

Along the track

A Christmas Reminder

Our world is a big, complex place, rich with different cultural traditions, beliefs and customs and, at every moment of every day, somewhere on this planet a new life is being born, young life is taking root, people are celebrating the beginning of a life.

When we look at the crib or read the Christmas story, we are reminded of how precious life is and how young lives can bring such joy and energy. Do we ever think of the joy Mary and Joseph must have felt at the birth of Jesus? How proud they must have been, what dreams they must have had for this child, their first born. The Gospel writers describe a long and arduous journey at a dangerous time, the tension of finding a place for their baby to be born, nothing much about the actual birth or who might have assisted but we do hear of the joy of the angels, the kings and the shepherds – everyone, high and low, rich and poor rejoicing at the beginning of this new life. Jesus wasn't faced with much of a future. The Gospel writers paint a pretty grim picture facing this baby, at the very least poverty and exile because his life was under threat. Yet there is still rejoicing.

At Christmas time, it is often through our children that we are reminded to rejoice and be happy as we see and experience Christmas through their eyes, the anticipation, the excitement, and the innocence. Yes, it can be over-commercialised and we may have become cynical or angry or disappointed but we still have the capacity for happiness and joy in ourselves and the capacity to bring that to others. We may need reminding of that sometimes. It is part of what it means to be human – losing that capacity is de-humanising. That may well be part of the message to the shepherds: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Luke 2:11. All people, even those of us all these years later if we are open to it. Over the years we may have lost that joy within ourselves or it may have diminished.

Part of the message of Christmas is a reminder that being joyful, enjoying happiness is part of who we are as is our capacity to bring that to others. Pope Francis reminds us often that bringing joy to others is the Christian's mission:

Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.

So, in the rush associated with Christmas, the stresses and the tensions, the over commercialisation and the pressures that inevitably brings, the essential message is that the birth of this child reminds us that we are loved. The giving of the presents and receiving them, the celebrations, the decorations, the special meal are all reminders that we are loved and that we are called to share that love with others. We are at our best when we do that. That is the message of great joy.

In a sense, Christmas reminds us that there is a child still within us, unless we have given up and decided to grow old even before our time. It is a reminder that despite setbacks and hardships, life is still full of possibilities even in unexpected places, perhaps not always in ways we had planned. It is a reminder that Christmas is a call to begin again, to seek out where real joy can be found... and shared. It is a reminder of the hardest message of all, one that we find hard to believe, the message that we are loved:

There is no fear in love. We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn 4 18-19)

We can always find reasons why this cannot be true – we have done wrong, we are not perfect, how could God love someone like me and so on. But the reality is, we are loved, unconditionally.

The first step that God takes towards us is that of a love that anticipates and is unconditional. God is the first to love. God does not love because there is something in us that engenders love. God loves us because he himself is love, and, by its very nature, love tends to spread and give itself. Pope Francis 16 June 2017.

We come to understand that through the love of others and they in turn come to understand that because we love them. Christmas is an important time, a yearly reminder of what is really important in life.

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au