Are you in the holiday spirit? Feeling festive? Are you merry and jolly? I was talking with someone this week who said they just couldn’t quite feel the joy of the holidays. They were behind on their holiday shopping and were hoping a Christmas concert would get them in the mood.
And I can relate. It’s not that I’m experiencing negative emotions but I don’t know that I’m excited and joyful either. I’m also behind on my Christmas shopping and when I finally did order some presents online this week, it said one of them might not be here before Christmas! One of my kids may get to celebrate Christmas a little later than the rest of us…oops.
And despite how we feel about Christmas this year, Christmas really is about celebration. And for some of us we celebrate for different reasons. Maybe you’re celebrating the end of the year, either because it was good or because you’re ready to move past it, quickly. Maybe you’re celebrating family and friends and time together. Maybe you’re celebrating a Christmas bonus or getting some good presents.
Henri Nouwen writes, “Celebration is first of all the full affirmation of our present condition.” And I love that quote because often what we celebrate is something from the past (like a tradition) or something that we’re anticipating (like opening presents). We too often fail throughout our life to live in the present anyway, but it seems like celebrations highlight that truth.
But a true celebration must be about the present. And not just celebrating what is happening here and now, but accepting it and agreeing that it is happening. True celebration is receiving the whole truth about where our lives are right now.
But I’ve seen that celebrations too often are a way to distract us from the current situation. We fail to celebrate fully because we drown our current situation in some way. We distract ourselves from accepting what’s happening through various means and measures. We don’t fully celebrate because we’re not fully present.
But the amazing thing about Christmas is that it’s all about presence (not just presents). And it’s about knowing and accepting and receiving that right now, no matter our particular situation and circumstances that God is fully present in this world. The name Immanuel, attributed to Jesus means, ‘God with us.’
And that’s the whole point of Christmas. God is with us. And he came to be with us in the most unexpected and profound way possible, as a helpless baby. But the reason he came to us is cause for the greatest celebration: he loves us deeply and unconditionally.
And so, I pray, we celebrate this Christmas season fully embracing the truth of God’s amazing love for us. And maybe we’ll find some joy along the way. God bless.