

## SERMON FOLLOWED BY SERVICE

Advent 2021 - De-Stress from Family Distress

1 John 4:8-11

“Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!” For how long? For how long until that meal you worked so long over - the buns burn, the gravy spills, and some sweet grandchild opens his not-so-sweet mouth and whines: “What did Grandma do to the stuffing? There’s fruit in it.” How long before someone gets too deep in the bottle? How long before that - I don’t know your family tree, so I’ll just say uncle - how long before your uncle the pincher, the loud mouth dirty joker does his thing and sets everyone on edge? How long will you be able to keep up the smile while the in-laws, or that parent, or your child - belittle you, bully you, question you, judge you, ghost you? How long before you get edgy, bitey, looking for another glass? How long before you’re looking for a way out, but you’re at home, and you have nowhere else to go? How long before “Merry Christmas” ain’t so merry? How long before you’ve had enough of the December family distress?

I hope and pray that none of you gets the full treatment of December family distress. Even so, I imagine most of us will get at least a taste of that distress. So what can we do to de-stress from December family distress?

One thing - we get to remember: it’s not about them! No matter what they say or do, Christmas isn’t about making them happy. No matter what they expect, Christmas isn’t about meeting their expectations. No matter what they think, Christmas isn’t a competition - if they do Christmas bigger and better than you, so what?! And no matter how much you might want your family’s approval and love, and no matter how much they might twist and toy with your heart, Christmas isn’t about their approval and love. This birthday, Christmas, isn’t about them. We like to hear that, don’t we? We might not always believe it, but we like to hear it. And it’s true.

*What are some ways people fall into the trap of making Christmas about their family instead of about Jesus? How might you fall into those same traps?*

What I’m about to say we might not like so much. Christmas isn’t about you or me either. Just as Christmas isn’t about making them happy, Christmas isn’t about making ourselves happy. Christmas isn’t about getting our love fix, our family fix, our Hallmark fix. Christmas isn’t about proving ourselves or getting our way or not having to do things their way. Christmas isn’t our birthday either.

*What are some ways people fall into the trap of making Christmas about themselves instead of about Jesus? How might you fall into those same traps?*

This birthday is Jesus' birthday. It's not about lifting ourselves up; it's about lifting Jesus up. It's not about getting our way; it's about Jesus' way.

*But the angel said: "I bring you Good News for you." So why does the sermon say: "Christmas isn't about you"?*

And what is Jesus' way? **"Father, not my way, but thy way be done."** All around him, Jesus had family pressing and expecting from him. A family of mother and brothers pressing and expecting. A family of disciples pressing and expecting. Crowds of families pressing and expecting. All at the same time that Jesus had work he needed to get done, battles he needed to fight, people he needed to see. And what he needed to do, and what his families expected from him, weren't always the same, were they? So what did Jesus do? He started first with his Father in heaven. He didn't push or pull, fight or pout to get his way. He didn't grump or grouse over the pain and mess; he didn't grump or grouse over the hurt and heart-ache. No, he shared his Father's heart. And he joyed through Christmas his Father's way.

And what was his Father's way? 1 John 4:9-11. **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."**

Imagine the family scene before that first Christmas. God's family was disrespecting their father, thumbing their nose at the Father - "We know better than you." Soon they were blaming each other, running away. Then jealous, then angry, then fighting to get their way. We still see it today, don't we? Families fighting, putting each other down. Some fighting face-to-face to get their way. Some fighting, attacking, by turning their backs, ghosting to get their say.

We've all seen it. And I imagine we've all been in the midst of it, to some degree. Sometimes as victim, sometimes as perpetrator. Sometimes standing up for what's right; sometimes just plain wrong. I imagine we've all been on both sides of the hurt enough to know that it all hurts, sometimes with a hurt that stays

inside [but it doesn't, does it?], sometimes with a hurt that reaches out to hurt others, always with a hurt that pains the Father, His Son, their Spirit of love and peace.

So what do we do with that hurt, our December family distress? I hope we know that just pointing fingers isn't going to do any good; none of us is the perfect father, mother, husband wife, son, daughter, brother sister; we have all worked more hurt than we want to admit, right? So what do we do?

We start with our Father and our Brother. "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." And what does the Lord do? He opens his arms with a smile. And what does he say? "Peace." Listening in on our families - hearing what we have said about each other, how we have gone off on each other - God would have such good reason to shut his ears to us and to let loose, judging, cursing, damning us. Instead, from his heart, he smiles: "Peace." Seeing our family dysfunction, he would have such good reason to cut us off, shut us out, ghost us; instead, he smiles and reaches out to us. He doesn't expect us to work our way back into the family. No, he brings us back into the family. He gives us a new family connection; he gives us his Son, the Son of God to be our Brother. And Jesus, instead of seeing our family sin and running the other way, Jesus stepped in for us. In Bethlehem, he stepped in for us and lived for us the life of the perfect Son and Brother, covering over, hiding, erasing and replacing all our family dysfunction. Then at the cross, he stepped in as the perfect Son and Brother and took the punishment we had coming. And now, he doesn't grouse and grumble about all he had to do for us. No, he smiles and promises: "Peace!"

*What are your favorite ways that Jesus says: "Peace"?*

*What are your favorite Advent and Christmas songs that share his peace?*

What does that mean for our December family stress and distress? There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. No matter what they say, no matter what the voices in here (head) say, we don't have to prove ourselves. We don't have to stress out trying to live up to the family's expectations. We don't have to get anxious and edgy. If the buns get burnt or the gift isn't right or the gravy spills or the in-laws still don't like you ... you still have Jesus as your Brother - and he says you're alright by him.

*How can we help ourselves (or others) see that Jesus' promise of peace is bigger and better than a family member's judging judgment?*

That means we're safe with him. With Jesus, if we've done wrong, we can dare to apologize; if we've been wronged, we can dare to forgive; if there's something we need to say, we can dare to speak up. We have Jesus as our Brother - and what they say or do isn't going to change that.

That means getting our way, having our say, fighting for our right isn't all that important. We have Jesus as our Brother - and he's going to get his way.

*Does having Jesus as our Brother mean that we always have to "grin and bear it"?*

*How does one know whether to "grin and bear it" or to set boundaries, stand up for what's right, or even get out?*

Jesus is going to get his way. And what he wants for you is peace. So when your family doesn't get it, remember Jesus. We don't have to make Christmas about making someone else happy. We don't have to make Christmas about making ourselves happy. We get to make Christmas about Jesus - enjoying the peace and love of God, sharing the peace and love of God - that's what Christmas is about.

# DE-STRESS FROM DECEMBER DISTRESS

DISTRESSED WITH FAMILY STRESS?  
DE-STRESS WITH JESUS AS YOUR BROTHER!

HYMN

*“What Hope! An Eden Prophesied”*  
Hymn 304

M: O Lord, open my lips.

C: **And my mouth shall declare your praise.**

M: Hasten to save me, O God.

C: **O Lord, come quickly to help me.**

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

M: Lord God, you have brought us safely to this hour of evening prayer. We thank you for providing all that we need for body and life. Bless us who have gathered in your name. Forgive our sins. Speak to our hearts. Dispel our sorrows with the comfort of your Word, and receive our hymns of thanks and praise, through Jesus Christ, our living Savior, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

HYMN


*“Let My Prayer Rise Before You”*



C: Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense, the lift - ing



up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice. O Lord, I



call to you; come to me quick - ly; hear my voice when I  
cry to you. Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense,  
the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.

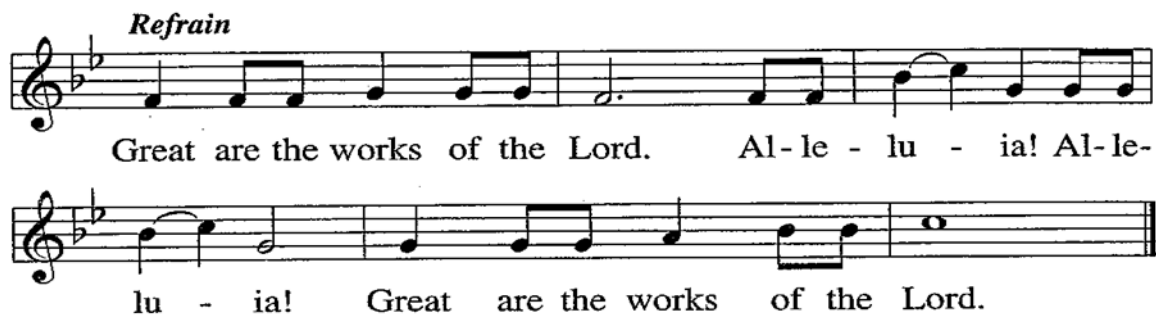
**PRAYER**

**M:** Let our prayers be acceptable in your sight. Come and help us in time of need that way we may sing your praise in holy joy now and forever, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C:** Amen.

**PSALM 2**

*Refrain*



Great are the works of the Lord. Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le -  
lu - ia! Great are the works of the Lord.

*Psalm tone* \*



Why do the nations `conspire\*  
and the peoples `plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers

gather together a`gainst the LORD\*  
and against his A`noointed One. *Refrain*  
The One enthroned in `heaven laughs;\*  
the Lord `scoffs at them.

Then he rebukes them in his anger  
and terrifies them in his wrath `saying,\*  
“I have installed my King on Zion, my `holy hill.”

I will proclaim the decree `of the LORD:\*  
He said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have become your `Father.

**Glory be to the Father and `to the Son\*  
And to the Holy `Spirit,  
as it was in the be`ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. `Amen. *Refrain***

#### PSALM PRAYER

M: Lord, keep us safe in the refuge of your anointed Son, so that when the nations rage against him, we are not terrified. You have begotten him from eternity and have seated him on your throne in heaven. Let us see him as he truly is, the One who lives and rules with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

#### LESSON

**Luke 1:67-79**

*This Advent season our three Wednesday lessons will be the three songs from the Gospel of Luke.*

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come and has redeemed his people.  
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David  
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us -  
to show mercy to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,  
to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

**HYMN**

*“Peace Came to Earth”*

Hymn 330

**SERMON**

**1 John 4:9-11**

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.



## "Song of Mary"



My soul pro-claims the great-ness of the Lord; my spir-it re-joic-es in God my Sav-ior.



for he has looked with fa - vor on his low - ly ser - vant



From this day all gen - er - a - tions will call me bless - ed.



The Al - might - y has done great things for me, and ho - ly is his name.



He has mer - cy on those who fear him in ev - 'ry gen - er - a - tion



He has shown the strength of his arm he has scat-tered the proud in their con-ceil.



He has cast down the might-y from their thrones and has lift-ed up the low - ly.



He has filled the hun-gry with good things, and the rich he has sent a-way emp-ty.

He has come to the help of his ser - vant Is - ra - el,  
 for he has re - mem - bered his prom - ise of mer - cy.  
 the prom - ise made to our fa - thers, to A - bra - ham and to his chil - dren for - ev - er. A - men.

**PRAYER**

M: In the closing hours of this day, hear us as we pray, O Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the well-being of people everywhere, for the growth of your church in all the world, and for the strengthening of all who serve and worship here, we pray, O Lord:

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For one another, young and old, for your blessings that come with every stage of life, and for joy in doing your will, we pray, O Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For our public servants who work day and night to bring protection, justice, learning, and health to this and every place, we pray to you, O Lord:

C: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

M: For favorable weather and bountiful harvests, for clothing and food, for health of body, mind, and spirit, and for deliverance from all sin and every form of evil, we pray to you, O Lord:

C: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

M: For the faithful who have gone before us, who have shared with us your good news, whose souls are now at rest in your heavenly kingdom, we give you thanks, O Lord:

C: **Thanks be to God.**

M: In thanksgiving for your many and varied gifts to us, we now commend ourselves to your care. Be our shield and strength, O Lord.

C: **Amen.**

#### **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **PRAYER FOR PEACE**

M: Lord God, all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works come from you. Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments. Defend us also from the fear of our enemies that we may live in peace and quietness, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

#### **BLESSING**

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: **Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN

*"All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night"*

Hymn 789

## OFFERING

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## Join Us In Worship This Christmas Season!

Christmas Eve - 4 & 7 p.m.

Christmas Day - 9 a.m.

Sunday, December 26 - 9 a.m.

New Year's Eve - 5 p.m.