

In John, that is I John, we have a summary of the basic Biblical message in single phrase: "God is love". The simple truth of the tremendous reality that God loves us and is for us is what gives meaning to every area of our human experience. But the NT does not present this Good News to us as an abstract reality/ John also writes a gospel that tells us that this God who is love became flesh to dwell among us in the person of Jesus Christ. God is not only love in some abstract way, but he is love in one of us; he is love in Jesus Christ. This means that God's love identifies with us in our humanity, that it literally permeates every element of our common life. God's love isn't distant. It isn't unrealizable. It is here. It is present to us. This is why we celebrate great joy at Christmas.

Christmas has become largely a secular celebration - using the birthday of Jesus as a kind of excuse for all the other things that go on. Somewhere around 1850, the churches, when they celebrated Christmas, started the custom of giving presents to children who came to Sunday School. But it happened that many of the children would show up only on Christmas, in order to get the presents. They called these children 'Christmas Bums'. A Christmas Bummer is a person who uses the birth of Christ as an excuse for getting presents or partying or whatever else people do at Christmas. Each year we hear it

Suggested that we need to de-emphasize the secular element and elevate Christ. We're told to 'put Christ back in Christmas'.

Perhaps what we ought to do is to apply the principle of the incarnation to the Christmas celebration as we have it. That principle is that Christ touches, infuses, and transforms every element of our common life. Why not let the Christ ~~the~~ spirit infuse our celebration so that everything we do is transformed: giving presents, Santa Claus, special get-togethers, the tree, shopping, and worship. Why not let Christ touch us in this way. Instead of fighting the secular elements why not move into it with the spirit of Christ and transform it into something healing and something beautiful? Something good for ourselves and good for our world? In a little book Henry Van dyke writes that "it is a good thing to observe Christmas..." The mere marking of times and seasons, when men agree to stop work and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom. It helps us to feel the supremacy of the common life over the individual life. It reminds a man to set his own little watch now and then by the great clock of humanity which runs on Son time. But there is a better thing than to observe Christmas, and that is to keep Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think about what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background, and your

chances to <sup>do</sup> more than your duty in the foreground; to see that your fellow men are just as real as you are, and to try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy; to admit that probably the only reason for your existence is not what ~~you~~ you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life; to close your book of complaints, and to look around where you can sow a few seeds of happiness....are you willing to do these even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and to consider the needs <sup>and</sup> desires of little children; to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other people must bear in their hearts; to try to understand what those who live in the same house <sup>went</sup> without waiting for them to tell you; to trim your light so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so ~~that~~ that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open...are you willing to do these ven for a day. Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world, stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death, and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem 2000 years ago is the image and brightness of eternal



love. Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you keep it got a day...why not always. But you cannot keep it alone.

"He was in the world, and thru him the world was made, yet the world did not know who he was" John:10 The world to this day knows not who he is.

The world desperately needs to know the savior and we have been showing it a tree; the world longs to know of love and we give it an office party; the world desperately needs to recognize the prince of peace and we show it Santa Claus. A happy and blessed Christmas is reserved for the peacemakers, Go and make peace and you will have your happiest Christmas.

The OT began with an act of violence. Cain kills Abel. Thru out, there are accounts of numerous wars. The strain of violence continues in the NT. It begins with an episode of Herod's slaughter of the innocents. When Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, the devil urges him to use military power to attain his goals, start of violent revolution, And as the gospel story moves on to its conclusion there // is Peter brandishing a sword. But in the midst of all the violence in the scripture, the prophets realize that war and violence are not the intentional will of God. Isaiah describes the coming age when there will be such peace that the lamb and the lion will lie down together. Micah describes the coming age when man's swords will be beaten into plowshares. On into the NT

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this message of peace continues. At the beginning "Glory to God in heaven, peace on earth", the angels sing. Jesus comes as the prince of peace. He chooses to die rather than opt for violence. He speaks of loving one's enemies. He teaches reverence for life. "Blessed are the peacemakers" he says.

What are we saying this Christmas?

We are saying that we have been created by a loving, caring gracious God who is calling us into intimate union with himself. We are saying that this intimate union with God is our means...our only means...of growing into the beautifully whole and fulfilled persons God created us to be. We are saying that this ~~intimate~~ <sup>intimate</sup> union with God is offered us thru and in the coming of Jesus Christ. We are saying that as followers of Christ, we are in the world reflecting the Christ-like love that comes thru to us in the gospels. "You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world" Jesus tells us. This means, among other things, that we are peacemakers whom Jesus called blessed; we are the voices crying out for the elimination of strife and violence between persons and nations. Unless we are saying these things genuinely this C//////// Christmas, then we have forgotten that the reason we are here is to celebrate the coming of the prince of peace.

Spring is past,

Summer is gone

Winter is here,

And my song that I was meant to sing  
is still unsung.

I have spent my days  
Stringing and restringing

My instrument. (anon)

Christmas is the time to stop stringing your instrument  
and to begin singing    Glory to God in heaven. Peace on  
Earth.