

I heard an angel speak yesterday. We were in a crowded place, and so I did not recognize her at first. Only after she had left did I realize.

I was waiting in line at the West Side Market, picking up my order. Other men were there, and a woman also, waiting. The proprietor waited upon one man, with another, then shook hands ~~and talked with another.~~ As he did so he said to the woman you'll have to wait. After a bit, having concluded his business with that second man he glanced at the woman, then turned to me to see what I needed. He called an assistant to help me, and only then turned to the woman. We must have sold your order, he told her. I'll see what I can go to make up another one. He threw a couple of chickens in a bag, weighed them, then asked, will that be all right. She nodded yes. For at least six or seven minutes he had kept her waiting for what he could have done in a matter of seconds. The fact that he was white, and I and the other men were white, and she was black, was not missed by me, nor by her I am sure.

She paid for her chickens, received her change then said, "Merry Christmas to you." I listened for sarcasm, bitterness in that, there was none. The angel had spoken.

I had approached that stand searching for the meaning of Christmas, I left, knowing.

Later when I told someone about this he nodded and said, "Yes, Christmas is about our caring for one another. To which I responded, No, that's not it at all."

Just think how the world made ready for Jesus. His mother late in her pregnancy, was ordered to take a sixty mile trek so some king could know just how many people he expected to bow down to him. We picture her on a donkey, though none is mentioned in scripture. But donkey or not, it must have been a terribly hard journey for her, all because a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. So Joseph went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to the city of David, which is called Beth-lehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be enrolled with

Mary, his betrothed who was with child. And while they were there the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

There was no place for them in the inn. After the hard journey, among all the folks who were related to Joseph, no one would make room for a pregnant woman. Like my Christmas gifts to the poor, or that vendors attention to a black woman, they gave only what truly cost them nothing, a stable.

That alone should have brought the end of it all. Angels like fighter bombers should have rained fire on that village. Justice would have been done. But no.

An angel appeared to the shepherds, be not afraid; for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.

What is Christmas? The time when we all learn to love one another. And be kind. A moment of peace in a year of guns and bombs and wars? Would the angels sing over that?

Do you realize that Jesus coming into this world has changed this world not at all? Whatever we are, we are not better. Not outside the church, not in the church. We could give fifty thousand dollars to feed hungry people, maybe a hundred, two hundred thousand, still we would not starve ourselves. But we will not.

We will not even do such a simple thing as forgive one another. God's command about this is clear, nothing could be clearer, but we nurse bitterness and anger and find it hard to even shake hands with some.

So what are angels singing about?

You see, in the movies, on TV, love really makes a difference. Scrooge joins the celebration and what God intends happens. And I get all teary eyed.

But in life the folks in the Inn don't suddenly come out to the stable with  
appologies and worship. They sleep.

Still the angels sang. Of what?

Of this. God was going to bless his epople. ~~wh~~ He was not going to wait  
for them to learn to make a place for a pregant woman. We would not wait  
until they knew how to keep his law. We would not wait until they would believe  
and hope and trust enough. God was simply doing Christmas, and Easter, and  
his forever New Year. And angels sang.

~~xxx~~ We'll follow Jesus from Bethlehem, chased down to Egypt by Herod,  
back up to Nazareth. We will follow Jesus across the dusty roads of Galilee  
where people will love the food and the healing, but still will forget to be  
faithful, and to obey. We will watch as the world puts the son of God on  
trial and dicides the world is better off with him dead. We will watch as  
God brings him back to life in this world and still some will doubt.

Truly the angels had no cause to sing about how we greet our God.  
But Christmas is not about us, but about the God who will not say, No. He  
chooses to love and forgive, even those who treat him like dirt. As that  
woman did yesterday.

All my life I have searched for someone who would care. I have searched  
for eyes I could look into and see joy and laughter, and know that the  
joy and the laughter were with me and for me, and not at me. I've searched  
for one who would see me just as I am, and who would not walk away when I do  
the very things that I hate in others. Those eyes for which I search first  
opened in Bethlehem, and the angels sang.

Christmas is not about my love for you, nor yours for me. I will fail you,  
I will die. Christmas is about God who chooses to love us and when we fail  
him, crucify him, he still chcooses us for all eternity.

Of course the angels sing, and we sing too. Jesus our savior and our  
Lord is born. *Alpen*