



**NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH**

Christmas Eve Homily

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December 24, 2016

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2016 has been a difficult year to say the least
and many of us have stumbled through this Christmas season
feeling a bit battered and bruised
so many losses—floods and avalanches of loss-
of luminous rock stars and icons
and countless lives stolen by senseless tragedies,
acts of hate and terrorism
and unjust killings
all these names

We have been shaken to our core
how can this be?
the world is not as it should be
and we find ourselves bracing for the worst
fearing what perils could lie ahead

A wise minister once said that it is the task of the church to cultivate and sustain hope
and we liberal religious people are a hopeful people
we are looking for a sign to guide us,
a star of hope for the new year

These days we liberals talk much of
gathering our strength
kindling our courage
organizing and resisting

Tonight on this Christmas Eve I invite you to do the opposite
let your guard down and be amongst friends
You are safe here
Christmas is a time not just to understand the nature of our power but of our ultimate
vulnerability

We live in a post-fact world,
A world that's perfect for Christmas
A story that leaves us with more questions than answers and countless interpretations
The message of Christmas still speaks to liberals and conservatives alike
Jesus was not born into this world with a silver spoon,
a king on a throne, sheltered and coddled,
He was born into the world like any other child,
Helpless, innocent
Dependent on others for care and protection

his birth was inconvenient and messy
his young mother and father,
refugees traveling the long journey to a strange and foreign land
their future uncertain,
their child's survival threatened by a violent leader
Jesus' parents did their best to find a clean and safe place to welcome him
and yet no kindness or generosity prevailed that night
no elaborate feast or hallelujah chorus
no promise of any different future
rather, a surrendering to life.

Tonight,
Can we allow ourselves to surrender to the present circumstances of our lives and our world,
not wishing they were different,
But giving ourselves over to life,

To an election that wasn't what we had planned for our country
The fault lines revealed, the hate that no longer crouches in dark corridors.

Can we give ourselves to a life that isn't exactly what we had planned for ourselves
Those unexpected twists and turns in our lives
Diagnoses and deaths, divorces and divisions,
tragedies and hardships,
The grave injustices and petty unfairness

Can we surrender tonight to a world where
we can no longer delude ourselves into thinking that
bigotry and hate are far away,
that war and terror are some other nation's problem

Can we allow ourselves to truly feel the weight of the world
and find our power lying not in our ability to fight and resist,
but in our ability to surrender to a world beyond our control, and discover the miracle of our
own frailty and vulnerability.

Each year, Christmas is birthed into our lives
an imperfect birth into an imperfect world,
with gifts left unwrapped
with unmade beds and messy houses
with empty gas tanks and empty bank accounts
with traffic jams and delayed flights
with leaky roofs and drafty windows
and cars that won't start
with burnt pie and overdone turkey

with an empty spot at the table where the loved one you lost should be sitting

with heartaches and regrets and grudges and
and yearnings for broken relationships to heal,
for peace to come and for things to be different
and imagining, for a moment, that things could be different.
and yet

There in the stable of our vulnerability
Surrendering to life just as it is, not as it should be
we might be humbled by what we might find
might we be saved not by the mighty sword of our ego
and power
but saved by a love that meets us in our most tender places
love beyond our understanding,
held and cared for, whole and holy.
This love is our birthright, the original blessing of our humanness.

This Christmas eve let us not worship at the exalted altar of perfection, but humbly at the
stable of our own humanness. May we discover miracles in the muck of the manger, a new
found strength emerging not from our responsibility to shoulder it all, but in our choice to lay
our burdens down and find ourselves in the company of friends heeding the call to care for one
another,
To raise our families to know the way of human goodness and kindness
to listen to the wisdom of animals and tend our earth,
To kindle our radical love of neighbor
one that does not seek to judge or to cast out but to
offer what we have without expectation of reciprocity

Christmas reminds us that we cannot act as if the peace we dream of has already come,
delivered by a king or ruler from on high. As much as we wish it to be so, peace is being
birthed, in all of its messiness, by humans like us. Humans struggling, grasping, finding peace
and being peace for one another in this beautiful and broken world.

MAY IT BE SO AND MERRY CHRISTMAS