



Roanoke, Virginia  
December 18, 2022

## **“Seek”**

*Part IV of the Sermon Series “While We Are Waiting”*

*Luke 2:8-15*

**George C. Anderson**

<sup>8</sup> Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Are y’all aware of the Tiny House phenomenon? I would never want to live in one, but I am fascinated by the idea of it. With great creativity and planning, a house can be built that would fit inside my living room, or even fit in a parking space. It can be one room really, but with everything needed for sustainable life. You don’t talk about rooms, but living areas: kitchen area, sitting area, dining area, a loft that lowers as a bed, a toilet that is pulled out like a drawer, a shower that looks like a closet. Some of these tiny houses have windows on all four sides.



Imagine your Now—your *Right Now*—being a tiny house with a window on all four sides. Don't get literal and trip over logistical obstacles in what is already a tiny house and a limited metaphor. Just imagine the moment you happen to be in a room.

The window in the back wall looks to the past. The view out the back may not be what actually happened. It is only what one sees in the past—the remembered, the truths and the lies one believes as true, and the memories that have been polished or tarnished because of your bias. If one's favorite chair is angled toward that window, then that one spends a lot of time dwelling on the past or trying to understand it. Maybe lost in nostalgia or caught in regret. Maybe one likes the view because one misses what once was or likes to play the “[What could have been](#)” mind game.

To the right and the left of the room called Now are windows on opposing walls that take in what is the moment that is right now. Again, the view out each side may not be accurate. We misinterpret people and events all the time, but it is what we see. Looking out those windows, one sees the people who now fill one's life, the news of the day, the demands of the hour. Look out the window on the right wall and one is happy with the view, satisfied with the way things are, counting one's blessings and hoping things don't change. Look out the window on the left wall and one doesn't like the view. One is unhappy with the way things are, possibly feeling trapped, or hopeless, fearing that things will never change.

Then, there is the view through the window on the front wall, the east wall, the view to the future. What one sees may not actually take place, but it is the view to the future one thinks is coming. One can look out this window with dread or excitement, with anticipation or with fear. Or one can pull the shades.

- Because one is happy with the way things are and doesn't want things to change,
- Because one is afraid things will get worse,
- Or that things will never get better.

Our lives cannot be captured in a moment of course. We move from one fluid moment to another, or through one to another. But I think it is helpful to pretend a moment can be caught just to do an analysis on why life can seem stuck. And the first question one might ask in that moment is, “Out of which window am I looking?”

Consider the moment of Now in which the shepherds find themselves. I am speaking of the shepherd watching over their sheep by night. I live in my Now, not theirs, so I cannot speak with final authority about who these shepherds are or speak to their state of mind. Nevertheless, my guess is that they feel pretty much planted in a lasting moment. My sense is that when they are out in the field at night, they are not thinking too much about the past, and think very little about the future except the possibility that a predator or thief may appear. Mostly they are caught in the present, protecting their flocks by keeping their attention focused on who and what is around them.

If I had read the beginning of chapter 2 instead of beginning at verse 8, you would have heard that this moment of Now in which the shepherds live is one when the known world is ruled



by Caesar Augustus and the region governed by Quirinius. It is a time of heavy taxation so that an occupied people can have the privilege of being under the comforting thumb of Rome. Shepherds are born into the job, or do it out of necessity, so it is not a profession with the promise of advancement. Hope for the future is modest because there really is little reason to expect much to change...

except maybe for the worse  
if one were to sustain an injury where one cannot work,  
or if Rome begins to ask more from them  
when right now they barely can get by.

So, I imagine them with their eyes not to the sky searching for signs of angels or looking for the coming of the messiah. They are focused on the fields and hills around them.

But suddenly the shutters of the front window are blown open and they are given a bright vision of someone coming, someone they need to find. An angel appears in the sky and, because this is not something they were looking for, they are startled and terrified. Did they not learn from Moses that one cannot look on the face of God and survive? Is now the time to die?

At least it is *holy* terror for the shepherds..., the realistic fear of knowing that if God is encountered things cannot stay the same. But, fortunately for the shepherds, the angel has not come to lead them through the door to death but to guide them to the God who has come into the world.

“Fear not!” the angel says, “for I am bringing you good news.”

This is one of those times when I prefer a different translation of the Bible than what we have in the pews. “I am bringing you good news for all people” is not nearly as beautiful, hopeful, and charming, as what the angels say in the translation of my childhood, the King James Version: “I am bringing you good tidings of a great joy for all the people.”

While I didn’t understand much of what I heard from the King James Version when I was a child, I understood that phrase, “good tidings,”

... even though it is an expression that was never used in ordinary conversation.

- My father never said, “Children, I have good tidings. We are going to go to *Six Flags Over Georgia*.”
  - (Disney World didn’t exist when I was a kid, *Six Flags* was my mecca of fun).
- In Elementary School, I never got a report card that said, “Good Tidings, you have an A”
  - (That I rarely got an A in elementary school is beside the point).
- I doubt I would ever be told that I won the lottery with the words, “Good Tidings.”
  - Though I would love to be proven wrong.

I’ve heard plenty of good news in my life, but that news was never introduced with those two words. But even though I never heard the expression expect from the King James Bible, I knew what it meant. I knew it meant something big and wonderful and unique. Whatever the news, it would be the kind of thing that was said in a royal court if a messenger announced a major



battle has been won or the maiden with the missing slipper has been found. Or it might be the way angels talk, and angels only talk when the news *is as bad* or *is as good* as it gets.

There's a charm to that way of thinking, that "Good tidings" is a one-and-only way of speaking of a one-and-only event. This passage, this story, the day of Christmas and its news, should glow in our imagination. For what is being told the shepherds is, if true, the most astounding thing that could possibly be true—that we do not live in our fields alone.

that exist in the moment of now

because there is eternity.

That we exist at all

is because there is an author of life.

And, given what we believe about God because of what has been passed on to us,

we love because God loves us,

we work for justice because there is a God who cares,

and we seek peace because God desires us to be reconciled.

This news is

that God is born among us—

that God is among us to bring peace for all peoples.

If the rule of heaven is to save the expression "Good tidings" for anything,

save it for the best news there is,

the news of Christmas.

But there is a danger to this way as thinking as well. Just as the *special* sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper should glow so as to illumine the ordinary, so too should the Christmas story glow with light so as to illumine ordinary lives—the ordinary lives of the moment of our passage, the lives of shepherds, fishermen, tanners, merchants, carpenters, prostitutes and tax collectors. Into their lives, God comes. Peace is promised to them.

Notice what the shepherds are asked by the angels to seek.

- They are not told to look for more angels.
- They are not told to seek the end of the rainbow,
  - or seek a sword stuck in a stone,
  - or seek this unique mountain shape where they will have a close encounter of a divine kind.

No, they are to find an ordinary stable,  
a common feeding trough.

And they are to find lying within it  
an ordinary baby  
wrapped in ordinary cloths.

They are to find God in ordinary life.



Could this passage be inviting us to seek signs of God coming not just into the world, not just in history, but into the lives we live. Are we not invited to a Confirmation Bias of a different sort, a bias that seeks the signs that God is here, and that, by God's grace, we can be led to peace?

If that is true, looking for God to come could be the most practical thing we can do because grace, mercy and peace—if they are out there—should be sought.

For better or worse, I've been in a creative mood with this sermon, what with my metaphorical tiny house with its windows. Hang with me because I am going to try one more creative exercise.

I want you to imagine how different now are these shepherds compared to shepherds in other fields in that region. Most of those other shepherds continue to do what most shepherds do, having been trained by the circumstances, their situation in life, expecting what they have learned to expect. They live their days without great expectation of what, by the presence and grace of God, their lives can become.

I'm going to accept what commentaries on our passage say, and that is that shepherds, because of their hard life, are often not the most trustworthy characters. So, I imagine shepherds in *another* field who are prone to drink, perhaps to numb themselves to what they do not like about their hard lives that they believe will never change. They are not the type to look for ways to find blessings they have, like families to love.

Because shepherds of the day live day to day and hand to mouth, I imagine that there are shepherds in *another* field who not only look for predators of their sheep but look *to be predators* of what others have. They are not prone to look for ways to cooperate and organize, to build a community so both risk and blessings can be shared. They are looking out for themselves because what they see is that there is only so much to go around.

Shepherds of the day did not imagine that they could change the circumstances of their world, and I imagine there are shepherds in *another* field who do not know how to look for ways to help bring about the peace and justice, how they can even make friends of enemies... if they even thought that peace and justice were possible. So they do not look for opportunities to bring concerns of wool and meat producers to the attention of those who need to understand why they should be appreciated.

But the shepherds who received the unexpected visit of the angels are different now. The Confirmation Bias of their lives is shattered. They are now robbed of the illusion that there is no reason to expect that things can change for the better.

But now

- they know a troubled marriage or a strained friendship can be healed and they will look for signs of how it can be so.
- They do not believe one has to remain in the prison of addiction, but by the grace of God and the support of others, sobriety can be gained.
- They now believe in the possibility



of the healing of a broken heart,  
of a broken and polarized country finding unity,  
of a nation broken by its political divides being united again,  
of peace coming to Ukraine,  
of a dying not being the end.

Yes, I hear it. The moment of the shepherds disappeared and now we are in our moment. My creativity can be a bit undisciplined. But a preacher has to get to the point somehow.

I believe this passage is as much *about now* as it was then, that the good tidings that was announced to the shepherds is good tidings for us to hear. Peace is born which means peace is possible. God has come, which means God can be found. Let's take on the Confirmation Bias of those shepherds, who believe this news and go looking for the signs of God in ordinary things—  
an ordinary baby,  
wrapped in ordinary cloth,  
and lying in an ordinary manger.

Knowing it is possible, let's look for the signs of God healing and reconciling the wounds of life, and then let's live into the change.

