

I love doing our Christmas in July service. I always need it. Like by time we get to June by time we get through June, I'm so frustrated with the world. I'm so frustrated with people because we have so much negativity. We have so much blame, pointing at everybody else. It gets tiring. It gets tiring fast, so I love doing this because it helps me remember the good, The good that's out there. One of my friends watched last week. He wasn't real happy. He thought I was talking about him. I wasn't, so I asked him well. What makes you think that I was talking about you and all, he said, was, you know. I'm like, all right? Well, I'm going to talk about you this week then. So he's prepped. He's prepared. I asked him, what is your favorite holiday? And he said, well, when I was a kid, it was Christmas, but now I would have to go with Halloween.

That's pretty common. You ask adults a lot of them, say Halloween. Some of them say Thanksgiving. They like Thanksgiving because it's like Christmas, but without the pressure. I am like, I can accept that. So, I asked him what made him change. What made him change from Christmas to Halloween? And he said he has great fond memories of Christmas as a kid. Remembers going to church on Christmas Eve in his pajamas, falling asleep and waking up the next morning with presents and singing that Santa had been there. As he got older, he still loved Christmas. He knew it made everybody happy. He knew he'd walk into his church, and everybody would be happy to see him. They'd be great to see him. It'd be fantastic time for him. He knew that if he walked down the street, people would be nice to him. People would say Merry Christmas or happy holidays. He liked that. He liked that sense of fellowship that came with Christmas. Now, he doesn't get that.

I asked him why he doesn't get that. What changed in his life that he doesn't see that anymore? Well, his first response. was nothing's changed in my life. The world's changed. Everybody out there is against him, not his fault. So, I asked him to explain a little bit more because I know he's not the only one feeling that way right now. And he said, well, people judge him. They don't like the way he dresses. They don't like the way you talk. They don't like some of the things that he does in his private life. I asked him why. I asked him if he likes those things about him. At first, he said, of course, and he started to explain to me why. He started to tell me the things he liked about himself and none of those things that he liked about himself were the things that he said people don't like about him. In fact, what he said he didn't like about himself were the things that other people said they didn't like about him.

So, I asked him, why don't you change? If you don't like these things about you? And these are the things that push you away from everything, why do you keep doing them? It's easy. It's easy to keep doing those things over and over because he's already been doing them. He doesn't want to change.

We were out having coffee when we were having this conversation. And as we stood up to leave, three people said hello to me. We walked out to the street, and another five people said hello to me as we were walking down the sidewalk. And he says, you know, a lot of people. I'm like, I do. But I don't know a single one of them. I don't know anybody of the eight people that just said hello to me. He's like so why then did they say hello to you. Like, it's easy. I like myself. I like where I'm at in the world, and I love doing God's work. What are three big things right there that we can all do every day because I didn't always like myself. There's a very long time I didn't like myself. There's a very long time where I didn't like God. And during that time in my life, I didn't like Christmas. And I realized that's the difference. I fought with God. I fought with myself. I didn't accept the parts of the world that were beautiful around me. I focused on the

negative. I forgot about hope. Forgot about love. I forgot that was joy, and there was never peace in me.

When I finally accepted one day that I needed to change, I needed to become a better person for me, that made a big difference. Many of us have those moments where we think I don't like who I am, and we change. Life becomes better, doesn't necessarily become easier, but it becomes better.

Today's reading is about that being better. We talk about shepherds a lot, especially in Bible study lately. And Shepherds were the lowest people in that time, They were hard workers. They didn't have a lot. Generally. probably had poor social skills. People didn't like them so, why would they be, the ones that God chose to announce the birth of Christ? The hard question: We think back to Christmas as we're children. We think of the manger. I wasn't putting the manger out today. I'm sorry. But we think about the sheep, right? We think about how cute they are, especially when we do the pageant and the kids are just running around in those sheep hats and baaing the whole time, like their favorite part of doing the pageant.

We think about that. We think about the shepherds who are herding those little sheep trying to get them to slow down for a second. What else do we think about those shepherds? They were alone. They are alone in the field and an angel came down and told them how great the world is going to become, how the changes were going to happen. And not just one angel. But in today's reading, we heard a whole chorus came in. A whole group of angels came and opened up the heavens and said to the shepherds, glory to God in the highest.

They told all of them.. They didn't tell the king. They didn't tell the Pharisees. They didn't go to the synagogues and tell them. They were out in the middle of nowhere, telling these people who were alone. They gave them voice. They gave them power. They gave them an opportunity to be something greater than they saw in themselves because God does that. God sees more in us than we see in ourselves. God gives us the opportunity to be greater. They give us the opportunity to share love and wisdom with people that normally get looked down upon. People that don't like the life that they have. The people that choose to stay there.

How do we be that chorus of angels? How can we go and share God's love with people and let them know that God sees more in them than they can see themselves?

When my friend asked me why those people said hi to me, I can see the look on his face. Obviously. But I could hear it. I could hear his mind thinking what makes him so different than me? Because I was out in my ugly Hawaiian shirt, my khaki shorts, my flip flops. Okay, not flip flops, they're sandals.. But still, I didn't look any different than him. He was in a suit. He had a tie. He looked impressive. Not one person said anything to him.

I invited him here today. I didn't expect him to show. I hope he's watching again because every day should be Christmas in our hearts. Every day, we should share God's love in a way to remind people that there's hope in the world, that there is peace, that there's joy, and that there is love.

That is why I loved today because I needed it. I needed to be reminded because I spent so much time with others, making me forget that it's a wonderful place we really live in. Not necessarily here on Earth, but here in our hearts. Where God wrote those four words. Where God took the time to remind me how important I am, and remind me about how important all of you are too. Because in my mind, we are that choir of angels. We are individuals yelling into the night. We are a chorus singing about love. Let us pray.