

The Day After

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Unitarian Universalist Church of Winchendon

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We are here, in this quiet moment, the day after Christmas, because we need to be here. Not that we “want to be here” because we may want to be home, snuggled in our safe place, resting in peace after the Christmas holiday. We are here, because, for some reason, each of us has heard a call and responded it. Maybe we heard the call of duty – come to church to fulfill a responsibility, come to church because if you do not come there will be an empty house. Or maybe we heard the call of loneliness – come to church to see a friend, come to church to not be alone. Or maybe we heard the call of longing – there must be more to Christmas, more to life, than shopping, cooking, singing carols – is there something more, something that might shine more brightly on the day after Christmas? For whatever reason, I believe that those of us who have come here today have come because we need to be here. So welcome, all of us who on the day after Christmas, are feeling the need to be here. Welcome.

Annie Dillard, in our opening words says that we are here, on the planet, to “abet creation.” Like a good student I realized that I did not know what “abet” really means and so I looked it up and this is what I found. “Abet” is “to actively second and encourage”, to “assist or support.” Well that is all well and good. We

are here on the planet, and here at church today, to actively second and encourage and assist and support creation. But that is not quite active and radical enough a definition and enough of a reason for being alive. A synonym of the word “abet”, which really tells the story better, is “to incite.” We are not here just, in the words of Dillard, to witness creation, to notice each other’s face, but to incite creation itself. That is how we do not play to an empty house. We are here to incite a riot of the Spirit, to bring something new into the world, to fill the house with something better and bigger and more marvelous, than what was here before we walked on to the stage. We are born to incite a revolution. We come to church, even on the day after Christmas, to incite, to bring to light, something new into our hearts and into our communities.

When my first grandchild was born, 6 weeks early and weighing in just over 3 pounds, I held him in the palm of my hand, and close to my heart. On the day after he was born and for many days and weeks and even years after his birth I sang him this song “Who are you? Where did you come from? Who are you? How did you get here? Who are you? What did you come to teach us?”

Christmas is the re-creation of the birth of a baby, not just any baby, but a baby who would change the world, and who the world would try to change into whatever it wanted that baby to be. I heard once about a metaphor for how it is

that we humans make a picture of God so that we can grasp on to the Mystery of Life so that is not so mysterious. Imagine coming upon an abandoned well, deep in the forest, or maybe out in the middle of the desert. Pull off the well cover and carefully peer over the edge. Do not lean too far because you might fall in, and you know what that means. Look down and see that the water level is very low for this time of year – in the darkness of the well it might even seem bone dry, but it is not. Keep looking. In the still flat surface of the dark water you will finally see a shimmering image and that image will tell you something about God. That image, that shining, shimmering image of your own “beautiful face and complex nature” will tell you something, but only something, about God.

We see with our own eyes. We understand with our own minds. We wonder with our own hearts. The Mystery, that is God, or Life, or the ongoing fact of Creation, is being birthed every moment. If we take the time to be still, to listen to the silence, and look deep within the well, we might see someone looking back and showing us, who we are, where we have come from, and what we have to teach each other.

The day after a birth is totally different than the days leading up to it and totally different than the day of the birth itself. The day after Christmas is nothing like Advent. We are not waiting for something to happen. We are no longer

anticipating a child being born. The explosion of life that Christmas is intended to celebrate has happened. A riot, a revolution, has begun and on this day, December 26, 2010, we can only stop, take our breath, look around us and within us, and say “now what?”

From Carlyll Houselander “How small and gentle his coming was. He came as an infant. The night in which he came was noisy and crowded; it is unlikely that, in the traffic and travelers to Bethlehem, the tiny wail of the newly born could be heard. God approaches gently, often secretly, always in love, never through violence and fear. He comes to us, as God has told us, in those whom we know in our own lives. Very often we do not recognize God.”

I did not recognize my grandson Dylan, and four years later I did not recognize my granddaughter Kiara. Even on the day of their births and even the day after. It took years of getting to know them and growing in love with them before I could even venture a guess about what they have come to teach me. I still do not know where they really came from or, in the deepest sense, how they got here.

It is the same with God. I do not pretend to understand the Mystery of Life that brought each of us into being and that inspires us today to become more that

who we started out to be. I know that for me, understanding, and taking God seriously, has something to do with taking the stranger, the unknown person, and unknown realities, into my life and embracing them, as I would embrace my children and grandchildren. Our Story for All ages is just that, a story for all of us who might, even on the day after Christmas, be scratching our heads and wondering what happened. On Christmas Eve, the service, here in Winchendon, and in Northfield where I was, and in so many other places around the world, began with all kinds of preparations. The church got cleaned. The program got printed. The greens got displayed. The candles were lit. The organist and the preacher and the friends arrived. The children sang. And only then, only if a stranger was moved to enter into the holy space that we had created, and was welcomed with open arms, did Christmas begin.

On the day after Christmas we get to ponder in our hearts, what matters to us? Now that the words of the Christmas carols are starting to fade away, and before the hype about the New Year beginning is upon us, we get to ask, what matters, why did we come here, to church, to the planet, in the first place? Who are we? Where did we come from? What did we come to teach and learn from each other, and what are we learning about the Mystery that has come into our lives? In our meditation this morning we heard that “our silence, the silence that comes on

the morning after, represents our astonishment at the Miraculous Fact, after which there is nothing to say. It means receiving, not giving; waiting, not doing; hoping, not knowing; resting, not strife; and peace.” (Werner)

May it be so for us, on the day after Christmas. Amen.

Sources: When Christmas Came by Eileen Spinelli

“God Approaches” by Carylle Houselander

“A New Year Meditation” by Ernest C. Warner