

## CLOSING SERMON FOR 2020 – NEW HOPE GLOBAL FELLOWSHIP – A *Blue Christmas*



### INTRODUCTION

This year a “blue Christmas” was the reality for millions of people who have suffered the effects of COVID and other upheavals this year. A blue Christmas. Has this been your experience as we end 2020?

I first heard the term in Elvis Presley’s Christmas song decades ago. Do you know that classic? It’s still on YouTube.

“I’ll have a blue Christmas without you; I’ll be so blue thinking about you.

Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree won’t be the same, dear, if you’re not here with me. And when the blue snowflakes start falling that’s when those blue memories start calling. You’ll be doing alright with your Christmas of white but I’ll have a blue, blue, blue Christmas.”

COVID’S lockdowns between countries and within countries has meant so many of us were not able to be with those we hold dear. Not just at this past Christmas but for most of the months of 2020. That, coupled with the deaths and deep losses throughout the year, has brought a profound sadness – yes and for many even hopelessness – as we end out 2020. In fact, this issue came up as we each shared the most poignant verse from the Christmas accounts in Matthew and Luke’s gospels at our Zoom church meeting this past Saturday. Sam’s verses were from Herod’s killing of the babies in Matthew 2. The desolation in Ramah mirrors what people have been feeling around the world. So, I want to address these realities together before we go into 2021.

The question I want us to consider is: **How do we deal with A Blue Christmas?**

### COPING STRATEGIES

Hanny’s answer, when we talked this week, was connection with community. The purpose of the spiritual gifts given to each believer backs this up. Practicing connected community is the first way we can cope with a blue Christmas. Here is a list of the gifts in Romans 12:4-8:

In the human body there are many parts and organs, each with a unique function. <sup>5</sup> And so it is in the body of Christ. For though we are many, we’ve all been mingled into one body in Christ. This means that we are all vitally joined to one another, with each contributing to the others. [Other translations say “for the common good.”]

<sup>6</sup> God’s marvelous grace imparts to each one of us varying gifts and ministries that are uniquely ours. So if God has given you the grace-gift of prophecy, you must activate your gift by using the proportion of faith you have to prophesy. <sup>7</sup> If your grace-gift is serving, then thrive in serving others well. If you have the grace-gift of teaching, then be actively teaching and training others. <sup>8</sup> If you have the grace-gift of encouragement,<sup>[a]</sup> then use it often to encourage others. If you have the grace-gift of giving to meet the needs of others, then may you prosper in your generosity without any fanfare. If you have the gift of leadership, be passionate about your leadership. And if you have the gift of showing compassion,<sup>[b]</sup> then flourish in your cheerful<sup>[c]</sup> display of compassion. (Passion Translation)

Think about activating all these gifts for one another as we face the ravages of this year -

Encouragement, Giving, Leadership, Helps or serving, Mercy or compassion.

This list and the other lists of spiritual gifts in Eph.3, I Cor. 12 and I Peter 4 describe many coping strategies we need to employ for each other’s good. Let’s be specific with each one.

Encouragement. This gift is essential when we face a “blue Christmas” because the feeling of “blueness” or “heaviness” or “darkness” means that circumstances or issues in personal relationships can send people into a negative downward spiral: God may seem distant; prayers don’t seem to be answered as expected; in fact, many

expectations have not worked out. But if someone comes alongside another virtually or in person, the gift of encouragement strengthens the other. The uplift gives courage to press on and keep expecting to see the blessings of God – despite negative circumstances.

Giving. This season, with our 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and move here to Florida, so many people reached out to us with the gift of giving – their time, their presents, their financial support, their friendship, their zoom accounts☺, their words or verses shared from Scripture. Each gift has meant so much in this difficult time. In fact, the Greek phrase accompanying the gift of giving is “with hilarity.” I think those who gave as well as those who have received can echo that sense of joy. More than one gift to me brought tears of blessing and joy to my heart! Giving with hilarity!

Mercy. Similarly, the gift of mercy is translated as “sunbeams dancing in a dark place.” Evan epitomized that at our church gathering last Saturday. He had a very positive, uplifting spirit. When he sang “Jesus, Beautiful Savior,” those sunbeams dancing among us dispelled the darkness.

And the examples among us of generosity and kindness and similar fruits of the Spirit have helped so many of us in our church fellowship weather the storms and issues 2020 has brought.

But none of this is automatic. It is when we have shown up on Saturdays for our church times that week after week God has spoken through the community to one who was downcast or needy that week. How do we cope with a blue Christmas season? By ministering to one another.

Second, we cope through music that uplifts and sends us into God’s presence. That’s what Evan’s song did for me last Saturday. Besides community, I think another great loss when our church scattered has been worshipping together. I miss the singing, the blessing of heart-felt worship, the liveliness of it all and the way music takes us straight into God’s throne room. In fact, on Christmas evening, I sat on my bed with a hymnal in my hand and just celebrated the message of Jesus by singing the carols, one after another, after another. The words brought the meaning of Christmas to the fore and the tunes brought back years of joyful memories singing those carols every year. For me, even singing alone was a sacred, uplifting time.

Third, we take extra time in God’s presence to let His Word speak His comfort, His promises, His admonitions and His peace into our hearts. Rev. 12 tells us that we overcome Satan (who capitalizes on any Christian’s feeling of blue Christmas) by claiming the blood of the Lamb and by speaking forth the word of our testimony (Rev.12:11). Quote the scripture back to Satan, as Jesus did in the temptation in the wilderness. Scripture says God strengthens us “according to His Word” (Ps. 119:28). Quoting that Word aloud is an essential way to combat the “blueness” that can envelope us. Rehearse in your minds the promises God has given you in the past and claim those promises for today. Tell someone else what promises God has laid on your heart recently. As Paul told the besieged Christians under persecution in Ephesus:

*“18 Be filled with the Spirit 19 And your hearts will overflow with a joyful song to the Lord Jehovah. Keep speaking to each other with words of Scripture, singing the Psalms with praises and spontaneous songs given by the Spirit!<sup>[a]</sup> 20 Always give thanks to Father God for every person<sup>[b]</sup> he brings into your life in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” These spontaneous songs of praise gladden the heart and dispel the blues!*

God has walked with us in goodness and mercy throughout this year, beloved. We can each attest to that. And He has comforted and strengthened and delivered us time after time after time. So despite the “blue Christmas” many have known this year, we can go forward with confidence and hope in 2021, knowing that:

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness, O Lord. Great is Your faithfulness.”

Amen.

Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson, Pastor, New Hope Global Fellowship, Christmas 2020.