

For the Last Sunday of Christmastide & the First Sunday of the Year

Pastor Jeff Wood

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[From Isaiah 45:5-11 where God is our Savior, for us and all the earth.]

I am one who, on the radio sound controls, turns down the bass and turns up the treble. That seems to help me make out the lyrics which otherwise often sound blurred to my ear. Apparently others have the same issue because what the lyrics are and what they heard are, well, a little different. I'll show you, in this last of Christmastide, lyrics of a few songs of the season, and what was supposedly heard.

"Round John Virgin, mother and child..." Apparently there is a plump man named John Virgin and he's present with Mary and Jesus. Round John Virgin, mother and child.

"Joy to the World, the Lord has gum..." May I have a stick? Must be a kid who heard this.

"Frosty the Snowman, was a jolly happy soul. With a corn cob pipe and a butt and nose..." I was taught to say, "Rear end," but if the snowman has a nose on front, he might as well have something on the backside?

"Olive, the other reindeer, used to laugh and call him names." There's a reindeer named Olive and she doesn't seem to be very nice with calling Rudolph

names. Olive, the other reindeer, used to laugh and call him names.

It's not just carols misheard. On this day after Epiphany on which the three magi are traditionally remembered, one man tells of a Christmas play. In it was eight-year-old Anne. She played all three wise men. She walked across the stage as if she were riding a camel, bowed to Mary, Joseph, and the angel. Then she announced, "I am the three wise men. I bring precious gifts: gold, circumstance, and mud.

As we begin this New Year, as we have new elders and a new session, I want to say to us that this really is the truth. Gold, circumstance, and mud is the truth in two ways.

First, it is the unfortunate truth. We are a society choked by materialism. I've had people come into my office and confess anger issues or an affair. No one, however, has ever come in and confessed greed. But it is all around us and in us. Interestingly, one of the biblical criteria for an elder is that he or she is free from the love of money. Trusting God, working hard, being generous and free is a real freedom. Let's all pray for that this year.

Circumstance. We more than once find ourselves in circumstances far different than we would have wished for. A death. A divorce. A disease. Someone was once asked, "How are you doing?" They answered, "Under the circumstances, ok." The asker then said, "What are you doing under there?" Well, it just happens. But we are encouraged to pray about everything with thanksgiving. Not that we are thankful for everything

but we can be always praying and finding something to be thankful for. Let's try to do that this year, elders and everyone. No life has perfect circumstances but let's use them for developing character and prayer.

Mud. Mud-slinging, getting the dirt on people, your name is Mudd, and it's clear as mud. We have a world of conflict and confusion. In it we are to mend fences and bring light. The Bible says we are ambassadors, agents of reconciliation, and peacemakers. Let's all set ourselves to this task starting in our own hearts and immediate relationships. We need it. The world needs it.

So there is the unfortunate truth of gold, circumstance, and mud. But there is also a fortunate truth of gold, circumstance, and mud.

Gold. We do have resources ...a measure of strength. Just think of our Christmas Eve offering. The resources are given by God to take care of ourselves, to enjoy life, and to help others. Thanks be to God for this and may he grace us with these resources for the year ahead. And let's not be concerned about being a dollar short; this keeps us looking to God rather than doing it all ourselves.

Circumstance. The Bible talks about considering it all joy when we face tests and temptations. Tests and temptations sound like circumstances. A test is a chance to develop, a God-with-us chance to grow. A temptation is about falling, a devil-against-us chance to fail.

Let's say you're working on the car. It's never just you and the car. It can become an occasion for cursing God

or asking for his help. Or taking a school exam, it can be handled by cheating or by resolving with God's help to study better.

Jesus healed people of leprosy but never of lying. The circumstances are a day-to-day school of character in which we can turn to him. He will tutor us but not simply do it for us. Then we will gain character and freedom.

Mud. The Psalmist (103) asks the Lord to remember we are simply dust. We are dust that he has given life to. Humble components that God in love works with. Don't try to be super strong. Remember he makes perfect in weakness. He uses both our intellect and our limitations. We just bring our muddy selves to him and ask him to work in us and through us. This is a good bearing to have. And it makes every single one of us broken people eligible.

The greatest thing is that everyone everywhere can offer to God the gold, circumstance, and mud of their lives. You can and I can. May the light of Christ shine upon this offering and shine through this offering to the whole world.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com
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