

Pastor Roy's sermon from December 24, 2018 (Christmas Eve)

The message of Christmas is God with us. Christians have proclaimed from the New Testament on that Jesus is a union of the divine and human. Sometimes we think of Jesus as not having to struggle because he was divine. We wonder if his essence was a moment by moment choice to be more human or more divine. Some think of Jesus as God appearing human.

But the church has always agreed that Jesus experienced his humanity completely as we do. Being human is as much a struggle as a gift. Jesus came to know that he, a man, was one with God. That made him free to live and love as a human being, and not hold back. In other words, he **continually offered himself** to God. The **offering** set him free to be completely human and divine. He lived with human limitations as we all do; but in the struggle, he offered himself to God rather than **resisting** which we often do. Our sin is to resist the love and faithfulness of God. Perhaps Jesus' freedom from sin was born of **not resisting**, but giving himself over to, God.

And here is my point--as we celebrate, this night, the birth of Jesus in a very humble place and time, we have the opportunity also to offer ourselves to God. Salvation is the gift of God. We hear the message of the angels celebrating God coming among us. We know that this baby will grow up to become a poor, itinerant preacher proclaiming the Good News, healing, loving outcasts of every description, calling a people to himself who offer themselves back to God—day by day, moment by moment. Though he had virtually nothing to his name, he was free because his life was an offering.

We often think of our salvation as Jesus setting us free mainly by forgiving our sin. We need to be forgiven in so many ways, yes. But I believe the essence of the gift of salvation is Jesus' invitation to offer ourselves back to God rather than resist God (which is sin). Each of our lives offered back, imperfectly, to God is a thing of great beauty. If you recall my message yesterday, offering back our lives to God is to live in the strength of the Lord.

It's important to remember that when we forget to offer ourselves back to God and push ahead in our own stubborn, broken strength, and *fail(!)*, it's ok. Forgiveness and a brand new start is the free, never ending gift of God. But if we fail to offer ourselves back to God, forgiveness is hollow—it can't get any traction,

because it's negative without any positive action. The positive action is giving ourselves over to God with us. No matter how many times a day we have to do it.

Each time, an inward glance toward the Spirit sets us free. We learn this from Emmanuel, *God with us* in Jesus—born as a fragile baby, growing into a man who learns to give himself over to God and teach us the same.

Thanks be to God for the gift of this Baby who teaches us to be free, to offer ourselves to God who receives us in love. Merry Christmas! Amen.