



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

December 24, 2007

Christmas Eve, 2007

I hear a lot that Christmas is about children. I received a story the other day written by a mom.

She writes;

Each December, I vowed to make Christmas a calm and peaceful experience. I had cut back on nonessential obligations - extensive card writing, endless baking, decorating, and even overspending. Yet still, I found myself exhausted, unable to appreciate the precious family moments, and of course, the true meaning of Christmas.

My son, Nicholas, was in kindergarten that year. It was an exciting season for a six year old.

For weeks, he'd been memorizing songs for his school's "Winter Pageant." I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd be working the night of the production. Unwilling to miss his shining moment, I spoke with his teacher. She assured me there'd be a dress rehearsal the morning of the presentation. All parents unable to attend that evening were welcome to come then. Fortunately, Nicholas seemed happy with the compromise.

So, the morning of the dress rehearsal, I filed in ten minutes early, found a spot on the cafeteria floor and sat down. Around the room, I saw several other parents quietly scampering to their seats. As I waited, the students were led into the room. Each class, accompanied by their teacher, sat cross-legged on the floor. Then, each group, one by one, rose to perform their song.

Because the public school system had long stopped referring to the holiday as "Christmas," I didn't expect anything other than fun, commercial entertainment songs of reindeer, Santa Claus, snowflakes and good cheer. So, when my son's class rose to sing, "Christmas Love," I was slightly taken aback by its bold title.

Nicholas was aglow, as were all of his classmates, adorned in fuzzy mittens, red sweaters, and bright snowcaps upon their heads. Those in the front row - center stage - held up large letters, one by one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas," a child would hold up the letter C. Then, "H is for Happy," and on and on, until each child holding up his portion had presented the complete message, "Christmas Love."

The performance was going smoothly, until suddenly, we noticed her; a small, quiet, girl in the front row holding the letter "M" upside down - totally unaware her letter "M" appeared as a "W". The audience of 1st through 6th graders snickered at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W".

Although many teachers tried to shush the children, the laughter continued until the last letter was raised, and we all saw it together. A hush came over the audience and eyes began to widen. In that instant, we understood

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

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the reason we were there, why we celebrated the holiday in the first place, why even in the chaos, there was a purpose for our festivities. For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear:

CHRIST WAS LOVE

And I believe he still is."

I do not know if that story is true or not but I know it tells the truth of tonight. No matter how politically correct we try to become, no matter how much the focus is on Santa, Frosty, Rudolph, and billions of dollars in gifts, we gather tonight because it was not just an M that was turned upside down.

The world was turned upside down because of nothing less than the love that God has for all his children and the love that God wants for his children to show one another. And the message of love that is told again this night is the message that God loves all his children.

To the young unmarried girl God says, "I love you."

To the fiancé who wrestled with doing what was considered right by the law against that which was right by his heart God says, "I love you."

To the innkeeper who gave his last inch of space to a couple in need God says, "I love you."

To the shepherds who were both social and religious outcasts God says, "I love you."

To the Magi who were outside of those who considered themselves God's elite God says, "I love you."

To you here tonight, with your joys and your sorrows, your happiness and your grief, your feelings of unworthiness or failing to miss whatever mark you set God says, "I love you."

And then God says, 'I have shown you tonight how my love can transcend all social, religious, cultural boundaries.

I want you to love others like that.'

Tonight is about you. It is about your heart and your soul. Tonight I affirm my love for you and I ask you once more to love others as I have loved you.

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So let's not just put Christ back into our Christmas. Let's remember the little girl who put a W into Christmas and reminded us all of God's love for us and God's call for us to love one another. Because Christ was nothing else than love.

Amen

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