

There is a special joy to Christmas Eve! Possibly, the carols, memories of childhood long long ago. Different from Sunday morning, according to Luke ALL the world, including Joseph and Mary, were visitors at Christmas. This is a time for daughters, sons, grandchildren, those studying at college, newly married, All traveling to be with family. A time when strangers from the hillside, and angels in our midst gather to sing and witness and talk with others of the REALITY CHANGES to everything in our lives.

Before Worship, I regularly make it my practice to greet worshippers outdoors.

If you have made the effort to worship, the least we can do is to welcome and greet you as part of this body. Oft times these are elevator conversations where in 30 seconds we meet children and grandchildren; receive diagnoses of illnesses and cancers previously unreported; and on occasions, deep important questions are asked that cannot be processed and responded to in 30 seconds or less.

Following HAMAS' attack on Israel, someone asked "Why have the Jews so often been hated?" More recently someone said, "This is my church and I continue to be part of this church, but I am a hypocrite no longer believing in GOD."

Those questions are a REALITY CHECK, worthy of greater than a 30 second conversation at the door!

More than whether you've been naughty or nice, because different from Santa, GOD is about GRACE. REALITY CHECKS are Important questions on Christmas Eve, worthy of generations talking late in the night of the Savior's birth, allowing Christmas Eve to be more than presents, stockings, candlelight and singing.

To the first Question: As much as Biblical Faith describes Free Will and Grace, Our Reality is that when human beings face overwhelming obstacles, changes to the world we have known: ANXIETY, FEAR and ANGER enter in. When we bury ANGER our repression becomes depression. In Family Systems we know that in order to cope with FEARS, ANGER, ANXIETY, WHEN OUR WORLD SEEMS OUT OF CONTROL, a common coping mechanism, something we all do, is to bind our Anxiety to someone else. We want our fears and anxiety to go away, so we make our problems, someone else's problem, someone else's fault.

Time and again over history, from Ancient Egyptian slavery to Babylonian Exile, Persian Pogrom, Roman crucifixions to Nazi holocaust, current day Antisemitism and Islamophobia, people who represent a minority, whose different customs, language, foods, others do not understand, have been scapegoated as BEING The Problem, the cause of our anxiety. This does not make blaming right, but shifting blame is something we all do.

In Medieval times, there was even a practice called SIN-EATING, where the poor of the community were invited by the wealthy for a banquet, in order that having consumed at the Richman's table, when the poor left, the poor took the sins of the house with them.

The PASSOVER meal actually had two sacrifices, One a SCAPEGOAT that the family wrote their ANXIETY, FEARS and SINS down and put these on the Goat's Horns before the Goat Escaped into the desert; the other as the PASSOVER LAMB.

PASSOVER LAMBS are PART of the Christmas Story, because Why were there Shepherds in the field between Bethlehem and Jerusalem keeping watch over their flocks? Jesus is born to be the LAMB of GOD.

To begin to address the Second Question: Often times people comment that their favorite part of worship is when the children come forward. Every time we invite the children to come forward in worship, I fully expect the whole congregation to gather at the Table. I suspect because while brilliant individuals, Captains of Industry, Accomplished and recognized in our fields, able to comprehend philosophy and mathematics, who when COVID occurred over-night each learned how to navigate the technology of the internet, to ZOOM and FACETIME, to order groceries and manage our investments.

However, most of us never had a REALITY CHECK of what we actually BELIEVE, beyond being children. Therefore, it seems easier to give up believing, than to try developing a multidimensional faith.

1. How could Almighty, All Powerful GOD, The Eternal GOD of Gods, Creator and Judge of the Universe, choose to take off all of that power and divinity to embrace the humility of being a human person, like us; even more being a vulnerable dependent newborn babe, for us?
2. How could the CREATOR enter into God's own Creation? Can an Artist step into their painting?
3. When so much of History has been about Revenge, Honor... How could GOD, 4,000 years after Abraham create a new Covenant for Us to FORGIVE and LOVE one another, because we have been loved, to create a new Sacrament in his own flesh and blood?
4. Someone this morning asked Why Celebrate Communion on Christmas? Did Christ come to die for us?
5. This community is well acquainted with death. How could GOD die, yet death could not end GOD's love?
6. How could All Powerful GOD, allow the atrocities of this world to occur, 6,000,000 Jews to be slaughtered in the holocaust, 1,200 Israelis and 20,000 Palestinians killed in the last 11 weeks, all of the Wars and Mass Murders that we have made common-place? How can there be a GOD allowing such evil?
7. How could GOD continue to love us, expecting us to love one another and to love GOD?

There are those among us, who love the purity and child-like innocence of Christmas, when in reality Christmas is the most complex and powerful of theological concepts to reconcile.

The great German Reformation Theologian Martin Luther gave us many American traditions of Christmas: the singing of carols, decorating a tree, hanging stockings, a late-night service on Christmas Eve. Martin Luther was once asked his favorite Scripture, he quoted John 3:16: GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, GOD GAVE GOD'S ONLY BEGOTTEN CHILD, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, SHALL HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

Many years ago, I was given the gift of a trip to the HOLY LANDS. We had planned to go together this year, I pray for the day when peace can allow travel to that mysterious historic place anew.

One of the most powerful places for me, was not the Palace of King David, the place of the Last Supper, even the Tomb of his Burial. In Bethlehem, the Church of the Nativity is not marked by a Manger, but the spot on the floor, where Mary giving birth, the Divine and the Earthly first touched.

Christmas is the simple beauty seen in every child,

yet in that image, witnessing Vision of GOD and Humanity being completely ONE, Emmanuel.

Hypocrisy? I believe if we are honest with ourselves there is a bit of atheist in every believer!

Only when we name our doubts and fears can we ever truly begin to question what we do believe.

More than YES VIRGINIA THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS, There is a GOD who loves us.

GOD Who throughout eternity has wanted so much to have us come to GOD, that GOD became One with Us, checking our every reality, every doubt and anxiety, for Christmas to be real.