## “Beyond One’s Own Power” (Galatians 2:20, II Corinthians 5:7)

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord. God has demonstrated his love for us through sending his only Son, Jesus Christ. We had a wonderful celebration of that event two days ago on Christmas eve. It was really a beautiful Christmas Eve Service.

Today, I have this time of reflection and meditation with you. I always feel privileged to have this kind of opportunity here at Fairfield Grace. However, this time, the circumstance is very different. I am here today because Pastor Choi’s health is not good. I join all of you and pray for his health and speedy recovery.

Today is the last Sunday in 2021. In seven days, when we meet for worship next time, it will be the first Sunday of 2022. It seems not too long ago that we celebrated the first Sunday in 2021. One of my friends told me that time flies faster as we are getting older. Although today is the last Sunday of the year, we are also celebrating the first Sunday after Christmas according to our Christian calendar. For the next two weeks, we are going through the season of Christmas. It is a season through which we ponder about the meaning and mystery of Christ coming into our world in a human form. The Christmas event – God became a human – what does all this mean? What does it mean to me and to the world?

As Lee, during our Christmas Eve service beautifully pointed out, the motif of Christmas is God’s love – God’s love for us. A Danish Theologian, Soren Kierkegaard describes Christmas as the most beautiful love story which the humankind has ever known. God loved the world so much that he himself had to become a human, giving up all He had. My prayer is that we continue to ponder about the God’s love story in this season of Christmas and how this God’s love story is touching our lives as we continue our faith journey.

There is a story from a book, “The Kingdom Within” by John Sanford. The story is about an old well on a family farm in New Hampshire. For over hundred years, this well provided water for the Sanford family faithfully. Even in the hottest and driest of seasons, this well faithfully

**P. 2**

supplied its cool and refreshing water. Then, time came to modernize the house and the family decided to seal off the well for a safety reason.

Then, many years later, Dr. Sanford visited his family farm and was curious about the well. He decided to uncover the old well and inspect its condition. When he removed the cover, he expected to see the same, dark, cool, moist depths he had known as a young boy, growing up on that farm. But, he was shocked for the well was bone dry. And, he found out the reason why. A well of this kind was fed by hundreds of tiny underground rivulets which seep a constant supply of water. As water is drawn from the well, more and more water moves in along the rivulets, keeping these tiny structures clear, open, and unblocked. When such a well is not used and water is not regularly drawn, these tiny rivulets close and are blocked. And that was the reason why the well had dried up. It dried up not because there was no water but because it had not been used.

By telling this story, the author of the book, Dr. Sanford is making a very clear and concise conclusion. The spirit of a person is just like a well. What happened to the old well can also happen to the spirit of a person, if the living water of God does not flow in and through the person. Our spiritual life can be dried up and all it takes is a bit of neglect, carelessness, disuse, and some misplaced priorities.

In this season of Christmas, as we ponder about the greatest love story initiated by God, we need to re-discover the power that can work within us – the power beyond our own. In our Galatians text this morning, St. Paul boldly declares that “I live yet not I but Christ lives in me.”

Christ lives in me – We can speculate what motivated St. Paul to make such a bold statement. But, what we can be sure of is the fact that it is not a theory he is proposing. It is a confession of an experienced fact. In his own life, St. Paul demonstrated what it is to be a “new creation” in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the intimate companion of St. Paul and, throughout his entire life, Paul always tried to walk with Jesus faithfully.

**P. 3**

In the II Corinthians first chapter, St. Paul describes how much he had to suffer to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 8, he said, “the persecution was so severe, and it was beyond his ability to endure.” The way he was persecuted was like a death sentence and he lost all hope for life. This is the words of St. Paul in verse 9. “In our hearts, we felt the sentence of death.” But, God saved Paul and his companions from such desperate situations. In verse 10, St. Paul writes, “God has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.” Based on his own experience, St. Paul was convinced that God would continue to deliver him in all circumstances.

What Paul was sharing is that there was no way he could get out of that terrible situation he and his companions were in by their own efforts. The situation was so severe that it was like a death sentence for them. However, God who came to love us gave them a way to escape from the situation and deliver them from it. Not by my own efforts but by grace of God. “No longer I but Christ lives in me.” This is a faith statement of St. Paul. And, I believe that this should be a faith statement for all of us.

“We live by faith and not by sight.” Our second scripture text this morning reminds us. To make the Christmas event to be meaningful for us, we have to be in constant touch with God. Only through the eyes of faith, we are able to understands the magnificent work of God through Christmas.

I was told that life we live is like going through a wilderness. While I was serving with the Global Ministries, the mission agency of the United Methodist Church, Mongolia was one of countries I visited most for the purpose of developing new mission work. As you know, Mongolia is a huge country in terms of its size. It is roughly 11 times of New York state, yet the population is less than 3 million people. More than half of the entire population still maintains a lifestyle of a nomad. Families travel place to place with their tent and livestock. If you go outside of the capital city, Ulan Baatar, all you see is nothing but a vast landscape and beautiful

**P. 4**

blue sky. And you see the land and sky meet – a horizon – in a distance. It is just so beautiful. And there are no roads either, so it takes about 3-4 hours to travel to the next city which is 60 miles away.

Traveling in a wilderness has many issues. The most difficult issue, among many, is to know where you are heading – where you are traveling. Since there are no roads and signs, you have to know which way you are going to reach your destination.

Every time I traveled through a Mongolian wilderness, I was reminded that the life we live is very similar to traveling in a wilderness. Many times, in our life’s journey, we need signs to make sure the direction we are heading is a correct one. Our experience is that we often wander around and unsure of the course we are heading in life. In our life’s journey, we need road signs that will direct us to the correct course. who can be the sign for us?

“Not I but Christ lives within me.” Christ who came down to be with us can certainly provide directions in our life’s journey. We need to let power of God flow in us and through us. We need embrace the Spirit of God, believing that love of God runs deep and is without limit. For the same love that supported St. Paul is present among us today.

As we are concluding the chapter of our lives in 2021 and are about to begin a new chapter in the new year, my prayer is that we remind ourselves that we are God’s people and continue to have confidence in God’s goodness and mercy. Like in our previous years, the new year will bring us many challenges and issues that will make our life’s journey difficult. It seems like there is no end to the Covid pandemic, either. In the midst of all these, God’s lesson for today is that we need to continue, proclaiming boldly that “I no longer live but Christ lives in me.” May this be our faith statement this morning.