***Looking for Jesus***

A sermon preached at LPCC, Dec. 16, 2018

Luke 2:8-15

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According to the lovely story we just read, once upon a time, in a distant land, angels regaled shepherds with the news that Jesus, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger, was born in Bethlehem.

So, the shepherds shout, “Let us go now to Bethlehem.” They want to find Jesus.

But now, 2000 years later, and without angels to show us the way, where will we find Jesus?

Maybe here, in church? After all, we had a lovely Christmas pageant last week, full of make-belief angels and shepherds. We hear sermons about Jesus, here, too. Might we find Jesus here in the church?

Sure. Sometimes. At ten thirty a.m., on Sundays. Or at a Bible Study. But mostly the sanctuary is empty and Fellowship Hall is full of day-care kids and tai-chi retirees.

Might we find Jesus in our hearts? Like the old hymn says: “I serve a risen Saviour, he’s in the world today . . . you ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.”

But that’s really only a figure of speech, right? A metaphor. Sort of schmaltzy, too—like a Valentine’s Day card. Jesus does not really live in our hearts.

So maybe we should look for Jesus in the creeds or a thick theology book on my office’s bookshelf? You could. But the truth is, people don’t read that stuff anymore. It’s dry and deep and complicated.

Where can we count on finding Jesus today, if not in Bethlehem?

Well, how about looking for Jesus in the hustle and bustle of Toronto. Because, as Jesus would later say, himself, “Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these . . . you did it to me,” to the poor, the naked, the thirsty, the imprisoned. These people embody Jesus today.

Today, we will find Jesus wrapped in rags and lying in a shelter.

The last and the least have always been “Jesus” out there in the world. Jesus is the #Metoo victim that society has, for too long, disbelieved. Jesus is the refugee seeking entrance to Canada like Joseph and Mary and the baby sought refuge in Egypt. Jesus is the First Nations or Black prisoners who fill our Canadian jails all out of proportion to their numbers in Canada. Jesus is the working poor who go to food banks, the elderly neighbour whose children don’t visit, the child fighting cancer at Sick Kids.

Listen. Most of us are not among the last and least. Most of us are not that comfortable stopping by a subway entrance to talk with a homeless teen and her skinny dog. We’re not equipped to be social workers. That’s okay. I get it. But if you want to find Jesus, build a significant part of your life around acknowledging and embracing the causes of the least and last. Hire them. Lobby for more homeless shelters and better psychiatric care. Donate a Christmas gift to New Circles or the United Way. Speak up at parties and in board rooms for gay or trans people. Teach yourself about racism.

Remember, just as you did it to one of the least of these, however and wherever you do it, you did it to Jesus. You will have found him. And by doing so, you will worship him just like the shepherds did when they found Jesus, homeless, in a barn.