

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Christmas, Jan. 4, 2015

I was fortunate after Xmas to be camping, in a national park, in the Caribbean. (There is one on St. John Is.) Two generations of my family were on one side of a shared campground; and *three* generations of a family were across the way. As we made coffee, or dinner, or sat around during the day, we inevitably noticed each other, waved when going by, and shared greetings.

On their side, two grandparents, and two parents, shared responding to two young children- a toddler, a little boy just beginning to walk, and his slightly older sister, who bounced around and seemed to talk all the time. Hmm. I thought. How's this going to go?

The grandparents and the parents gave much attention to both children, both to the little boy, and, when the sister edged in, to her also. The children seemed content. There wasn't much jockeying for power. In fact, the little boy felt so cared for that, when put down on his feet, he started toddling off, on his own, down the path, to explore the world. After a while, he turned around to see if anyone was there. A parent, who was carefully following took him up in arms and brought him home. The little boy felt so loved and cared for, he was ready to try going out on his own. When the little girl felt neglected, someone was there for her too.

Now, what falls short in this romantic picture- not really the way things are? First, everyone was on vacation- two sets of parents- grandparents and parents- on the same site most of the day attending to two children. We all cherish and need such loving care; and *it's not immediately there much of the time. We don't live in the Garden of Eden.* I never told you about the mother's sixteen year old younger sister. She had an attitude. Her nose was seriously out of joint. She pouted, refused to go on family trips, and once made a gesture I don't want to make here.

So we come to the manger, and another family- another bigger family into which, as we come of age, we need. We may find ourselves on a path alone, with no one following. We may, like the jealous and rebellious sister, dig ourselves into a hole. We may be abandoned through no fault of our own. When we're out in the cold, when we've messed up and become

rebellious, when it seems no one else is coming down the path to gather us up in arms, God comes down the road. In a manger, at the supper table, and on the cross.

We are that family. We are that family with animals, shepherds, and kings; that breaks with a stranger and finds welcome that stands at the foot of the cross and receives open arms leading us beyond our losses to new life. Here is our home.