Reflections on God's Love as We Enter the New Year

So, here we are nearly a week into the Christmas season and just beginning a new year. Though the secular world tells us Christmas is over, the church celebrates Christmas as a season. At the heart of this season is Jesus, who reminds us how much God loves us. God's love for us is eternal, constant and steadfast. "Steadfast love" is a phrase used throughout the Bible. In the Psalms alone, this phrase is used at least 119 times. Each time this phrase is used, the reference is to God's love for God's people. The Hebrew word is "heshed" and always refers to love in the context of the covenant between God and the people of God. This "heshed" which God has for us is a sign of God's fidelity to us, the people of God.

In light of the transitory and disposable nature of our society, I want to reflect on the nature of God's steadfast love for us, which is the core of the Christmas message. What does the steadfast love of God mean and how might we respond to it? The phrase "I love you" is tossed around quite a bit in our culture. Yet, so often there are many strings and conditions attached to those words. "If you do this; when you do that, I will love you." We all have either said this or heard it said to us. The "love" of the world and, unfortunately, the love we are able to give through our own power, is conditional. It can, and will be, withdrawn with little or no warning.

God's love, on the other hand, is steadfast and constant. Consider how that truth, and I do believe it is true, can change us. We all long for love, acceptance and comfort. In order to receive these things, however, more often than not, we have to earn them. If we are good enough, smart enough, clever enough, etc. we will be loved and accepted. If these are the messages that we live our lives hearing, is it any wonder that we pass the same messages along to those around us? The core message of God's truth to us, however, is "my steadfast love endures forever..." (see Psalm 136). Knowing that the love of God—the creator of the universe—is extended to us, and will never be taken away, can be a sustaining and encouraging presence in our lives. With this truth imbedded in our hearts we can love others in a more steadfast manner.

My problem, and I suspect yours as well, is that I have trouble planting this truth into my heart. I have trouble loving as God loves. If we want to change, however, our first step should be to pray for God to put that truth in our hearts. The next step (and this takes time and effort) is to begin to develop "holy habits." Commit yourself to spending time in prayer and the reading of scripture. Make it a habit to be in the presence of this God who assures us that his love endures forever. Spend time with other believers—those who are also seeking to develop "holy habits." Finally, spend time worshipping this God. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for worship translate as "to bow down or serve." As we serve this God who loves us, we are empowered to love others in that same steadfast and unconditional way. Let us seek to love each other as our Lord God loves us. God's Blessings and Peace to you this Christmas season,

Robert
**Worship**

Sunday, January 4, 2015, The Second Sunday after Christmas

Today’s readings are: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 84; Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

The Flowers on the altar are placed to the glory of God and in loving memory of

*Barbara T. Nichols*

given by N. R. Nichols, Ill

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8:00 am Holy Eucharist: Rite I
The Rev. Robert Childers will preach.

*Ushers:* Lex Tarumianz, Doug Warner
*Chalice Bearer:* Molly Adams
*Lay Reader:* Lex Tarumianz
*Vestry Greeter:* Alex Bohner

9:15 Christian Formation
Lectionary Study, Library
Bringing it Home, Lupton Reading Room
Shepherd’s Study, Youth Building

10:30 am Holy Eucharist: Rite II
The Rev. Robert Childers will preach.

*Ushers:* David White, Donny Armstrong, Tommy Dickinson, Wejun Robinson
*Lay Readers:* Gordon Davenport, Krista Stein, May Wood
*Chalice Bearers:* Wejun Robinson, Anna Kent, Har Harwell, Charlie Brock
*Verger:* Ben Probasco
*Acolyte Master:* Wilson von Kessler

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**ANNUAL PARISH MEETING JANUARY 11, 2015**

Sunday, January 11 at 9:15 a.m., between the two services, we will have our annual parish meeting. We will welcome our new vestry members Mike Costello, Carol Martin, Jeremy McDowell, & Martha Westbrook, and say thank you to the outgoing servants, Alex Bohner, Ed Henson, Susie McGinness, & Susan Probasco. Rector Robert Childers will offer a “state of the parish” address, treasurer Keith Sanford will provide an update on the financials and the staff will deliver brief updates on church programs. Please come to hear and be heard.

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** придение света, суббота, 4 января 2015 г., 10:30 утра Eucharist: Rite II The Rev. Robert Childers will preach.

*Ushers:* David White, Donny Armstrong, Tommy Dickinson, Wejun Robinson
*Lay Readers:* Gordon Davenport, Krista Stein, Mary Wood
*Chalice Bearers:* Wejun Robinson, Anna Kent, Har Harwell, Charlie Brock
*Verger:* Ben Probasco
*Acolyte Master:* Wilson von Kessler

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**THE GOOD SHEPHERD YOUTH ARE HITTING THE SLOPES**

WHEN: March 6-8, 2015
WHERE: Sugar Mountain Resort
COST: $185

The cost includes two nights lodging at Blue Ridge Village Condos, and one-day lift and ski/snowboard rental, plus helmet rental and/or a lesson if you choose. We will prepare our own meals since we will have full kitchens in the condos. The deadline for signing up is MONDAY, JANUARY 12.

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**Prayers of Concern**

Phyllis, Sissy, Fran, Tina, Robert K., Brendan, Marty K., Kate Grovesnor, Wade, Tom, Sarah, Carl W., Ellen, Lou & Sue, Bob A., Ginny T., Lynn, Susie, Jim K., Linda H., Chris B., Caiti S., Pat Wiedmer, Debbie, Carter, Christie Wright, Anne Hall, Grace S., Nick Nichols, Brian Smith, Noah O’Brien, for peace throughout the world; those serving in our Armed Forces, especially Bailey, Michael, Cole, Judd, Hunter; for all those suffering in the world.

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**Save the Date! Sacred Studies Workshop, Jan 16-17: Life is a Dream: A Creative Exploration of Body and Soul.** Diana McCombree will speak Friday, January 16, 5:30-7 pm, at The Center for Mindful Living ($30) and Saturday, January 17, 9 am – 3 pm, at the Church of the Good Shepherd ($50, includes lunch). Participants will engage in a series of enlightening exercises to gain a deeper understanding of their dreams, gifts and yearnings. There will be an opportunity to explore the images, affirmations and inherited limiting imprints while integrating prayers, dreams and spiritual beliefs. Come feed your soul! Contact Kathleen@gslookout.com for more information.

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**Clergy on Call: The Rev. Robert Childers is available for pastoral emergencies:** c 423-463-4397

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**Sunday School/Christian Formation, January 18, 2015**

Adult, Youth and Children’s Christian Formation resume January 19 at 9:15 a.m. Make it a resolution for the new year to come to Sunday school -- and get your kids there, too! (They can’t do it themselves...). A program for preschool through 5th grade children will be available in the library during the Annual Meeting this Sunday. (Older kids welcome to help out.)