

“An Offering of Thoughts on Christmas”

(Rev. Wesley Bixby)

For two years, which means it is now officially a family tradition, we have the kids pose in front of the tree on Christmas morning before they can open any presents. I am convinced when this idea came into our minds the rational part of our brains must have been on shut down. Otherwise Gina and I would have known that the energy coursing through Ethan and Olivia's bodies of being seconds away from ripping off the wrapping paper simply could not somehow magically be contained for just a few minutes while I fidgeted with the camera and my inner Ansel Adams found expression in a Kodak moment. Nevertheless here is our effort from Friday morning.

Trees play such a central role in our Christmas time celebrations. On our trees hang a variety of ornaments and lights that attract our attention the moment we walk into the room if not for the sheer size of the tree but also because for eleven other months out of the year they simply are not there. There are also some famous trees woven into our culture. These include the Charlie Brown Christmas tree which I found out Target will sell you for the reasonable price of \$7.48, plus shipping and handling...quite a bargain. But perhaps even more iconic is the tree at Rockefeller Plaza in New York. The tradition of putting up this tree began in 1931 during the Depression when on Christmas Eve the workers who were building the center put up this tree and decorated it with cranberries, paper garland and even a few tin cans. And seventy-eight years later, here is the tree from this year. Not too much difference.

Trees fascinate us not only in the winter, not only during this sacred season, but throughout all the seasons. How many of us marveled a few weeks ago when the winter storm caused branches of trees to hang low against the weight of the snow, only to see now the limbs start to spring back to their original place as they are finally able to shrug off the white stuff. In the summer we stand beneath towering trees, reaching toward the skies causing us to crane our necks, straining to get a glimpse of the top. We drive long distances to stand in awe at this handiwork of the Creator and often feel small in comparison. Trees amaze us both for their size, but also their longevity. Here are two of oldest known trees in the world. This one springing forth in a desert, with no other tree around and the dry parched ground around it, you wonder how it survives. And this is a Bristle pine from the White Mountains in California we think dates back five thousand years, clinging to the rocks, twisted and timeless.

John tells us in the beginning all of creation sprung forth from the sweet sound of the sacred's voice. And we see the beauty of creation around us, even with a blanket of snow of this week or from trees that have weathered centuries and we sense often as we gaze upon all creation the interwoven, interconnectedness of life. Rob Bell points out in a video entitled, "Tree" that all of scripture happens between two trees: the tree of life in Genesis and the tree by the river of life in Revelation, the tree that is for the healing of the nations. God's activity in our world is found between two trees. And so, here is my leftover thought and invitation to you for 2010, that as we start to pack up our Christmas trees we would be motivated and moved to pull out our Bibles and engage in a journey between two trees. Throughout 2010, I and hopefully a few other brave souls will covenant to read the Bible from beginning to end...not alone, but side by side, together. On the back on the insert from Bryan is a bit more information for you to ponder prayerfully this week if you'd like to take this leap of faith

along with me. To be honest, I offer this invitation with some trepidation knowing it will not be easy. Life gets busy and setting aside time to read scripture always sounds like such a good idea, but trying to put that good intention into practice takes effort and more importantly it longs for support. I figure if we do this together, we can hold each other accountable, offer grace when the pace of life is too frantic, and above all offer the support we need so we can take the journey between the two trees of scripture. Friends, I pray that no matter what resolutions you might write down on Thursday this week, one on the list would challenge and stretch and be centered in response to the One who invites us to follow him, the One who is the light of our world, the One who is the Word made flesh, Christ who is born anew for us right here and right now. God's blessings and grace surround you now and as 2010 dawns in our midst this week.