

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
December 24, 2015
John Crosby
When Heaven Came Down: Messiah Comes to Us

I'm sure I was supposed to say something meaningful, but Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! This is one of those times that we gather together often—in times and places that we don't usually get to bump up against each other—and so I just wanted to make an announcement. We have been doing this, in this location, for almost 60 years! And in those years, we have made it a tradition that our Christmas Eve offering would go to a place somewhere in the Twin Cities where men and women are helping the least, the lost, and the left behind. To a place where there is a sense of God's presence, and justice, and shalom, and all of our money would go toward that. For almost 60 years we've done that. Twenty years ago this year, twenty years ago, one of our staff members looked out on the north side of Minneapolis and felt like it was more than a shame that so many were homeless and in terrible housing. It was a sin; it was something we could do something about. And so he started a small organization that turned into a movement, and twenty years later as they celebrate their twentieth, we would like to make that our Christmas offering. It's called Urban Homeworks. And here, in about four minutes, we'll show you why we're so excited.

[Link to Urban Ventures Christmas Offering Video] <https://vimeo.com/149997356>

Christmas is when the God of heaven is so concerned that He comes to earth to live next door, only there is no room for Him to live there. Surely His followers, the children of the most high God, will be invested in bringing life and healing and joy to people that they might have a home and believe that the God of heaven lives right next door. Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you for Jasmine's honesty, for her vulnerability, and for Your response to her cry for help. I pray that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars will be raised so that these stories might be multiplied, so that if even we cannot cure all the injustices of the world, we might do this one thing. That Your children, as precious as our children are to us, that Your children may not sleep in the back of cars. I pray that You will give us eyes that see and the great joy that comes from ridiculous generosity. In the name of the One who showed us how to give, and taught us how to give, and blesses us when we give with ridiculous generosity. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

It's a season of giving. We've just participated in an imitation. When we give to others, we are imitating the God who gives. Just now, tonight, tomorrow, we imitate the God who gives. As you leave today, we would like to give you a gift. It's a book by John

Ortberg called *All the Places to Go*. We'd like to give one to each family here as a gift to you for two reasons. John has shamelessly ripped off Dr. Seuss's *All the Places You'll Go* and has said, what does your future look like? As we come to the end of the year, what are the doors that are open and closing in front of you? Where will you go? All the places to go...I think that week in and week out, John is the best communicator that I know. Whether he is writing books or preaching sermons, he's sort of my gold standard; he's a wonderful author and speaker. You will love the book. The second reason for it, though, is that we're giving the book in hopes that you would not only read it, but it will excite you to invite someone to come and hear John in the middle of next month. On the 16th and 17th of January, John is going to come for the weekend and speak from his book about our future as individuals and as a community, looking at what God has before us. It will be a wonderful time. I asked John if he would just give you a one minute greeting.

[Link to John Ortberg Greeting Video]

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/m61kpqjybf26n/Ortberg%20Promo%20Edited.mp4?dl=0>

John is from California, which actually explains a lot. I said to him, "John, really, you ought to come and visit our community in the middle of January. It's an experience you'll never forget." He didn't understand, so he's coming. We hope that you'll join us. We're going to give one book to each family as you leave. If you have some gifts you haven't bought, you can buy other copies of the book at the information desk, or if there's somebody that you think, I'd like to give this book to them and see if maybe it will draw them into Invited, you can pick that up at the information desk also. Let's pray.

God, I thank You for laughter, I thank You for the possibility of a bright future. I pray that just as we have been waiting—like Rich said, the kids have been waiting for tomorrow and can't wait for it to happen, and many of us adults have been waiting and can't wait for it to be over—that we will be changed if You show up. Even in these next few minutes we will be changed if, on this birthday, You visit us again and speak to us through Your word. Bless us that way, Lord Jesus. Amen.

We read the Old Testament passage out of the prophet Isaiah. All month we have been talking about what those who lived hundreds of years before Jesus's coming thought would happen, and how in very many ways, it echoes exactly what's said after Jesus shows up. Rich read this, "I will make you a light for the Gentiles so my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." That's Isaiah 49. It sounds almost exactly like what Jody read, "In Him was life, and that life was the light of all. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." [John 1:4-5]

We did this with the kids this afternoon: I brought out a big light and turned it on and I said, "Do you really need a light when it's noon outside and the sun is shining?" "Noooo" they said. I said, "Do you really need a light when the spotlight is on you and it glares?" "Noooo" they said. I said, "When do you need a light?" and the kids said, "When it's dark outside. When it's dark." People who walk around only see a need to have lights when

they admit that they're in the darkness. Only when the darkness gathers, and deepens, and changes what they can see.

Five years ago in August, August 10, 2010, there was a disaster in Chile. Not one of the earthquakes for which Chile is famous, but a disaster in a mine. So, miners are trapped below the surface, they're actually almost a half-a-mile below the surface, 2,300 feet down, and from this entrance, since you don't dig a mine straight down, you don't think like that, a mile kinds of scrolls around and goes like this. They are 2,300 feet down and they're almost three miles from that entrance. And for seventeen days, they have no idea if anyone is alive, if anyone has survived at all. There's a shelter 2,300 feet down and they have to drill a tiny hole, just with a drill bit, all the way down. It takes seventeen days to get this two inch hole down there and when they attach a string to the end of it, up comes a note that says, "We are well in the shelter. Thirty-three of us." And for the next sixty-nine days, there's a race, a race to see whether these thirty-three men can be rescued out of the dark, out of their hopelessness.

They experienced graphically what I believe almost all of us experience when we feel like we have fallen into the darkness. When you go from the light and all of a sudden you're in the dark, the first thing that you notice is that you feel lost. You don't know which way to go. The signals are confusing, even if you're in your room, and you're not sure which way to go. The second thing about feeling lost is that in the darkness you can't tell if anybody is with you and you feel alone. Sometimes you feel abandoned in the dark and it seems to last forever.

The miners were trapped in the darkness, but so are many of us. And one of the things that happens is that we're not only lost and feeling like we're alone in the dark, we also become afraid. We don't show people that we're afraid often, but there's a gut-twisting sense inside of us that as bad as it is now, it is about to get worse. They experienced what we all feel.

Now, this is the fifth anniversary of that incident and so they have made a film, a wonderful film, called *The 33*, about this rescue that took sixty-nine days. It's called *The 33* because there were thirty-three miners trapped below, but the reality is that while there were thirty-three men trapped below the surface, thirty-four men were raised out of the earth. Thirty-four men came back to the surface because one man, Manuel Gonzalez, volunteered to go down in a capsule. The capsule was so narrow that when you see it, you can't believe that you could fit inside of it, much less go down 2,300 feet and almost three miles across to reach those who could be rescued no other way. Many of the miners spoke of this, saying Manuel came and he was the picture of salvation, but they felt like the thirty-fourth miner was with them the whole time.

It's a Christmas story. As you see Manuel emerge out of the tunnel, as you see this little capsule come down and the miners come around it who were in darkness for such a long time...as they come around him, the first person they have seen in almost 70 days, it's very much like the Christmas story, isn't it? People who were in the darkness, people who were helpless, people who were in the dark that Christmas, were rescued.

Remember, I said when we are in the dark we feel lost. And so the story of Christmas is that Jesus comes to earth so that He can find the lost. He says He comes to seek and save the lost. He describes His role as a shepherd. He told us, "I am a good Shepherd and I have a flock and if even 1 out of a 100 sheep is missing, I know it. I know who they are, and I will go to the ends of the earth to find them." Even some of us who have known Jesus a long time can wander off and feel lost. I wonder, do you feel lost today? Do you feel like you're in the shadows of the dark? In the same way, we feel alone. And I believe that at Christmas, Jesus's rescue mission is that He comes to bring the light so that we see Him and believe that we need never be alone again. The story of the New Testament is filled with people who are left to themselves, whether they are lepers or tax collectors or women who nobody else will spend time with, and they feel so alone. Jesus comes and spends time with them when no one else will, and even when He walks away, they know that He is always there.

In the darkness, people are lost. Even at Christmas people feel very alone, and underneath it all, in spite of all the wonderful music and the presents under the tree, there is a sense of being afraid, of feeling helpless or hopeless. What Henri Nouwen calls "living in the house of fear". Our house may look nice, but we live in the house of fear and nobody else can tell, but there is a knot in our stomach because we're afraid somehow we're going to get "found out" whatever that means. Whether disaster will come or we won't be good enough, I believe that at Christmas the rescue mission of Jesus Christ is to come and remind us of the words of John, who said that God is love and perfect love pushes out fear to move from the house of fear into the house of love.

Now, I didn't tell the kids the story about the mine, they live in a scary enough world already. But if I were talking to adults, I would talk about living in the darkness and I would remind them of the words of C.S. Lewis. Lewis said once, "I believe in Christ the same way that I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by its light I see everything else differently." I believe in Christ and I am no longer lost. I need never be alone. I need not be afraid for Christ has come for me.

The apostle John loved images like the ones Jody read. In Him was life. Inside of Him was life that overflowed and that life was the light of all. You see, the light shines in the dark. It shines into your darkness and the darkness can never overcome it. The true light that gives light to all was coming into the world, but this, according to John, this was the verdict – light came into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light.

I don't think people like to be lost or alone or afraid, but the reality is that when Jesus comes and brings the light He says, "Follow Me." Not just *believe* in Me, but *follow* Me. And those of us who are Americans, we don't think we're omnipotent, but we think we're pretty competent and we don't want to have to follow anyone else.

Light came into the world, but people love the dark and stayed there instead of the light. Do you need to come out of the dark and follow the light? God said let light shine out of

the darkness and made His light shine in our hearts to show us the light of God's glory and the face of Christ, so the darkness is passing, and the true light has begun to shine.

Lord Jesus, we speak to You as if You're here because, well, You are. You came and brought light and life. You showed us how to live, You showed us how to die, You showed us that death itself was not the end, and when You came back You sent Your spirit to put a little of the light inside of us. You sent Your spirit so that we need never be alone. We need never stay afraid. Things will scare us, but we need not live in the house of fear. And this Christmas, this Christmas filled with the wonder of possibilities, You come again and You bring light, and You rescue us from the dark. Bring us out of the shadows and give us the light of life. We ask for that gift. In Your holy name, Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.