

LET'S NOT PUT THIS AWAY

With Christmas now over and the new year upon us we are beginning to see people putting things away. I was reminded of this after seeing several real Christmas trees being put out at the side of the road for pick up when I walked our dog Daisy on New Year's Day. That meant these people had to put away the ornaments that once decorated those trees and the gifts that once were placed under them. I do not know if these people put away the rest of their Christmas decorations at the same time as they were doing the tree, but it makes sense if they did.

We have an artificial tree, so we have not put away any of our decorations yet. That will probably be on our list of things to do this weekend. It's not just our trees and decorations that we put away at this time of year. Soon we will be putting away singing the songs we love during the Christmas season. We may also put away some of our favourite memories of Christmas and hope to remember them next year. We may also put away our Christmas spirit that has touched our hearts in this season and we might replace it with the usual feelings that arise as our lives return to normal day to day living. The only reminders some may soon have of Christmas are when their Visa or Mastercard bills come in, or if the Hallmark channel continues to show some of their movies about this season.

With the new year here, as we begin to put away our Christmas decorations and related items, some people may also put away all thoughts of Christ now that Christmas is over and never think about Him again until Easter or next December. I hope this is something we are not doing at this time of year. We just have to focus on the Good Friday story to be reminded of what happens when we try to put our belief in Jesus away for any period of time.

In three months, our attention will be drawn toward Good Friday and Easter Sunday. After Jesus died on the cross that day, His body was taken down and given to Joseph of Arimathea. With the help of Nicodemus, Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. Every one of Jesus' followers thought that He had now been put away and would never be seen again. The religious leaders felt Jesus had been put away as well and would never have to be dealt with again. Even Satan felt Jesus had

been put away and believed he still had the power over us when it came to fear of death. It is interesting to see the impact it had on Jesus' followers when they felt He had been put away for good after His death:

- Peter struggled with guilt for having denied knowing Jesus three times the night before.
- Judas took his own life dealing with the reality he had betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders.
- Thomas was filled with doubts after the death of Jesus which continued after the resurrection until he could see Him with his own eyes.
- Mary Magdalene was grieving deeply and when she saw the tomb was empty on that Sunday morning thought at first somebody had stolen Jesus' body.
- The rest of Jesus' disciples and followers were struggling with grief, and also with fear and uncertainty.

Jesus' followers believed after His death that He had been put away for good and would never be seen again. We can clearly see the negative impact this belief had on them. This is why I say that putting our focus on Jesus away after the season of Christmas can be one of the biggest mistakes we make. **As we return to our daily routines in this new year, feelings of grief, doubt, fear, uncertainty, and guilt can come upon us at various times.** These examples from Scripture remind us how hard it is for us to deal with these emotions **if we leave Jesus out of the picture.** When Jesus rose back to life on that Sunday morning, we see the impact it had on these same individuals:

- Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus after He rose back to life and her grief was replaced with joy.
- The disciples saw Jesus in the upper room that Sunday night and their fear and uncertainty was replaced with peace in their hearts.
- Thomas' earlier doubts were replaced with faith and belief eight days later.
- Peter's feeling of guilt turned to forgiveness thanks to Jesus.

As we see from these examples **Jesus is a true difference maker.** His birth and coming into the world to be our Saviour made the difference about why we celebrate December 25th each year. His death and resurrection made the

difference for why we no longer fear death and are no longer separated from God due to our sins. Jesus' presence in our life also makes the difference in helping us to turn any negative feelings we are experiencing into being at peace once again. We have put Jesus at the forefront of our lives during these past several weeks. Let's make sure that as we put our Christmas decorations away, we do not put our love and need for Jesus away with them.

I hope each and every one of us will have a blessed and joyful 2023.

Keep Safe and God Bless,

Pastor Dean