

December 24, 2019 'Things That Stick Around!' Rev. Jane Courtright

May God's hope, peace, joy and love be with each of you tonight!

I can think of 2 holiday materials that just don't seem to go away! You can find them anywhere in your home: under the couch, in a plant, behind your hamper, on the bathroom floor....definitely squished into your carpet. Once I spotted some woven into the nest of a bird on my property!

Of course in YOUR home, you can try to get rid of it. A vacuum cleaner, a broom or even a feather duster might take care of them, but they'll always return! Have you guessed these holiday materials yet?

Let me give you some clues: One is colored silver. The other comes traditionally in green, but also now in pastel and other colors. They are used during 2 different seasons. Song clue for the first one: 'O Christmas Tree, how pretty are your branches.' Song clue for the 2nd: 'Here Comes Peter Cottontail, hopping down the bunny trail.' NOW, can you guess what these materials are? Answer: Easter grass and Christmas tinsel!

I know some of you 'young-uns' may not know much about tinsel. But when I was growing up, and tinsel started showing up on shelves in stores, you KNEW Christmas was coming! Just like when colored straw or plastic grass appears on the shelves in stores, you know that Easter is coming. Tinsel & grass: signs with meanings. Signs pointing toward celebrations.

Granted, these signs mean different things to different people! From a secular or without a church point of view, Christmas tinsel is a sign of decorating trees, sending cards, buying presents, family. Easter grass, no matter what color is a sign to stock up on candy, buy a new Easter outfit, to dye eggs, spring time.

And though these things involve commercialism, they're also signs with spiritual meaning. They are signs of birth and rebirth. They are signs that God is taking the ordinary and making it extraordinary!

For instance, an ordinary pine tree becomes extraordinary when it's decorated, sometimes with shiny tinsel. As almost anyone knows, decorating Christmas

trees takes patience! Especially if you're putting tinsel on the tree! It takes exquisite patience if you don't want to end up with silver globs on your tree!

Baskets filled with Easter grass are signs of expectancy. I remember that my Mom used to put the jelly beans under the grass. Do kids still get those marshmallow Peeps in their baskets, and does the Easter grass still stick to the Peeps? Somehow, we kids had a way of spreading Easter grass all around the house and beyond. No surprise, really, Christmas tinsel and Easter grass are signs with a meaning!

Why am I talking about THESE 2 items on Christmas Eve? Because we can't separate what they represent. They are more than just flimsy cheap decorations. They are ordinary signs pointing to the extraordinary. What happens if we move the two words around? What about Christmas grass and Easter tinsel? How's that for a switch?

After all, when Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem, they couldn't find a place to stay. They must have found a place eventually though, because Mary gave birth in a stable. A stable in that time was often a cave, with feeding troughs or mangers carved into the rock walls.

Our Bible says that Jesus was laid in a manger! A manger is a place where animals are fed. It wasn't filled with fresh, tender grass. It probably was filled with a rough, dried out straw. Have you ever slept on hay? Kinda prickly, I imagine. The King of Kings on a bed of hay?

This birth story points to feeling anonymous, poor, rejected.

The Gospel of Luke pictures the King of Kings born into humble circumstances. The ordinary that would become extraordinary. Signs pointing to a miracle that happened on one ordinary, extraordinary night.

We're told that an angel appeared to the shepherds, who quite naturally, we afraid, awed at the sight! But the angel said to them: "Don't be afraid! The Messiah has been born today in Bethlehem."

You'll know him by these 3 signs: 1. "You'll find a baby. 2. "The child will be wrapped in cloth." 3. "The baby will be lying in a manger!"

"Come and see the one born to be a Savior for the world! You'll find him lying on a bed of Christmas grass!"

And what about that Easter tinsel? We can't appreciate the celebration of Easter and its dazzle or tinsel, without passing through Good Friday. The symbols of the cross, crown of thorns and nails are the ordinary become extraordinary. Tools of death, tools of life.

The Christmas manger and the Good Friday cross. They just can't be separated. Jesus comes to us via the manger, leaves via the cross, and opens the door of the tomb to life that lasts forever....into eternity!

We celebrate Easter because of Good Friday. We celebrate Easter because of Christmas. We celebrate the ordinary becoming the extraordinary. Christmas and Easter – signs of God's awesome love and promise!

Christmas grass and Easter tinsel. 2 things that stick around. The signs are joy and celebration. Joy to the world and thank God! MERRY CHRISTMAS! Amen.