

The sermon I am going to preach this morning is probably one you've heard before.

It's not a new message.

However, because it's so hard for us to live in our priorities, I think the message bears repeating.

That's the theme for this morning, priorities.

Knowing what ours are is important all the time, but especially at this time of year.

It seems like this season is when our priorities can get all out of whack.

We suddenly care deeply about things that, in the scheme of things, aren't that important, like how the Christmas tree is decorated, perhaps.

And the things which we usually consider to be very important, like staying healthy and staying within our budgets, maybe take a back seat at this time of year.

Saying what your priorities are is important, after all, it's good to have intentions.

But what you say your priorities are isn't necessarily what they actually are.

How do you know what your priorities really are?

Take a look at two things, your bank statements and your calendar.

If you don't keep a calendar, then reflect upon how you spend your time.

Those are the two things which determine our priorities, how we spend our money and how we spend our time.

I was recently reflecting on how this time of year is sort of suspended from the rest of time.

That would be okay, except that this suspended time seems to be full of much more stress and anxiety than the other 10 months of the year.

Emotions are heightened.

This Christmas season brings up memories, beautiful ones and painful ones.

It's an acute reminder that loved ones are no longer with us, and some relationships aren't the same as they used to be.

We associate the holidays with people and places, and if those people and places aren't in our lives anymore, it can be painful.

It's also hard for people who live with depression and addiction.

These emotions cause us to want to give into our vices, which might mean eating or drinking too much.

Or, compounded with the shorter days and gloomy skies, this time of year might make us not want to get out of bed.

This season also comes with lots of expectations, expectations about gifts, family get togethers, Christmas cards, food, decorations, children's experiences and parties at school and elsewhere, and did I say gifts?

So it only makes sense that our priorities that we're pretty committed to during the rest of the year go out the window at this time of year.

We're distracted, our minds are on other things, suddenly our priorities can change and even become misaligned, perhaps without our consent.

So I'd like us to focus today on committing ourselves to doing our best to spending our time, money and attention on those things which we know, at the core of our being, to be the most important things in our lives.

Lots of other influences, like friends, family and advertisers will try to tell us what our priorities are, or what they think they should be.

But this is the time, in worship, in community with each other and God, for us to think about what our true priorities are, without the influence of the wider world.

After all, this whole season is about Jesus.

It's about the birth of a beautiful baby who turned the world upside down, whose birth shook the foundations of civilization.

Talk about priorities, this holiday season is about celebrating the baby who came to remind most of the world that their priorities were upside down and he was going to show them how to turn them right-side up.

He was a new kind of king, not one with a fancy palace and servants and a huge army.

This was a king who was poor and vulnerable, born to parents who had to flee for his safety, who showed us that you gain power by giving it up, and you help others not by controlling them but by loving them.

It's sort of ironic that our priorities become misaligned at the same time we are celebrating the birth of one who came to show us what our priorities should be.

Some people even feel more disconnected from Jesus and from the church at this time of year, simply because we're so busy, so distracted.

So, if our priorities are determined by how we spend our time and how we spend our money, maybe we should think about how we are making Jesus a priority at this time of year.

How are we going to make space for him, for his teachings, for living as he taught us to live?

Have we made room for him in our checkbooks and in our schedules?

The picture on today's bulletin is of birds on a wire because I love watching a bird land on the wire, and all the birds on either side of it scoot down to make room.

Are we scooting things over in our lives, to make room for Jesus?

Lest this sound like one more obligation, I think that when we create space for him, it helps with our anxiety and our stress.

It helps us to say no to those things that we simply don't want to do or that aren't life-giving, and it helps us say yes to those things which resonate with our values, with our understanding of the true meaning of this sacred season.

Because that's the thing, it is sacred, it's precious, it's fleeting, and I'd like us all to enter January a little calmer and more grounded, ready to start the new year on the right foot, rather than people who are coming up for air after spinning inside a tornado for 6 weeks.

So, *how* do we make space for Jesus in our lives?

For some people, it's silence and stillness, or meditation.

For other people, it's reading sacred texts or devotional texts or joining us for our Thursday night Advent story time.

For some, it's coming to church on Sunday morning.

For other people, connecting with Jesus happens by being in nature, by finding the beauty in the winter, by tromping through the snowy woods.

Other people connect with Jesus by helping others.

This time of year, we're offered many opportunities to volunteer and to donate goods for folks who are having a tough time making ends meet this season.

Whatever you do to connect with Jesus and his message, I hope you'll try to make that one of your priorities this season.

I hope you'll scoot over all those other things you consider priorities to make room for Jesus on that telephone wire.

Now the Psalm that we heard this morning was written long before Jesus was born, but I chose the reading for today because in it, the Psalmist is trying to find a resting place for the Arc of the Covenant, this was going to be the resting place for God.

This is where God dwelled.

A resting place is where we can relax, take off our shoes, be comfortable and take up space.

We know that God doesn't reside in one specific place, God is everywhere, but have we made such space for God in our lives?

Can God settle into our lives, making a home there?

Have we set a place for God at the table within our hearts and minds?

Is God comfortable there, or does God feel more like a visitor?

In this text, God promises that God will 'cause a horn to sprout up for David,' (Psalm 132:17) God had "prepared a lamp for [God's] anointed one." (132:17).

This means God will anoint a messiah or David's descendant to come.

Christians understand the fulfilment of this promise through Jesus, he is King David's descendant.

And so we might interpret this text through our Christian lens, knowing Jesus, and think of it in that context.

We're invited to reflect on Jesus' dwelling place.

He is manifested within each one of us, by how we treat others, how we spend our time, and how we spend our money.

If he's able to take up residence within our lives, that means we're doing something right, we have made him a priority.

If Jesus is more like a visitor or even someone peeking inside the window into your life, maybe you should rearrange some things to make space for him.

There wasn't any room for him at the inn, but I invite you to make sure there is room for him in your life this Advent season.

Amen.