FROM HUMBUG TO HALLELUJAH:
OUR CHRISTMAS PRESENT
ZEPHANIAH 3: 14 - 20
DECEMBER 10, 2006

I. PRELIMINARIES
A. HONORING CHRISTMAS IN YOUR HEART SCRIPTURE: JOHN 14: 27
   1. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
B. BOOK RECOMMENDATION
   1. “Tuesdays With Morrie” by Mitch Albom
C. UNISON PRAYER
   1. “Lord, hear me as I call out to you in this day. During, prepare my heart, mind and soul to receive you and grant me release from my bondage. In your great mercy, hear my pleas to you. AMEN.”

II. OUR CHRISTMAS PAST CONFRONTS US WITH THE QUESTION OF OUR BONDAGE
A. WHAT ARE THE BONDS, THE CHAINS, THE TENTACLES OF YOUR POSSESSION?
   1. Those forces from the past that strive to hold you down, strangle, intimidate and dominate you into living life according to its power and standards...bringing nothing but hopelessness

III. OUR CHRISTMAS PRESENT CONFRONTS US WITH ANOTHER QUESTION...A QUESTION OF DISTRACTION...
A. WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS THAT ARE PRESENT IN YOUR LIFE TODAY THAT STRIVE TO DIVERT YOUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE MEANING OF THE DAY?

IV. UNFORTUNATELY THE CHRISTMAS SEASON HAS BECOME ONE OF MY LEAST ENJOYABLE TIMES OF THE YEAR
A. DON’T MISUNDERSTAND ME, I LIKE CHRISTMAS
   1. More often than not you will find me listening to Christmas music
   2. But the season has become a time of burden, high activity and demands, most of which really have little to do with the season
   3. For these reasons, I suspect that I am not alone
B. IF WE ARE HONEST WITH OURSELVES, WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THESE DAYS ABOVE ALL OTHER DAYS ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT TIMES FOR MANY PEOPLE
   1. They accentuate our broken relationships...isolation...loneliness...hurt feelings...frustrations...conflict...depression...despair...spiritual emptiness
   a. The “Most Wonderful Time Of The Year” is anything but wonderful for many people
   b. The proclamation of Ebenezer Scrooge...Bah! Humbug!...is not so far off base for too many of us
(1) Christmas (woman shopping with daughter)

V. LIKE SO MANY PEOPLE AROUND US, THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH IS NOT IMMUNE TO LOSING SIGHT OF THE REASON FOR THE SEASON
A. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT MAY WELL BE THAT WE EXAGGERATE THE DIFFICULTY OF THE SEASON BY EMPHASIZING THE ALL THE WRONG THINGS...
   1. What is the season all about?
      a. Is it about all the gifts, parties, and activities...the decorations...the packages...the cards...the food being prepared?
      b. Is it about the hustle and bustle...the trappings of the season...all the glitter and glamour?
      c. Is it about the disruption of routines and schedules...confrontation with people some of whom we had just as soon never see...fatigue...guilt...the demands and distractions of hectic activities...of everything that must be done...stress...spending money that you do not have
VI. IN THE CLASSIC CHILDREN’S STORY, “A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS,” CHARLIE BROWN IS GIVEN THE TASK OF FINDING A CHRISTMAS TREE FOR THE PLAY
A. A TASK THAT EVEN CHARLIE BROWN CANNOT MESS UP
   1. But before he is sent out, he is reminded to select something in keeping with the modern spirit
B. VIDEO
   1. Starting
      a. Scene 5: Start at 00:16:35 (Long Version). . .Scene 5: Start at 00:19:28 (regular version)
   2. Ending
      a. Scene : End at 00:22:05 (short Version). . .00:23:10 (regular version)

VII. THE SEASON OF ADVENT IS OUR TIME TO PREPARE FOR THE CLIMATIC ENTRY OF GOD INTO HUMAN LIFE
1. We are all too often impressed by the wrong things of life
   a. Earthquake, wind and fire. . .the noisy, boisterous, big and bizarre. . .the powerful, the rich, the glamorous. . .the busy schedules
   b. All the while consistently missing the still small voice and the power of gentle stillness
   c. The birth of the child Jesus ultimately reminds us how much can and does come from small, unexpected, unlikely places

VIII. THE SECRET TO AN UNFORGETTABLE CHRISTMAS PRESENT IS NOT MYSTERIOUS OR ABSTRACT
A. HOWEVER, IT DOES REQUIRE FOCUS ON OUR PART
   1. We have to remember the reason for the season
      a. Let us not become so busy celebrating the season that we totally miss the reason for the season
   2. We have to set priorities
      a. What is most important in these days? . . .all the trappings of the season. . .all the things that divert our attention. . .that call our name. . .the fulfillment of unrealistic wants, wishes and expectations. .
   3. We have to set aside time
      a. Time for what is really important. . .for what really needs to happen this Christmas in your life. . .to have fun. . .laugh. . .smile. . .build family traditions