

I don't know if you've heard about it, but this week RAGBRAI is coming through town. I'm not sure how you could have missed it, but according to Facebook, there are a number of people that haven't been keeping up on what is going on. This should be a time of celebration and the community coming together to show everyone going through town how great we are.

Unfortunately that isn't how the majority of people on social media are acting. Now, I'm not saying everyone, Karen for example came to the defense of the RAGBRAI committee and what they are doing. But there appears to be a lot more people saying negative comments about what is going on then there are saying positive comments about it. And whether you agree with it or not, it is happening and there will be more people in town on Wednesday than most of us have seen in one setting.

I've been going to meetings and trying to come up with ideas for what we can do this week to join in the celebration. I've spoken with so many people getting insight about their thoughts on RAGBRAI. And I can honestly say that I cannot wait until Thursday.

You see, I've been involved in all aspects of events like this. No, I haven't ridden in RAGBRAI. But I was a vendor when they came through town in 1994. I've been a vendor at other events like this in Kansas City. I helped organize parts of at that time one of the largest kite festivals in the US. And I've walked around events that were this size. And in all of that I can tell you that there is one consistency in all of those events, you can't make everyone happy.

Someone is always going to be upset. It doesn't matter. I did an event where we gave away free gelato for the entire event. We didn't charge anything; we didn't ask for donations. We were a sponsor and just wanted to get something cool to people in the middle of July. I got yelled at because we didn't have a flavor that they wanted, or we didn't have chocolate chips or sprinkles for their gelato.

Well, I got to the point that I hated working big events like this. I knew someone was going to come and yell at me. I knew nothing I did was going to be good enough for most of the people there. I was down on myself the second I got in my car before I even left my house. It was miserable.

So, one day I'm driving the food truck to this event in the middle of Kansas. I've got no radio on the truck, so I'm listening to a random shuffle on my Amazon music and it starts playing Christmas music. And the next thing I know, I'm singing along.

Well, I get to our destination and I keep playing Christmas music while I'm setting up. And people start coming to the window and I notice that people are standing in line singing with the Christmas carols.

That isn't hard to believe when you are doing events in December, but this was midAugust. It was one of the hottest days that summer. So, from that day forward, I would listen to Christmas music before really big events, because who is in a bad mood at Christmas time?

And that is why I wanted to do a Christmas in July service this week. Yes, it probably would have made more sense to talk about Jesus feeding the five thousand. But, that seems a little on the nose for this week.

So often, we only celebrate the season of Christmas around Christmas. Sometimes we might carry it into Epiphany, but we definitely have stopped celebrating when we get to Lent. Why do we do that? Why do we stop sharing God's love as much as we do during Advent and Christmas? Shouldn't we be celebrating his love more the rest of the year, because so many people have forgotten about it?

I keep getting asked why I do what I do? Why do I try to feed people, when Jesus didn't? Why do I accept people that Paul said to turn away from? Why do I waste my time on people that won't follow me?

I don't see what I do as wasting my time. I love that every week I get to come and spend my time in fellowship with all of you. My critics do not consider this a waste of my time. They are talking about the rest of my time. The Food For Kids program, doing events for the Lions Club, providing pastoral care for people that aren't members of our church. I'm not wasting my time, I'm sharing God's love.

God loves us so much that he gave us his only son. When Jesus was born, God didn't make a grand spectacle about it. Jesus wasn't delivered in a grand hospital. They didn't stay in an extravagant hotel. He was born in a stable, they slept in a barn with animals. But God made certain that the regular people knew.

He sent an angel to tell the shepherds. As we heard in today's reading, the angel told the shepherds the good news, the messiah was born. The angel told them where to find Jesus and to see the miracle that God had created. The shepherds went and saw him, and then they sang his praises to everyone that would listen.

The shepherds were the first to spread the good news. They shared what they had seen and what the angel had told them. They helped spread God's love. They took the birth of Christ, Christmas, and continued to share his love.

They didn't stop when they left Bethlehem. They didn't keep the news to themselves because they felt others weren't worthy of knowing. No, they shared the story. They shared God's love.

My favorite hymn reminds us about how we need to share the season of Christmas all year round. The title, "I am the Light of the World" is taken from John 8:12. Jesus says, I am the light of the world, and whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. But it is also based on the poem, The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman.

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.

That is what Christmas means. That is how we share God's love. We find the lost, heal the broken, feed the hungry, bring peace to the people.

God gave us his love not so that we can hold it and keep it for ourselves. Not so that we bicker amongst ourselves and exclude others because we think that they are different from us. He gave us his son, so that we could learn how to live a righteous life and how to appropriately express God's love. And the best way to do it is to share God's love and keep Christmas in our hearts and actions all year long.

**God, our Creator, we offer this humble prayer remembering Christmas in July. We come to worship with a song of thanks in our hearts—a song of redemption, a song of hope and renewal. We pray for joy in our hearts, hope in our God, love to forgive, and peace upon the earth. We ask for the salvation of all our family members and friends, and we pray your blessings on all people. May there be bread for the hungry, love for the unlovable, healing for the sick, protection for our children, and wisdom for our youth. We pray for the forgiveness of sinners and abundant life in Christ. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love and power. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen**