

RANSOMED
HEART
ministries

December 2008

Dearest Friends,

Well, it's certainly been a wild year, hasn't it? I'm writing this before we leave for Australia, so who knows what more wildness will unfold.

And now we are entering Christmastime, which is a wild story in itself, the story that helps us get our bearings, the story that sheds light on all other stories.

The stories God likes to tell are nearly always tales of desperate deeds against insurmountable odds by the most unlikely heroes in the world. And nearly always, a last-minute rescue. Noah and his little family put out upon an endless sea. David in a do-or-die charge against the brute Philistine. Daniel in the lion's den. The sheer number and consistency of these stories is unyielding and *unnerving*.

The Incarnation may be the wildest, most unpredictable of them all. God becomes a man. The God of the universe humbles himself to enter our world, take on a human life, a baby nursing at the breast of a teenage girl in a small hovel on the outskirts of nowhere. You could never have anticipated this.

And that is an important thing to remember – you could never have anticipated this. Because it is this same God, who came to be Immanuel – God with us – who says, in times of uncertainty, do not give way to fear.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:25-34).

This is so counter-cultural, so against the grain, so *disruptive*. Don't worry??! Don't scramble? But... but...but. That is not the spirit running rampant in our world just now. We all feel the very strong temptation to worry. And to hunker down. It seems perfectly reasonable. I feel that pull so strongly myself. And right about then I feel that nudge of the Holy Spirit who says,

John, you are thinking like the world right now. You've been taken in by the fear, the apprehension. You have forgotten what is true. Who I am. Who you are. Come back. Give no place to all of it. Don't look at the world, look at Me. I'll show you what to do.

And I sigh a deep sigh, and come back to all that I believe and know to be true. I mean, either we believe what Jesus said or we don't. Either we believe this unpredictable God really is on our side, or we don't. Of course, much of our collective worries right now tend to be financial. God knows that, and he says, *Do not worry*. Christmas is the act that shouts, *God is on your side. He really does come through! Watch for him.*

Now yes, we are a donor-supported ministry. But we try to make sure that the lion's share of our budget we earn ourselves through our conferences and resources. We feel that gives us integrity. And we deliberately stay small and mobile, so that we can move as the Spirit of God moves us. In fact, earlier this year we made some cuts, trimmed our sails, *before* the financial crisis hit. Once it did hit we realized God was guiding us. That was neat. We are actually launching some efforts to carry our message forward with greater influence, doing even more with less. Fish and loaves. God's way of doing things.

So, as the year winds down let me thank you for all you've done for us this year. Being an ally to us in so many ways. Carrying the message forward to your world. Sending your friends to us. Praying for us. Supporting us. We love you. We're in this great work together. This is a really ripe time for the Kingdom to be advancing!!

We understand that some of you just aren't able to help us financially this year, and I wanted to say as clearly as I can there is no shame in that. We know you'll help when you can. You are still our allies in every way.

Some of you are able to help us this year, and I want you to simply talk to God about that. I hate those appeals that sound like the ship is going down. Ask God what to send us.

Personally, I'm going to try and give a little more than I did last year, even though we too have taken a hit as many have. Stasi and I support several ministries (Ransomed Heart being at the top of the list) and we feel the very real pull to be the third servant in the parable of the talents – to take what we have and bury it in fear, hold onto to it tight, “until we see what happens to the economy.” But no. We hate that posture. We are going to give, because this is a time for the Kingdom to be advancing. We're going to ask God what to do, and follow his lead. An act of Christmas defiance against fear!

And so, Merry Christmas, dear friends! I pray the coming days are filled with God, with his joy, with the wonder of his mighty rescue. And his outlandish way of doing things. He really does come through.

With love from all of us at Ransomed Heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'JH' or 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John