

Christmas Day Reflection

Dec. 25th, 2011

All Souls Church

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Christmas has come again.

Already, children have risen before the sun to gather under the tree with wide eyes and soaring spirits. Parents sit up in bed, as giddy as their children to witness magic born again. The streets are hushed, the city strangely muted from its usual hustle and bustle.

Christmas has come again. For four weeks we have prepared for this moment to arrive. The beginning of Christmas marks the end of our Advent journey. We have prepared inwardly, reflecting on the joy and mystery of Christmas. We have shopped, wrapped, cooked, rushed, decked our halls and donned our finest to gather together for but a moment. This moment. Now that we have prepared for Christmas, the question is will we truly enjoy it, or are we still preparing to enjoy it?

Today we remember Jesus' birth and spiritual legacy. As one story goes in the book of Luke,

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Now you can imagine what it was like when Jesus came to town. To be sure, it was a big deal—a bigger deal, even than Santa. You can also imagine what it was like to be in his presence—radiant love and pure peace, humanity's deepest goodness. So you can imagine how silly it seems to miss Jesus' presence for the sake of a clean house. In the story, Jesus reminds Martha that there is a time to prepare, and a time to be present to life. The story is a reminder to us that radiant love and pure peace dwell in the order and beauty of life as well as the chaos and messiness. Perfect love does not require perfection. Today, are you able, like Mary, to be present to receive the gifts of Christmas, or are you like Martha, worrying and preparing to be present without truly showing up?

Although we honor our Christian heritage on this day, Buddhists have much to teach us about the work of being present to life, its beauty and its chaos. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh writes:

We are very good at preparing to live, but not very good at living. We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. Every

breath we take, every step we make, can be filled with peace, joy, and serenity. We need only to be awake, alive in the present moment.

This Christmas, can we dare to stay awake, alive in the present moment? I think we can, and we must. If we are present in each moment of this season, we can invite the spirit of Christmas wash over us. We can invite a quieting of our incessant need to do and allow a deeper sense of being to emerge—a being connected to all life, a sense that each day we can dwell in the presence of radiant love and pure peace, whether our houses are messy or clean, our presents wrapped or unwrapped.

Christmas comes in the way it always does. It rushes by just as fast as it came. If we blink, we might miss it. So today, this glorious Christmas day lay your preparations to rest, and invite Christmas to stay. May you and your family enjoy every moment, this holiday and into the New Year. Amen and blessed be.