



It was freshman year of college when I started to cave into the possibility of this whole pastor thing. And so, when my home congregation got wind of the news, it was in their esteemed wisdom to immediately place me in the slot for the readings on Christmas Eve. But that was the night we pulled out our Sunday best times a thousand: our most majestic choral anthems, the most hospitable greeters at the door, our serene candlelight, and yes, the best lector from our whole lineup. So, as long as I could remember, one man always filled the essential role that night. He was a towering figure in the community, not just figuratively, but literally, too: with a tall, seemingly intimidating, stature. And it just so happened that he was the former director for the local illustrious high school marching band. Not only that, but he had this voice that sounded like it was destined for the narrator of the Mormon Tabernacle Christmas special that appeared on PBS every December 25.

However, for the days leading up to that December 24, I had this recurring dream: that, when I walked up to the lectern, the words were not there; as if I was supposed to have them memorized or something, as if I wasn't prepared enough for my Christmas Eve best to make my fellow siblings in Christ, who knew me since birth, incredibly proud. Instead, I failed miserably with my panic-stricken deer-in-the-headlights look. I had ruined what was supposed to be our most holy night. That dream, actually that nightmare, made me wonder if I was not ready not just for a December 24 lector slot, but any preaching on any future Sunday going forward.

Now, thankfully, in real life, the overwhelming majority of communities of faith are blessed with gifted and *organized* parish administrators, as we are with Lori here at Divinity, and so everything went just fine. I'm sure I wasn't quite to the level of the Mormon Tabernacle Christmas special narrator, but it went just fine. And it turned out that the dream brought to life on a most holy night long ago was not about me speaking clearly or prophetically from the lectern or the hospitality level of the greeters by the door or the soothing brightness of the candles lining the pews. The dream had already been taken care of by a not-so-towering figure.

The psalmist speaks of a dream being fulfilled long ago, leading to joy and laughter. A dream brought to life when so many felt incredibly hopeless, including wondering if God had just flat-out given up on them. And far too many will wonder the same thing this week as they approach what is meant to be the majestic serenity of December 24 and 25. And yet, those two often most chaotic days can feel like a towering intimidating force, not just from God, but from family and friends. Sometimes we feel as if we must master the art of finding the perfect gift for our loved ones. Or we better write the most uplifting card to put in the mail. Or we better maximize our kitchen tools to craft the best meal to feed a houseful. There's so much that must be done, so many slots of love to fill, so many expectations to reach in making this the happiest time of year for others to enjoy. It can feel so incredibly draining, wondering where is all the hope and majesty that this week and beyond is meant to bring into our life.

Except, God insists that the dream has already come true. The dream of a world, of an eternity, that is not dependent on how much time we spend scrolling through websites or up-and-down merchandise aisles to find just the right something or if we pick the perfect cover image and inside message of a Hallmark creation or if we cater the greatest holiday meal ever imaginable. The dream that God's love and constant grace-filled presence is not contingent on how well we pull off the next week or any other time in our life: that dream has already come true in Jesus Christ.

Granted, that doesn't mean we can't try to pull off not just our Sunday best, but our daily best in showing a bit more love and grace and compassion to all children of God, regardless of how well they celebrate December 24 or 25. But if, for whatever reason, you don't have it in you this year; if, for whatever reason, there comes the day or days when you don't think you have much love to share at all, the Gospel remains that there is more than enough in Jesus Christ. And there will be more than enough to bring the Good News, to bring the dream of all humanity to life not just next weekend, but today, and every day. Yes, this season of Advent will remind us that the dream of a full-scale restoration of hope and peace and the most serene tranquility is not quite there yet, to say the least, but there is still more than enough for us to experience the most holy glimpse of it right here, right now. That, through it all, nothing can happen in this life to separate us from that relentless love in Jesus Christ, our Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!