

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

December 24, 2020 – CHRISTMAS EVE YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*A God-Blessed Mess!*”

Isaiah 9:2-7 (The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light: A Son has been born!)
Psalm 96 (Sing to the Lord a new song: Tell the nations that He is King)
Titus 2:11-14 (The grace of God has appeared to us, bringing salvation)
St. Luke 2:1-14 (Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem, son of Mary, Son of God)

I don't know about you, but I tend to be a messy cook—after a big meal, my kitchen is a disaster area. And this past week, my desk looked like the paper and office supplies aisle at Staples either blew up or threw up on it. But let's face it. We're surrounded by messes—from small piles to big mountains. And our world is in a *huge* mess—*especially* this year!

At home, we try to hide our mess by shoving everything into a closet. Or sometimes we think that if we pretend not to see it, or don't talk about it, the mess will somehow go away. But that's like refusing to watch the news and then thinking wars, poverty, and evil will cease to exist. Or like a teenager who throws dirty clothes, used fast food containers, and broken sports equipment under their bed and then tells Mom, “I cleaned up!”

With so much violence, unemployment, poverty, crime, *thousands* of people dying *daily* from COVID-19, and environmental problems, it's not too hard to see that we live in the midst of a mess. And the mess isn't just other people's burden. The mess of this world extends into each of our lives, alongside our personal messes: Those thoughts and emotions we know aren't right. Those to-do lists we haven't completed. Things we wished we hadn't done. Relationships that are broken and need repairing.

As we confess every Sunday, “we have not loved [God] with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.” If you can be honest with yourself for a moment, what are some of the untidy things or relationships in your life? Or that are messing up your life? Usually these are the things about which we pretend everything's okay when it's not. At times, we go to extraordinary lengths to cover up our faults, or to hide the things and people that mess up our lives that we'd rather others didn't know about.

No matter how hard we try, like that Mom who knows what's under her kid's bed, God knows every detail of our lives—and the mess we're in, as a planet, a country, and as individuals. Yet, despite knowing full well how messy our world is, and how messy our lives are, Jesus entered our messed-up world, but He did it *in a messy way!*

We spend a lot of time prettying up Christmas, making it just right. But let's not forget that Jesus came to us in a messy way. It's been said that if Jesus was interviewed for the job of Savior he wouldn't be hired. He was born to a couple who were not yet married. And He was born in an animal shed.

Have you ever smelled a place where cows or sheep or horses sleep? Or walked through the animal enclosures at the zoo? Not only are they messy, but they *stink!* Yet God chose to enter our world in a stinky, messy, stable.

And there is something else about bad smells. They can distract us. I'm still trying to get used to driving through some of the most beautiful farm country God ever created, when the breathtaking vistas actually cause me to want to hold my breath because those gorgeous fields are being fertilized with pig manure or chicken you-know-what. *Pew!* The stink is quite distracting for this non-Pennsylvania native.

The mess in our lives can have the same effect on us—our problems can overwhelm our time and energy, distracting us from what is good and helpful. But despite the mess we live in, Jesus came to live among us. Now, which one of *us* would want to spend time in a garbage dump where people actually live, or a homeless encampment? The squalor and stench are enough to gag you. But the fact is, Jesus chose to visit our messy, dirty, stinky, sinful world. Why? Because God *loves* us—you, me, and the whole world. So, He sent Jesus to be the solution to our mess. In fact, Christ is the only guaranteed solution to our mess.

You know those makeover shows on HGTV, where the star comes in and completely remakes someone's home from a pigsty to a showplace? That's what Jesus does with our hearts and souls, our intentions and perspectives, our priorities and plans. When we accept Him into our messy lives and ask Him to clean us up, He *will!*

Other solutions we might try simply cover up our problems. Reminds me of a childhood friend I caught up with after many years. She wasn't a Christian when I knew her in high school. But as she talked about all the things she had tried—sex, drugs, rock-and-roll, and Eastern meditation—she described these as “merely rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.” I got the analogy immediately, because I understood. I myself had tried politics, philosophy, and social activism, but also found the only answer to my problems, to *my* mess, was knowing and trusting in Jesus Christ.

All the other solutions we attempt may make life pleasant for a while, like a fake smile or sweeping the dirt under a mat. But thanks be to God, He came to earth as a human being in Jesus to deal once and for all with our mess—both the mess that affects us now, fouling up our minds, hearts, and relationships, and the mess involving our eternal souls (otherwise known as sin), that has the potential to prevent us from receiving the heavenly inheritance God wants to give us. Moreover, Jesus did not come for a select few, but for all people.

As we heard in tonight's Epistle reading from Titus—I'm reading here from the Contemporary English Version: “God has shown us how kind he is by coming to save all people. He taught us to give up our wicked ways and our worldly desires and to live decent and honest lives in this world. We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He gave himself to rescue us from everything that is evil and to make our hearts pure. He wanted us to be his own people and to be eager to do right.”

Jesus wants to help each and every one of us restore a right relationship with His Father, God, and with each other and the world around us. Will you allow Him to bless *your* mess? The paradox of the Christian life is that even after we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus, we're still sinners—just forgiven ones. We will still live in a mess, whether personal or global, because that's not going to be ultimately fixed until Christ returns. But now that He has given us salvation, at least it's a *God-blessed* mess!

This Christmas as you unwrap the gifts you receive, remember the gift of the baby Jesus, who came to live among your mess—and mine. To deal with our messes and clean up their effects in our lives and in our world.

This evening, let us kneel before the manger with Mary and Joseph, and quietly, in the privacy of our own hearts, invite Jesus into the messiest parts of us that He already knows about—and ask Him to bless these with the gift of *Himself*.¹ That will be our best Christmas gift—ever! Amen.

¹ Adapt. Richard Schwedes, 14 November 2007, “At Christmas, Jesus Comes into our Mess,” [SermonCentral.com](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/at-christmas-jesus-comes-into-our-mess-richard-schwedes-sermon-on-christmas-114146) <<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/at-christmas-jesus-comes-into-our-mess-richard-schwedes-sermon-on-christmas-114146>> Used with permission.