

Lillejuleaften Dec 23, 2024 – St. John United Lutheran Church 7:00 pm

The sermon

Throughout this December we have had several events in the church that have made me ponder upon our various traditions: How they have come to be, why we have kept them, but also what they are doing to us?

As we all probably can agree on, tradition is a word that is tight closely to Christmas. At least I will argue that there is no time of year where we do a lot of odd things in the name of tradition: We bake more, we decorate more, we give more, we come together more.

I love all of this. Not only because many of the traditions are fun, but also because I year after year experience how the traditions come with a kind of harmony that is rarely found at any other time during the year.

I cannot help but believe that this is due to how our traditions all are – despite of it being in a way we cannot always explain – is linked to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Currently I believe our world is in some kind of emergency. We have wars getting out of hand. We have a climate getting out of hand. We are still licking our wounds following Covid. We are...

Being in a state of emergency is tough for everyone: For those who of course are affected in their daily life, but also for those who is on the sideline not able to aid other than praying.

Being in a state of emergency also means that we see changes to our world and our daily life that we would rather be without. Maybe we even see changes to the traditions that we hold so dear.

Change is hard. We do not like it. But as we face change I on this Christmas Eve would like to argue how we maybe should not fear change all that much.

Not all change is good. Nor should we not protect what we care for. But neither should we meet every change with a 'no'. In a world full of change we must invite change in whether we like it or not.

Not only because the current state of emergency requires that of us, but also because we only through an open-minded attitude towards change can affect and benefit from whatever outcome the change will result in.

To support my argument – that we maybe should not fear change all that much – I first want to point towards what our entire Christmas celebration is all about:

Is not Christmas all about a change to our world that was out of our hand yet became the salvation of all?

It is! Christmas probably is the biggest change that has ever happened to humankind. The biggest act of mercy and love.

A second support to my argument is an experience I have about what happens when change out of necessity occurs to us. Occurs for instance to our Christmas traditions.

My first example of this is a story I was told during one of the many Christmas events we have in our Danish community. It is a story about a Christmas Eve where the power suddenly vanished. The roast had just been put in the oven when all the light suddenly went out.

It was a local outage, yet it had a huge effect on those affected. The ones it occurred to told me how they called BC Hydro, who replied that nothing could be done until the next morning.

They went to the neighbors who were in the exact same situation. And despite not being all fun in the moment, it became a memorable Christmas not remembered for all that could not go as prepared for but remembered for how they came up with solutions together with the neighbor and had a good Christmas anyway.

The pork was not ready before midnight, but together with the neighbour they discovered how a roasted pork can be prepared in a barbecue. For dinner they had risalamande. It had been prepared the day before, and since the fridge were not working, they could as well eat it all.

After having this story told to me, I asked my wife which Christmas she remembered the most, and again it was not the ones where everything went as planned.

The Christmas she remembered the most was the one where their cat halfway through the Christmas Dinner knocked over their Christmas Tree leaving an utterly mess of broken colourful Christmas decorations all over the presents.

I then listened to some Christmas Crooners, and as I heard the song, "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas", I started to wonder what stories they might have shared when the song as the end of one of its verse's sings:

"There'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago."

I guess the tales would not be about all the Christmases gone straight by tradition. Rather, I guess they would have shared stories about all the Christmases where something minor or major changed the usual order of things.

As for me, there is one Christmas that sticks out among them all, and it is as well a Christmas that saw a lot of change to it. It is the first Christmas I held with my brother-in-law to-be.

He is born in Colombia and his first visit to Denmark was for a Christmas. Now, in Denmark we have a lot of weird traditions that he had to get accustomed to.

He as well brought a lot of Colombian Christmas traditions to my parent's house that Christmas. That Christmas Rudolph was called Rudolpho – that was a change for me – and to him, all the food probably was the biggest change.

It is the Christmas I remember the most – a Christmas full of change – and I like how my parents – to remind themselves of this Christmas – no longer solely have Danish flags on their Christmas tree, but Colombian flags as well.

Why do we like traditions? I believe we like traditions because nothing is greater for us than not having to always invent. We love just being able to sit back and let tradition have its way.

There is nothing worse than having friends on a visit and not knowing what to serve them, nor what entertainment to come up with. During Christmas that will never happen. All that is dictated by tradition.

During Christmas we do not have to invent how to decorate. We do not have to invent what food to prepare. Nor do we have to invent any kind of entertainment. Tradition truly is a wonder.

Despite tradition being a wonder, I hope my Christmas service – and the message of the angel, fear not – will encourage you to not fear change all that much either.

Change might not be what we wish for yet change makes things remarkable. Change makes us think about our ways. Change can be an unexpected miracle.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish you all a merry Christmas. If you will go through a Christmas as usual or if you will go through a Christmas with change, all I wish for Christmas is that you will celebrate the coming of our Lord without fear – in peace – comforted by the fact that God is with us today, tomorrow and into eternity. All because of the miracle that changed everything oh so many years ago.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.