

[Isaiah 62:6-12](#)
[Titus 3:4-7](#)
[Luke 2:\(1-7\)8-20](#)
[Psalm 97](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO ON CHRISTMAS EVE, THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, DECEMBER 24, 2008, AT ALL HALLOWS' PARISH, SOUTH RIVER, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christmas Eve Midnight Mass is my favorite service of the year. Christmastide starts tonight, a twelve-day period in which we focus on the awe and wonder of the Word made flesh, the holy birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

I enjoy the lessons assigned for Christmas in our Episcopal tradition, both for tonight and for tomorrow morning. We have the elegance of Luke's Nativity story, the poetic cadences of John's proclamation of the pre-existent word of God, the blessed assurance of Titus, contemplativeness of Hebrews, and the imagery of Isaiah. I also enjoy the music, carols, and anthems for this solemn occasion. Of course, I would be remiss if I failed to mention the "smells and bells" that accompany our celebration! But what I really enjoy the most is you---the congregation here present---the people of God, gathering to receive the gifts of God in the Holy Infant, who shows us who God really is. I enjoy people watching, especially on Christmas Eve, when we tend to have an abundance of folks from all walks of life, many of whom I will see for the first time, and perhaps again on Easter, if I'm lucky. A blessed parishioner sent me an email yesterday with a cartoon of a lady saying "It's Christmas....time to go see what they have done to my church since Easter."

But tonight is the night for the lost. They come in all shapes and forms. Sometimes, I see gentlemen in formal attire and ladies clad as if they were attending a ball. Other times, I see parents inspired by the faith of their children as they made their way back to church after the obligatory young adult lapse phase in their church attendance. And sometimes, I see people whose loneliness permeates the air around them.

I always notice the lost. Perhaps, because I am one of them. So, I notice that on Christmas Eve, the lost come to church in droves. But I also know that it takes a certain amount of humility for one to admit that one is lost. We need to let our guards down sometimes to admit that we're lost. So let's not press on the subject of who's lost and who's not at this moment.

God comes to us in Jesus Christ to save the lost. "All we like sheep have gone astray." For the lost, Jesus is like a magnet that will draw you to himself. In Jesus, there is plenteous forgiveness, grace and mercy. In Jesus, the humble and meek are exalted, and the proud and conceited are scattered. The humble lost souls are the antithesis to the proud. The proud believe that the world rotates around them. They may be clinically narcissistic. They are imbued with a false sense of certitude and entitlement. They believe that they have "it" all figured out. "It" can be life, or religion, or morals, or politics, or people in general. The proud cannot wait to tell you how you should live your life so that you can also have "it" all figured out as well. How presumptuous and vain!

And, by the way, the proud simply cannot be bothered to pull themselves together, in this cold, dark night and suffer the hardwood benches of All Hallows' Chapel or any other Christian service. They would not bother with coming here. They are far too busy and important for church, even on Christmas Eve, wherever they are.

And so, who do we have left in this church tonight? We have pew after pew of lost people in this safe haven for those who have not yet figured "it" out. Has anyone ever told you that you looked lost? Maybe. Maybe not. But you know that looks can be deceiving. You may have a fulfilling career, a booming family, or impressive credentials. But what I am getting at is the pain in the depths of your souls.

I know that you are lost, because you are here. And I know that you are humble enough to admit that you are lost, because you are here.

This Midnight Mass is a gathering of the lost souls, the humble lost souls. You are here because you know what it means to have a broken heart and weary spirit. You have felt the intensity of the pain of broken relationships and estrangements. You have grieved over the loss of a loved one. Indeed, you have experienced the permutations and combinations of the vicissitudes of life. The ups and downs in life have made you become lost sometimes.

As we said, the lost do not have much of anything figured out. There can be some serious irony and paradox in all of this. Some very lost people achieve amazing things. Sometimes, they are accomplished beyond imagination. They can be CEOs and live in mansions. But at the same time, they ache for a sense of wholeness that no therapist can offer. They yearn for a kind of healing that no doctor can provide. They hope for a feeling of happiness that no medicine can create.

They know that they do not have "it" all figured out. To varying degrees, they seem happy, rich, and prosperous. However, a still, small voice constantly reminds them that they are nothing but lost. Very lost, indeed.

The lost here are so lost that they no longer pray that they can have "it" all figured out. Instead, they pray that they may be found; that they maybe found by God. And lo and behold, God came to us in Jesus Christ over two thousand years ago to find us, the lost. My favorite hymn from my Anglican grade school goes like this:

Love was when, God became a man; Just a carpenter, with some fishermen. Love was when, God became a man, to reach, to love one such as I.

Brothers and sisters, we are all the lost ones tonight. We are all drawn here because the truth is that we simply had no choice. Yes, I said we had no choice. But you may say, wait a minute, "We made the decision as a family to come here tonight." Our sense of loss, our sense of not having everything figured out really drove us here. Consciously or subconsciously, you are here because you want the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. You want to touch Jesus' cloak for healing as he passes by the busy market place of life. You are in alignment with God tonight. You are in alignment with the hope that comes from the extreme humility of God, in that wet, dirty and cold stable in Bethlehem. You are in alignment with God, against what the world considers a most ridiculous fancy. You simply must come here to hear the best story ever told!

At this time, in this place, your soul begins the process of healing, because Jesus Christ is born, and he has found us! We gather here, despite the rain and the cold, and even skipping sleep, because we know it's worth it. Wild horses cannot keep us away from this most sacred encounter with the Lord. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now, I see.

Come and let us worship the newborn King.

Amen.

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