

According to Mark . . . January 2018

The lyrics of one of our most well-known carols say in their first words, “Joy to the World...”.

Joy to the WORLD. Not joy to just a few of us. Not just to the rich, or the poor, or the many in-between on the economic ladder by which we so often measure ourselves. Not just to the white, brown, yellow, or olive-skinned among us by which we so often divide ourselves. Not just to the Americans, or Russians, or Columbians, Haitians, Syrians, Serbians, Nigerians, North Koreans, or the nation-states to whom we so often pledge fealty amongst ourselves. And certainly not to just the Christians, but also to the Muslims, the Taoists, the Buddhists, the Hindu, the Agnostic and the Atheist, Joy has come into the world for each and all of them, too. Joy to the WORLD, for the Lord has come to bless all peoples whomever they are and wherever they may be. God’s love is not for some and exclusive; it’s for everyone and inclusive.

Joy to the WORLD. And yet we see even in the Christmas season how our divisions can dominate our perceptions of each other and a world torn asunder. Over who is allowed to travel to our country and who is not, based on what we thought were protected classes of personal identity: religion, creed, national origin. Over who is a perpetrator and victim of sexual assault and misconduct: the powerful who act with impunity, or the ones struggling to make a life or career for themselves and their families. Over a slogan meant to bring awareness to the differences in perception of treatment in many walks of life and social and economic justice: Black Lives Matter. Over our constant race to the bottom of how those who rule us behave, paradoxically and crazily, now requiring the poor to subsidize the rich in social and tax policy.

Joy to the WORLD. It is never too late to turn our eyes toward justice, equanimity, kindness, mercy, and love. Even though America is the only nation on earth no longer involved in climate talks on how to stop global warming (literally 200+ other nations are engaged in talks last month in France), we would be welcomed back if we engaged again in discussions on how to love our planet. We could find ways to strengthen housing and reduce both crime and poverty by restructuring how Section 8 vouchers are distributed among both the poor, landlords and the towns that zone housing and their low-income tenants. We can figure out that we need not broad-brush our neighbors with assumptions about their beliefs, politics, religion, and education without first engaging with them in discussion about who they ARE right now, not who we THINK they’ve become.

JOY TO THE WORLD. Our challenge this year at TCC is to better live into The Bridge Initiative. To LOVE our neighbor as ourselves, inquire after someone who is not like us, encounter others who seek us out but know not how to engage us on our own privileged terms. Because our joy in God depends upon our encountering the world around us, as strange and crazy as it may be, and the realization that it’s never too late to start anew and afresh in the Kingdom of God. Our joy depends on our understanding that only by emptying ourselves through compassion for others do we get what we seek—loving our neighbor as we would love ourselves—can we then achieve the completeness and wholeness Christ

promised in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

So this year, my brothers and sisters, be not afraid of anyone, for any reason. Be the Bridge. Because for us at TCC, Joy to the World, the Lord is Come.

Pastor Mark