

**December 27, 2020**

**Scripture: Luke 2:22-40**

**Title: REMEMBER THE BEST, SEEK THE BEST!**

There's an ancient Scottish legend that tells the story of a shepherd boy tending a few straggling sheep on the side of the mountain. One day as he cared for his sheep, he saw a beautiful flower, one that was more beautiful than any he had ever seen. He knelt down and scooped up the flower in his hands and held it close to his eyes, drinking in its beauty.

As he held the flower close to his face, he heard a noise and looked up. There, he saw a great stone mountain opening up, right before his eyes. As the sun began to shine inside the mountain, he saw the sparkling of beautiful gems and precious metals. With the flower in his hands, he walked inside. Laying the flower down, he began to gather all the gold and silver and precious gems in his arms. Finally, with all that his arms could carry, he turned, and began to walk out of that great cavern, and suddenly a voice said to him, "Don't forget the best."

Thinking he had overlooked some choice piece of treasure, he turned around again, and picked up additional pieces of priceless treasure. With his arms literally overflowing with wealth, he turned to walk back out of the great mountainous vault. Again the voice said, "Don't forget the best."

By this time his arms were filled. He walked outside, and all of a sudden, the precious metals and stones turned to dust. He looked around in time to see the great stone mountain closing its doors again. A third time he heard the voice, and this time the voice said, "You forgot the best. For the beautiful flower is the key to the vault of the mountain."

As we celebrate this first Sunday after Christmas and this last Sunday of the year, we don't want to forget the best.

We don't want to forget the joys, we shared in this special season of the year. Some of us, will want to remember this year. Then, there are events, that we would just as soon forget. The Covid-19 virus, the subsequent downturn in our economy, a personal sickness, maybe a divorce in the family, a death, the loss of a job, the possibilities could go on. The late Charles Kauralt once observed, "There are three kinds of memories, good, bad and convenient." He's right! We don't want to remember everything. There are some things that ought to be forgotten.

Fortunately, our faith helps us deal with the good, and the bad in life. As we make our way out of the Christmas season and of this year, just as the shepherd boy made his way out of the mountain vault, we don't want to forget the best.

John Wesley, the spiritual father of the Methodists, said on his deathbed: "The best is God with us." The Biblical word for that is Emmanuel.

God with us, what great news to take into the New Year. God with us, our problems and inadequacies seem to fade, in the light of that staggering truth. God with us, there's no obstacle we can't surmount, if that's true!

**God is with us, in the Christ child of Bethlehem.** A righteous and devout Jew named Simeon, recognized at once, who Jesus was. According to the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought their newborn son to dedicate him to the Lord. They did this by offering a sacrifice in the temple. The sacrifice, according to the law, was a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

Two facts, jump out at immediately, with this event. First, this is the sacrifice prescribed, as a suitable offering by the poor. We see here Mary and Joseph's social and economic status. That's how God would begin God's redemption of humankind. God would start at the bottom of society, with a borrowed manger and the humblest of homes. Here's where Jesus' story is told, among ordinary people of limited means. And this is where the story stays. Remember, Jesus' friends even had to borrow a grave, to bury him.

The second startling fact, is only speculation, about his gentle mother's innocence. As she offered up her pair of turtle doves for the sacrifice, could she possibly have imagined that her son, would one day be offered up as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices? Could she in her wildest dreams, have seen where this happiest of occasions, would one day lead? That, the son she dedicated to God, in the temple, would one day kneel in a garden, and confirm with drops of sweat, like great drops of blood praying, "Not my will, but thine be done?"

The Biblical record is clear, Mary couldn't see where God was leading her son. Only after his resurrection, did she comprehend.

Luke tells us, that Simeon recognized immediately, this was the Christ Child. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon, that he would see the Christ, before he died. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he came into the temple. There stood this humble couple with their small child. Luke tells us that Simeon took Jesus up in his arms and began singing, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

Then Simeon turns to the humble parents who, by this time, are glowing in amazement, and announces to them, that their child is, a very special child. Now, every child is special to its parents, but this child, would be a blessing to the world. Emmanuel, God with us.

An experience related by Dr. Murdo MacDonald, one Scotland's finest preachers, tells it best. MacDonald was a prisoner-of-war, of the Germans in World War II. MacDonald learned about the invasion of Normandy and of D-Day in a most unforgettable way. Early in the morning, an American shook him awake, shouting into his ears. "The Scotsman wants to see you, it's terribly important."

MacDonald says that he ran over to the barbed wire fence, which separated the British and the American camps, MacNeil, who was in touch with the BBC by underground radio, was waiting for him. He spoke two words in Gaelic, "They have come!"

MacDonald then ran back to the American camp and began waking up the soldiers. He said again and again, "They have come! They have come!" The reaction

was incredible. Men jumped up and started to shout. They hugged each other. They ran outdoors. They rolled on the ground in joy. The Germans thought they were crazy. They were still prisoners. Nothing had outwardly changed. But, inwardly, the prisoners knew everything was different. Allied troops had landed. Their deliverers were on the way. They have come!

That's the kind of feeling that caused this elderly man Simeon, to sing out as he did. He has come! Now I can die in peace. He has come! We haven't been forgotten. He's come, and never again will the world be the same. He's come, and light has penetrated and overcome the darkness. He's come and we're not alone. The best is, God with us. A voice says to us today: Don't forget the best. We dare not forget, what God has done in Jesus Christ. Don't forget the best!

One final word, as we to begin a new year. **As we remember the best, why don't we make a new commitment of our own lives, to seek the best in our lives?** We need to remember the best, because we so often settle for less.

C.T. Studd grew up in England. He was a great athlete, a star cricket player who made headlines throughout his country. Academically he was at the top of his class. He was from a wealthy family, and always had the best of everything. When he met Jesus, he made this declaration: "If Jesus be God, and He died for me, there's no sacrifice too great for me, to make for Him."

Prior to his marriage, C.T. Studd gave away half his fortune. When his fiancée learned, he gave only half away, she asked, "Charlie, what did the Lord tell the rich young man to do?" He answered, "Sell all." She said, "Well, we, too, will start clear with the Lord at our wedding." All the money this young couple had, went overseas to missions. But that's not all. It wasn't long before they moved to Africa, to give their lives to Jesus, in missionary service.

C.T. Studd lived his life according to a principle we all need to apply, "If Jesus be God, and he died for me, there's no sacrifice too great for me to make, for him."

And that's certainly true. Christ gave his all for us. What shall we do for him?

Dr. Leonard Sweet, in his book, *Giving Blood*, tells a wonderful story about one of the finest performers who ever graced America's stages, Judy Garland. He tells about a night in 1961 when 3,100 people packed Carnegie Hall to be a part of what is now known as "the greatest concert ever given." Among those present for "Judy Garland at Carnegie Hall" were some performers whose names are etched in our memories, Carol Channing, Rock Hudson, Spencer Tracy, Hedda Hopper, Henry Fonda, and Julie Andrews.

Everyone present that night knew that Judy Garland was the consummate performer, that she would sing until exhausted and depleted. Garland felt she owed everything she had, to her every audience.

In this concert, she sang a remarkable twenty-six songs, giving her all in every song. A live album was made of her performance. It received five Grammy awards.

But, above all else, Leonard Sweet was struck by something Garland did just before walking out on stage. She repeated to herself, and to anyone else who happened

to be within earshot, an unusual charge. “It was not the time-honored ‘Break a leg,’” says Sweet. “Rather, it was: ‘Time to give blood.’”

“Time to give blood.” Certainly, if anyone ever “gave blood,” it was Jesus. And he did it for us. As we leave this Christmas season and begin a new year, may God help us not to forget the best, God with us. Remembering a God who came to us in Jesus Christ and gave His all for us. So, let’s not forget the Best, God with us and let’s give our best Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.