

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:5 My sweet Mother has struggled with the "holiday blues" for many years. Memories of broken relationships and loss are often behind these feelings. She is not the only one, Matt Anderson M.D. states that "anxiety and even depression affect many people about this time of year." And this year I am sure it will be no different, what with the new financial constraints and the pressures to have that perfect Christmas holiday. A friend and I were talking about this when we noted that all the movies this time of year paint a picture of the perfect family Christmas. Everyone is laughing and celebrating – making Gingerbread houses, caroling, and they are surrounded by those they love, and a lot of those movies have the main couple falling in love. But real life is often much different. We have families in strife. Financial struggles that make gift giving a burden rather than a celebration. Family members who live too far away to visit, or maybe they live too close to appreciate. And then there are all those obligations, parties, shopping, baking, cooking. As Matt Anderson M.D. stated: "Personal circumstances mock 'It's a Wonderful Life.'" You might find yourself stating as did the author of Psalm 42:5: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior, and my God."

Look, I am not making light of "holiday blues" or the deep depression that some struggle with on a consistent basis. But what I do want you to know is that you are not alone. David, the writer of Psalm tells us that even he, (the apple of God's eye) struggled with depression. David also wrote, "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me." Psalms 69:1,2. If you relate to these feelings, I recommend you speak with your doctor. I believe depression affects people's minds, bodies, and spirits. So, seek medical care, take steps to be healthy in body – exercise, eat right, get sleep, and seek spiritual renewal. Prayer, ask for forgiveness, plead for God's presence to be made real to you, seek wise counsel, and most of all remember that you are not alone. depression, holiday blues, melancholy, or whatever name you give it happens to the saved and unsaved alike. You have not failed. In fact, it was these very emotions of despair and loneliness for which Christ, the Word of God, was sent to earth spoken in syllabus of flesh and bone. It was to a world in darkness that the light of the world was sent.

Just maybe these holiday blues are not to be feared but to be embraced because they remind us that even now some 2000 years after Christ's arrival in a manger, we are still in need of his presence. We are still longing for his return and until that time we will continue to seek life abundant in a fallen world. We are not without hope, we are reminded of our need for a renewal of hope. That even now we need Christ's coming into the world. We need his peace. We need his joy. We need our appetites satisfied by the bread of life and our thirsts quenched with living water. And we need to be reminded that this world is not our home. Peter, a follower of Jesus once said: "Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul." 1 Peter 2:11-12. Seems to be a little bit of holiday blues reminds us that our true needs cannot be met in pretty wrapped packages, or delicious spreads of food, nor can they be totally met with a large number of relationships. After all Hebrews 13:14 puts it this way: "For this world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come."

I am not suggesting we should all be filled with despair this year, but rather that we seek to have loving compassion on those that do and recognize that we too should be looking toward the fullness of the kingdom of God coming in the return of the one who was sent to a manger so many years ago. "

Hope is the middle ground between a present reality and a future separation...hope rests on a secure reality but since it waits on a future resolution and since there is some living out yet to do it must be lived out – it is still a hope and must therefore be nurtured not simply held." One of the ways I am going

to nurture hope in my life is to act on my belief in God's goodness and love given in Jesus. I am going to select gifts and give them not because it is expected but because I want the receiver (my own family and friends as well as community children) to feel love in a tangible way. I will sing carols and praise songs not just when I feel like it but as a declaration that no matter what I am feeling I choose to praise God. I will help with the Feast of Sharing because I want all to know they are welcome at the table but for a thanksgiving feast and as a reminder of the Lord's great desire to sit at a table with his disciples. And I will attend Christmas services not as a prelude to Santa's arrival but out of deep and in sincere gratitude for the arrival of the Christ Child.