

## **IT IS BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS**

I still remember this one November 1st very well. I was working as an accountant at the time and stopped into the food court at the mall to grab a coffee on my way to work. It was 8:45 a.m. and the mall was already decorated for the Christmas season. What shocked me was how just the day before the mall had all of its Halloween decorations up as I grabbed my morning coffee. From the time the mall closed on October 31st until it reopened on November 1st staff were busy taking down Halloween decorations and replacing them with their Christmas ones.

That was probably 25 years or more ago. Today we do not have to wait until Halloween ends to see signs of Christmas. I noticed by mid-October the Dollar Store I shop at already had their aisle of Christmas decorations on display. The W Network started showing some of their Hallmark Christmas movies a few weeks ago. I received a few catalogues during October showing items that might be purchased from their store for Christmas.

Now that Halloween has passed, we will see even more signs that Christmas is coming soon. It won't be long before we hear Christmas music being played on the radio, or in stores while shopping. Soon we will be hearing about Santa Claus parades taking place, or when children can expect to find him in the mall to sit on his knee. If we have not already done so we will be making our Christmas gift list and asking others to come up with theirs.

Advent and Christmas services are fast approaching and ministers like me are already busily planning ahead. After the American Thanksgiving we will be seeing more of our favourite Christmas shows and movies being aired on television. In a few weeks I will see my neighbour's Christmas lights and decorations on display when I walk my dog around the block. Despite the warm temperatures of late and the fact we still have leaves in our trees and many more on the ground it is starting to look a lot like Christmas.

It is during this time of year we are sometimes asked if we are feeling in the Christmas spirit. Our answer to this question usually depends on whether we are feeling cheerful, excited, and happy as we get closer to celebrating the birth of Christ with family and friends. Our emotions can swing and vary so much in the days and weeks leading up to Christmas. The direction our

emotions are swinging in determines whether we are feeling the Christmas spirit, or are overwhelmed due to the stresses of this time of year. I know for some people it is not until Christmas Eve or Christmas Day itself that they finally feel like they can relax and enjoy being in the spirit of this season.

Ten months have passed since we last experienced the Christmas spirit. Certain things could have taken place in our lives during this time frame that might be affecting our emotions with respect to feeling cheerful and happy right now. We might be experiencing:

- financial worries we did not have ten months ago due to inflation and rising prices,
- grief and sadness approaching our first Christmas without a certain loved one's presence,
- a health issue we were not dealing with last Christmas,
- a broken relationship that was not part of the family dynamics last Christmas,
- depression or anxiety that was not affecting our well-being last year,
- a lack of optimism seeing how much has changed in our world over the past ten months.

If we have experienced some of these changes during the past ten months, we may not be feeling as cheerful and happy as we normally do when the Christmas season arrives. If realities like these are beginning to affect our ability to be in the Christmas spirit this year, I think ***we need to be asking Jesus to reignite His Spirit within our hearts so that we can enjoy this coming season.***

One of the gifts we are given as Christians is having the Holy Spirit live within our hearts once we give our lives to Jesus and start following Him. Something the Holy Spirit does for us while residing in our hearts is to produce some of the same character traits in us that we admire about Christ. The apostle Paul brings this out in **Galatians 5:22-23** when he writes:

**But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.**

Paul goes on in Galatians to tell us the only way we can develop these admirable traits is by joining our lives to Christ in a way that we truly get to know Him, and by following His Spirit's leading in our lives. Perhaps the trying circumstances we have endured during these past ten months have caused us to pull a bit away from Jesus' Spirit leading us, or maybe they have extinguished the joy, hope, and cheerfulness we once carried. If we leave our hearts in this condition, we will miss out on the joy and cheerfulness that comes with being in the spirit of the Christmas season.

If our spirits are struggling right now emotionally, physically or spiritually let's not wait until Christmas Eve to try and find cheerfulness and happiness. ***Let's start today by asking Jesus to help us reignite His Spirit within our heart so we too will be able to have joy, peace, love, and happiness regardless of the circumstances we are dealing with in this season.*** When Jesus does this for us, we will realize we have just been given our first gift in this Christmas season.

It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas now that Halloween is over. If something over these past ten months has robbed us of the spirit of this season, let's give ourselves ***the gift of Jesus' help to replenish our hearts with an abundance of His love, guidance, and joy.***

***Enjoy this season ahead.***

***Keep Safe and God Bless***

***Pastor Dean***