dear ones, you know I hold you dear,  
And be glad I'm spending Christmas, with Jesus Christ this year.

I send you each a special gift, from my heavenly home above.  
I send you each a memory of, my undying love.  
After all "LOVE" is the gift, more precious than pure gold.  
It was always most important in the stories Jesus told.

Please love and keep each other, as my Father said to do,  
For I can't count the blessings or love he has for each of you.  
So have a merry Christmas and wipe away that tear.  
Remember, I'm spending Christmas, with Jesus Christ this year.  
(Author Unknown)

God gave God's best gift for my mom and dad, for your loved ones and for you and me. The Gospel of **Matthew** puts the invitation to God's Christmas celebration here and in heaven like this.

**"She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'"** (Matthew 21-23)

Today, we join in giving **thanks to God**

- **For Emmanuel** – **God is with us**. We are brothers & sisters of Jesus!
- **For safe-keeping our loved ones**. We don't have to worry about them. They experience no more pain, sadness or death.

- **For our own safe-keeping** until we too join the **great heavenly family reunion**. There is not a moment this Christmas or ever that God will leave you, me or any of us **alone or unloved**. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16) That’s the Christmas story. And it’s for you, me and all God’s people who have gone on ahead. Some day, maybe not so far from now, it will be **Christmas and Easter every day**. And all of God’s people will celebrate together! Thanks be to God. Amen.