



# Jacob's Ladder



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Rev. Sapada Thomas, Pastor

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## The Pastor's Point

by

Rev. Sapada Thomas

### Stay "Christ-focused" at Christmas

"And now, dear children, remain in fellowship with Christ so that when He returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back from Him in shame." 1 JOHN 2:28

The modern rush to reach the next big door-buster has stolen our ability to relax through Thanksgiving dinner. There's no deal greater than Jesus' birth, and we don't have to wait in line for it. Christmas gives us the opportunity to reflect upon the plight of the last year of life. John encourages us to stay focused on what's important, the long journey of our earthly lives to be more like Christ. We can aim right at that goal, because He was born to earth as an example of what to shoot for. Christmas is an encouraging reminder to stay focused on the reason for the season. I would like to encourage you to do the following this Advent Season as we prepare for Christmas:

#### Be Quiet

Time in God's Word is especially important amidst the commercialism of the season. He promises to reveal new layers of the same

Christmas story that we can apply to this season of our lives. When we offer Him our first minutes, we begin to see Him throughout the day.

#### Re-Program

The surrounding soundtrack of our lives can take a toll on our hearts, especially if we spend most of our time drenched in secular media. Christmas is a great time to reboot our thoughts by adjusting the message we are tuned to. The Word weaved into Christmas carols has the power to move our hearts into the correct place.

#### Say "No"

Before squeezing other events onto a calendar square, we can pause to pray for discernment on whether an additional event or commitment is necessary. "Thank you for thinking of me!" we can reply in the

meantime, "I'll get back to you." This Christmas, let's put the magnitude and majesty of the King of Kings at the center of our holiday planner.

**The Point:** Don't get so caught up in the consumerism of Christmas that we miss the true meaning of the Christ Child, and the impact His birth has on our personal lives.

## **My Journey Continued: Things I've Learned Along The Way**

**by Rev. Mattie Gipson**

Little did I know that night in June 1992 as I sat in the rear of the Arena where Annual Conference was being held that my life was soon going to take a U-turn and go in a direction that I had not imagined in my wildest of dreams. It was the night of the Ordination Service for Pastors in the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church. At the end of the Service, the Bishop stated that there was someone in the audience who was struggling with a call to ministry. He invited that person to come on down front "right now". I really didn't think I was struggling with such a call but for some reason I sat upright in my seat. I looked around to see if anyone was going down front because I surely had no plans to do such a thing. I even sat on my hands to make sure I didn't accidentally let my hand fly up. A curious reaction since I had no nudge to make any such change in my life.

Fast forward a few weeks and I found myself asking my pastor how does one know when they are being called to preach. He smiled broadly and said, "I've been wondering when you'd ask me that." I learned that day that often people see things in you that you have no clue are there. As time progresses I proceed to explore exactly what this means



for me. I am assigned a mentor and we meet weekly for several months and I find myself entering the Mississippi Course of Study (COS) for Local Pastors. I've always enjoyed learning so I enjoyed the weekend classes of COS. After my fourth course, the teacher asked me if I would stay a few minutes after class. His question: "Have you thought about going to Seminary?" Well, of course I had not. I am a wife and a mother of a college student, and a full-time employee with BellSouth. And of course, I had my church responsibilities. So, of course Seminary was nowhere in my thought process. But the teacher planted a seed as he urged me to explore that possibility.

A year later I find myself applying to Emory

University's Candler School of Theology--- and to my surprise after a campus visit, I was accepted on the spot and given a scholarship. And about an hour later, I had secured housing beginning June 1994. After this whirlwind of activities, reality sets in. I MUST continue working because I have a college student to support.

My next step was to apply for a job transfer. My office manager nearly laughed me out of the office because BellSouth had not granted a transfer in over two years. The company was in the process of downsizing and most offices are working with a skeleton crew. No movement going on except retirement. Three weeks later it was my turn to laugh. She called me into her office and said, "You're not going to believe this. I didn't, but your transfer went through." I smiled and said. "It's a God Thing!" I learned that if it's in God's plan, man can't stop it!

A part of Seminary education is Field Placement. I was assigned to a Men's Halfway House. I thought this is not going to work for me. What on earth can I learn from such an assignment? I learned much. Many of my preconceived notions about people who were criminals or addicts or societal misfits were totally shattered. I met a young man who was an African prince who had come to America to go to school and had followed the wrong crowd and ended up homeless. Like the Prodigal Son, one day "he came to himself" when a pigeon pooped on him as he slept on a park bench. Another young man was there because he left the family business and his life was in danger. The family business---SELLING DRUGS. I learned that you need to hear a person's story before you judge their lifestyle.

After finishing Seminary and moving to Laurel, MS for my first appointment, I was surprised to find that I was just beginning to learn about church folks. Thankfully, I had a couple of wise Seminary professors who gave us a little heads up that we should listen three times as much as we talk. That was a valuable lesson. I learned that the names on the Leadership forms are not necessarily the real leaders in the church. I learned, or was reminded, that you can't be everything to everybody. You MUST BE YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF!!!! Being yourself allows you to deal honestly with each person.

Learning should NEVER STOP!

A few other things I learned:

Don't take someone else's opinion of a person. Learn the person for yourself.

You don't always have to be the "smart one" in the group.

You can lead without being THE LEADER.

You don't have to take credit for every idea you have that gets executed.

It's good to keep a poker face during some negotiations.

Travel as much as you can and learn how people of other cultures live.

When you travel in other countries, respect their customs.

Don't assume your way is best just because you're American.

Learn to be fair in your dealings with others. You have no idea how much collateral that earns for you in the future.

I have learned that the GOLDEN RULE works, 24/7/365.

If you're not sure what to do in some situation, it never hurts to ask yourself WWJD????

As we wind ourselves through these times of this worldwide pandemic, learn and follow the guidelines of the CDC and UMC Health Team.

Allow God to be the wind beneath your wings.

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