

CHILDREN: LIFE'S INTERRUPTIONS

ISAIAH 9:2-7

CHRISTMAS EVE

DECEMBER 24, 2004

SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH, LUMSDEN, SK

I remember the birth of our first child, Kaitlyn. It was a Sunday night in December. The whole episode was over a little after 9:00 in the evening. Colette was resting after the exhaustion of labour and I was left in the Neo-natal intensive care unit holding my new daughter and thinking of how my life had changed in that one day.

I remember thinking how much my life's focus would need to change. Before kids, we could be relatively carefree and selfish: if we wanted to eat out, stay out late, or go to a movie, we could. The career choices I could make were pretty much wide open. I recall talking to my bishop about partnering with the Anglican Church to minister in a First Nations community.

Now, I had a child to protect. The places to which we would move had to not only be appropriate for us but safe and friendly for our children. I remember the hardships and prejudice that some of my colleagues faced as Preachers Kids in small communities and I was determined not to subject my own children to such injustice.

I remember that my sense of the future grew by 20-40 years that day. I had a pretty solid ten year plan for my life, but the arrival of this new child just grew that time span by a couple of decades. She would need money for university, an enriching community in which to be raised, and a safe environment that would not test or tempt her beyond her age.

Children were for me an interruption to my plans for life, and I wasn't completely prepared for what they would mean at the time. Since then, both Kaitlyn and Graeme have enriched my life and made me a better and more loving person that I would have been otherwise.

I'm glad for the interruptions that they have meant in my life and while it may not always seem so at the time, I'm also glad for the interruptions that they introduce into my days, for the people they are and the people they are becoming and the things I learn about myself in the process.

We so often seem so comfortable living our lives in sin and darkness. We sweat and labour to get ahead. We work to make money and make money to buy stuff. We buy stuff to feel important and then we look around, compare our stuff to everyone else's stuff, and realize that we are not as important as we'd like to be. So we decide we need a better job to buy more stuff, and it all starts again.

We run so fast on the treadmill. We are so used to providing for our families, to meeting the needs of everyone else, to living up to the expectations we feel from others, to making the mortgage and car payments, and to squirreling away money for the life we are taught to expect, that we don't even pay attention to how hard it is to keep it all together. Having given the best of what we are to our work, we find that there is very little left for ourselves and the ones we love. We are so tired at the end of the day, but we can't bring ourselves to ask whether our burdens are worth the cost.

As we journey through life, we endure hurts and injuries. We live through broken relationships; we feel the pains of hatred, or anger, or prejudice. We experience the harshness of enmity and conflict. Thinking that this is

just part of the burdens of life, we simply accept these pains.

We live in a world at war but we have become so callous and hardened to the pain and suffering of others that we no longer question, challenge, or concern ourselves with the hardships of others.

We walk in darkness but taking cold comfort in the fact that everyone around us is stumbling around with us, we do not ever stop to question if this really is the point of it all.

We lived by instinct; we followed the herd of society.

For us this night all that is interrupted. Now we can live our lives with fullness and texture.

Tonight, we celebrate another child who has interrupted our lives and our world. Through the interruption of one child, a Great Light has now shattered the darkness of our daily existence. All the darkness that filled our days has now been removed. That which was lost and unknown to us has now become real. The shallowness of our daily existence, the pains and burdens by which we are the walking wounded, the values imposed on us by work and family and the society around us: all that has oppressed us is now released. The yoke of our burdens is broken and shattered.

Through the interruption of one child, we are offered light, life, and wholeness. Because of this interruption, our lives have a richness to their fabric that we did not previously know.

Through the interruption of one child, we no longer need to buy into the expectations that our world puts in front of us; we can choose the truth. We can opt for love; we can live for peace; we can receive healing and wholeness. And we can reject the sin, the strife, the jealousy, the selfishness, the greed that formerly held us captive in the darkness.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of host will do this.” (vv. 2,4,6-7).