



# Christ United Methodist Church

*Creating committed Christ-followers for the transformation of the world.*

Matthew 3: 1-12

Romans 15: 4-13

Rev. Elizabeth Macauley

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## **“Peace”**

I want to share a story told by William Muehl (From *Why Preach? Why listen?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pg. 82).

One December afternoon . . . a group of parents stood in the lobby of a nursery school waiting to claim their children after the last pre-Christmas class session.

As the children ran from their lockers, each one carried in his or her hands the “surprise,” the brightly wrapped package on which he or she had been working diligently for weeks. One small boy, trying to run, put on his coat and wave to his parents at the same time, slipped and fell.

The “surprise” flew from his grasp., landed on the floor and broke with an obvious ceramic crash.

The child . . . began to cry unconsolably.

His father, trying to minimize the incident and comfort the boy, patted his head and murmured, “Now, that’s all right son. It doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t matter at all.”

But the child’s mother, somewhat wiser in such situations, swept the boy into her arms and said,

“Oh, but it does matter. It matters a great deal.”

And she wept with her son.

The apostle Paul calls us to “welcome one another, just as Christ welcomes us”.

Welcome means that we see the Christ in each other - that spark of God that lives within the other.

And, welcome means that we see and know to be real the Christ within ourselves. Within our own often frustrating and far from perfect selves.

I want to share with you a definition of faith that boggles me every time I encounter it:

Theologian Paul Tillich says that faith is the courage to accept acceptance.

Faith is the courage to accept acceptance, to accept welcome.

Faith is the courage to allow that we are accepted by God as we ARE, not as we think we SHOULD be. Faith is allowing God to love us.

Faith is the courage to put down all the heart and soul barriers we put up - you know the ones I mean. The internal sense we walk with that somehow, we are such damaged goods that God could not conceive of loving us until we are nicer better smarter kinder holier people.

To accept that God accepts us is one of the most profound surrenders we can practice.

Will we allow ourselves to surrender to God's acceptance?

God welcomes us.

The world swirls around us. Challenges are real. We fall down and we get back up again and things we treasure are broken into smithereens and our God does not seek to still our tears by telling us it really doesn't matter, it really doesn't matter at all.

What God does is hold us when our dreams shatter or our hearts break or when we will not surrender to God's acceptance of us.

It does matter. It matters a great deal.

My friends, let us adopt in this season of Advent the spiritual practice of accepting that we are accepted.

And as we accept our acceptance, we are able to accept that others are accepted.

That kind of surrender can change our lives and our weeping world.

May it be so.

May it be so.

Amen