

Go Tell It

A Sermon by Rev. Katherine Schofield

December 29, 2019

The spiritual "Go Tell It on the Mountain" has come to mean many things depending on the time and place in which it is sung. Freedom anthem, hymn of faith, a simple song of Christmas. As is the case with most spirituals, its music and lyrics cannot be attributed to any one person. African-American composer John Wesley Work is credited with formally adapting the song and including it in a songbook in 1907. But the versions of "Go Tell It on the Mountain" are as varied and distinctive as the people performing it. The lyrics have been adapted and re-adapted and personalized countless times. And it is always, at its heart, a celebration.

The Angels' announcement to the shepherds – of Good News! Great Joy! That a Savior had been born for them – must have reverberated with hope for the enslaved people who created this song. It is one of the miracles of Christmas that this Good News of Jesus, of love and liberation for all people, would be proclaimed from on high to the shepherds, people who were of the lowest social class, who had no claims of property or status, and no hope of escaping their lot. This Good News was for them – that a savior had been born. It was the same Good News heard in the fields of the South - a promise of liberation, of hope and of God's breaking in to the world. Good News – Great Joy – Worthy of a song. We sing the song "Go, Tell it on the Mountain" each Christmas Season and it's a crowd-pleaser. We really get going for "Go, Tell it on the Mountain" because the Good News, the Great Joy -- is for us as well. It bubbles up within us, this feeling that God's love is real, and is for us, and is made real in the gift of Jesus Christ. And we do feel like shouting...

Praise God! Praise God from the heavens and in the highest heights! Praise God you angels, all the host
And the sun and the moon and all the shining stars, every animal, even the sea creatures of the deep
that we've not discovered yet, trees, and rocks, rivers and mountains be glad and shout the Good News!

I think it's fair to say that Christmas is the peak – the pinnacle of our worship year. Yes, I know Easter is a close rival, and I think what I'm about to say next applies to Easter as well. I find that after the excitement and exuberance of Christmas I naturally experience a bit of post-celebration funk. Perhaps all of my endorphins have been fired and my brain just needs a rest. Or maybe the twinkle lights can hold back the dark of a winter's evening for only so long. At times, like Charlie Brown, I get frustrated with the commercialism of it all and how Christmas feels so very disposable – like after the paper is torn off of all the packages and thrown in the trash we're supposed to move on to the next New Year's Eve Party or even start stock piling candy hearts for February. All that build up to the one day and then – the letdown. This is why I am particularly grateful for Christmastide.

As we know from another of our favorite Christmas Songs there are actually 12 days of Christmas, not just the one. All the way from December 25th to Epiphany on January 6th we are called to celebrate Christmas. While I admit that it would be challenging to celebrate Christmas like we do on the 25th every day of Christmastide, I do think this season encourages us to think about what makes Christmas Christmas. Is it the presents? Or gathering with family? Or going to church?

The answer for me comes from my favorite Christmas Movie – no not It's a Wonderful Life, or Rudolph or even Die Hard. My favorite is the Muppet Christmas Carol, truly the most theologically profound Christmas film of our day. At the center of the film – which is an adaptation of the Charles

Dicken's original – is a song, sung by the Ghost of Christmas Present, which seeks to explain to Scrooge what Christmas is all about. “A cup of kindness that we share with another. A sweet reunion with a friend or a brother. In all the places you find love. It feels like Christmas!” It is true – Christmas is when Jesus Christ, the embodiment of love, is born into the world. Whenever we show kindness, when we create room for love, Christmas comes again.

And, as the song continues, the true message of Christmas is to let it last all year – to keep making room for kindness and keep sharing love in the world. And the love we find, and the love we share, we carry with us wherever we go.

The season of Christmastide reminds us that Christmas is not only one day, that we are called to make it last – all year if we possibly can. To show kindness and cultivate love in the world. And one way we do that is by telling the stories.

Christmastide is a challenge – to “Go Tell It”. Have you experienced the love of God, liberation from what binds you, a hope rooted in something bigger than yourself! Go Tell it! Tell your mom! Tell your dog! Do you know that forgiveness is real? Tell your friend who is trapped by shame. Do you believe that the Good News is for every person, from the poorest shepherd to the most powerful dictator? Go tell it!

Look – most of the noise out there, what gets most of the air time – is bad news – of rich get richer, of power corrupting absolutely, of selfishness and hollow honor and money as proof of success –

But we have a different story to tell – one of a vulnerable baby who would turn the world on its head, a story of weakness as true strength, of a selfless love that cannot be stamped out but instead grows as we share it. We have a story – oh what a story – and we've got to tell it. Because there are so many who hunger for just a bit of Good News, a glimmer of hope, a whisper of justice. And we have a song to sing, of a people who once lived in bondage, but sang a song of liberation – who could shout a promise of Good News from a mountaintop never knowing that the echo would return generations later from a world that had made just a bit more room for love.

May our voices rise in singing praises to God, echoing joyous strains, that in our song and in our living we might celebrate Christmas each and every day.