

A Defiant Christmas People

December 24, 2011

The comedian Marc Maron tells on himself about growing a beard,

"I've had this look for about a year. I usually grow this beard out around Christmas. I like to go to malls dressed as Jesus, and I like to then walk around the mall and go, 'No! No! This wasn't what it was supposed to be about, people!' Then if there's a Santa at the mall, I walk up to him and say, 'Listen, fat man, you're just a clown at my birthday party.'"

I had this vision that on the weeks leading up to Christmas we would introduce the lighting of the advent candles with two people up here arm wrestling. One is dressed like Jesus and the other dressed like Santa. It would be a classic struggle. First one would get close to beating the other and then it would change the other way. Finally, on Christmas Eve Jesus would put Santa down. Do we feel the tussle and conflict within us?

Christmas is an expression about reality that takes in all of the dimensions of our lives but ultimately the Christmas story shapes our lives by the Spirit of Life and Love. The birth of a child full of promise is an expression of deep time grace which is the heart of human existence.

So, once a year our freedom is respected and we are invited to be a Christmas People; a Defiant People.

What do I mean by a “defiant people?”

Christmas is the story of the incarnation which is the story about what is best in Spirit becoming reality in the flesh, in history, in our own lives. Christmas is hope trumping despair, light overcoming the darkness, and life quietly conquering death.

To be a Christmas people is to be a defiant people.

Christmas is the ultimate “occupy movement”. When the Spirit of God occupies the world there are profound implications for Wall Street.

Christmas is the ultimate “marriage equality” bringing together heaven and earth until there is no distinction and so peace and justice are realities here and now. and not some other worldly fantasy. This has profound implications for people trapped in their homophobia.

Christmas is the ultimate non-documented worker crossing the ultimate border without invitation in order to do a great work among us. Again, there are profound implications for all of us.

Christmas is an expression about reality defined by the Spirit of Life and Love. The birth of a child full of promise is an expression of deep time grace.

A story of defiance.

Several years ago Peg shared with me a story out of a book she was reading. The story was about a parent who could not go with his family on a trip across the country. Every one was disappointed but all the plans were in place and all the reservations were made so Mom loaded the car and took the kids on the road.

The dad was able to finish his business sooner than expected so he looked at the itinerary they had planned and guessed where they would be on their trip. He got on a plane flew to where he thought they would be, got a cab and had himself dropped off in the middle of no where on the highway his family would drive.

In a few hours Mom and the kids speeding down the highway passed a man standing on the side of the road. The kids did a double take and yelled, "That was Dad!!"

He completely surprised them and they were together as a family and they resumed their vacation. He delighted them and he delighted in delighting them.

This is the approach Peg and I are taking with Christmas. Instead of getting all wrapped up in the stuff we have to do in the limited amount of time we have to do it, we are asking ourselves what would delight our children? We know that when we delight them we will have joy.

We are not spending a lot of money. We are behind in decorating. We have a tree but it doesn't have a single light or ornament. It is all natural and it is okay. We not only committed ourselves to unplugging the Christmas machine but we don't even have to plug or unplug our Christmas tree. We are not stressing about it as we declared a moratorium on December 25th. Plan B will have us share gifts and celebrate again sometime in the first week in January. We are entering into the spirit of the old song about the 12 days of Christmas and we will be chill-lax-in into the 12th day. We gave ourselves a Christmas cushion.

There is something about Christmas that makes us more thoughtful. People seem to be more mindful of others and the needs of the world. We allow a spirit of generosity to flow through us this time of year unlike the rest of the year. We know it is not quite right but rather than dwell too long on this let us celebrate the good of the season and the right directions of our hearts and minds.

There are many stories about Christmas defiance. On the battlefield in WW I German and English soldiers put down their guns to meet in no man's land to sing carols and play

soccer. People with means make the mortgage payment of their unemployed neighbor. A young child uses her birthday money to buy Christmas gifts for others. This is what Jesus cares about. He wouldn't care if we said or did not say, "Merry Christmas!" Instead, let us be Christmas. Let us be an incarnation of Spirit to each other.

Christmas offers us the opportunity to visit the thin places between heaven and earth. Of course, I am speaking metaphorically. What I think I mean is that we seem to be more open and vulnerable to love, hope, and faith. Perhaps it is this tenderness and openness to the Spirit of Life and Love that makes us love and fear this season so much.

Charles Dicken's story about the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from a small squeezed soul to a large generous human being is the story of our own transformation at Christmas and it seems to be a story about humanity's potential.

At the end of Scrooge's visit with the second spirit he notices something under the fold's of the spirit's robes.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree; but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it otherwise! Tell them the truth of this and make it cause them inner turmoil, and make that inner conflict worse, and push it to the end so that no one can ignore it!"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on Scrooge for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve. [Stave 3: 108-109]

Christmas is an expression about reality. The children hidden in the folds of the robe of Dicken's spirit of Christmas Present exist in stark contrast to the birth of a child full of promise wrapped in love.

Being a defiant Christmas people means it is up to us to delight in every child and every human being.

Being a defiant Christmas people means it is up to us to erase the doom that is written on the brow of too many people.

Christmas is the ultimate "occupy movement".

Christmas is the ultimate "marriage equality".

Christmas is the ultimate non-documented worker crossing the ultimate border.

Christmas is an expression about reality defined by the Spirit of Life and Love. The birth of a child full of promise is an expression of deep time grace.

This is what it means to be a Christmas People. Be defiant and delight in it.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Blessed are they who find Christmas
in the fragrance of the pine,
the song of the carolers,
and the soft flicker of candles...

All To them shall come memories of love and happiness.

Blessed are they who find Christmas
in the stars of the sky...

All Their lives may ever reflect its light and beauty.

Blessed are they who find Christmas
in the age-old story of a child
born in a stable and laid in a manger...

**All To them a little child will always mean
hope and promise in a troubled world.**

Blessed are they who find Christmas
in the joy of gifts sent lovingly to others...

**All They shall share the gladness and joy
of the shepherds and sages of old.**

Blessed are they who find Christmas
in the worldview, love, and spirit of Jesus of Nazareth...

**All They shall ever strive to help bring
peace on earth, good will to all** *(UUA.Burlington/cc).*

The peace

God makes peace within us. Let us claim it.

God makes peace between us. Let us share it.

The peace of God is here... to stay.

All Thanks be to God.

Imagination

Jesus had a vision. His vision was straight from His Father. Jesus saw the world not just as it was but he also saw it as it could be. Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God being at hand. So close if we would only grasp it and live it. Jesus proclaimed that life is a gift and the world was to be place of peace, love, and justice. Now, those of us who say Jesus is Lord have been entrusted with this vision of the Kingdom. He taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The sacrament of Holy Communion is holy because God is with us and it is a sacrament because in the moments of our sharing we are making the Kingdom of God real in the here and now.

I have this political cartoon in my office. It depicts Uncle Sam as Gary Cooper from the movie High Noon. He is walking down the street with a six shooter on his hip and a big stick in his left hand. The stick of course is reminiscent of Teddy Roosevelt’s days of speak softly but carry a big stick. In this picture Uncle Sam is wearing a badge and it is shaped like a star. On his belt buckle are the letters U.S. He is not wearing a cowboy hat but instead he is wearing the tall top hat that we usually associate with pictures of Uncle Sam. His right hand is at his side and his fingers are flexed and ready to draw at the slightest hint of trouble. On the street are all of these characteratures and stereotypes of people in the Middle East. They look poor and thin and dastardly. All of the buildings are of Middle Eastern Architecture and on top of the buildings is the symbol of Islam, the crescent moon. The men on the streets are fighting with each other, or they are begging, or hiding around corners or in shadows with their knives pulled out ready to ambush the new sheriff in town. To the left edge of the cartoon is a woman in a burka holding a child. They are the only other two figures in the picture that face the reader straight on. All of the men are depicted sideways as shifty and sneaky and ready to pounce.

The message of the cartoon is that the United States, like Gary Cooper in the town of Hadleyville, is the only hope of restoring peace and order to the Middle East. The United States walks into the region and announces that there is a new sheriff in town and all you little sniveling trouble makers better walk the straight and narrow. When I saw the cartoon I didn’t know if it was a joke or if it was serious. After I read some of the publication I realized that it was not a joke. The cartoon portrayed a political and ideological position believed in the hearts and minds of many people. It is a view that might makes right especially if the might is backed up by the rugged individualism and

integrity of some one like Sheriff Will Kane of High Noon. I understand the appeal of this position. I am a patriot as well, but now I want you to picture another central figure in the cartoon. Instead of Uncle Sam as Gary Cooper, picture the one whose birth brings us together tonight and remember the worldview he taught and lived.

As the one walking down the street...

Instead of the badge of authority he would be wearing the towel of a servant.

Instead of the gun he would bear his own arms to lift up the poor.

Instead of a belt buckle showing off the symbol of national strength he would point to the Kingdom of His Father.

Instead of wearing a top hat he would share their suffering by wearing a crown of thorns.

Instead of his hands being ready to inflict suffering and death his hands would be ready to heal and raise the dead.

However the cartoon is right about one thing.....Jesus would be carrying a big stick.

But instead of a club it would be the Cross. Be careful before you answer to quickly; who are we? Are we his feet? Are we his hands? Are we his love?

I want to answer with a great shout and with boldness. I want to be at that place in my own spirit but I am not there, yet. I cannot deny the pull on my heart to put my trust in the greatest monetary and military power in the world. But my heart and my mind are also being captured by the vision of my Lord and Savior. You may feel the same tension in your spirit. Have courage and don't allow yourself to be herded like cattle. Share your struggle but more importantly share the Good News of Jesus Christ.