

CHRISTMAS EVE

Holding on and Letting Go

Bienvenidos. In Spanish, the word means welcome. Bien means good and venidos means coming. So the bienvenidos then means something like good coming here. So bienvenidos to you—blessings on your journey to this place, on this night. Some of us have been coming here to worship for decades. Some came as children and now bring grandchildren. Some of us have been here for years, we feel at home, but still know ourselves as relative newcomers. For some of us, this is our first Christmas Eve service. Welcome to all—and blessings on our journey that has brought us to this place.

Christmas is about holding on to our memories of who we have been on our journey. We remember who we are with a special intensity and focus at Christmas. Maybe we remember baking cookies with our mother or grandmother. We find our mind carrying us back to buying a Christmas tree and as we smell that fresh pine smell, we are again a child helping our parents decorate. Some gifts, some songs, some foods carry our hearts into our childhood and hopefully we find happiness there. I suppose one of the spiritual disciplines is for us to look for the happiness that is there in our story rather than focus excessively on the sorrows.

When our two boys were about 9 and 11, they worked together for weeks preparing their own secret Christmas decorations. Red and green construction paper and glue and tape disappeared into their room and their creations were then hidden from parents prying eyes. On Christmas morning, they got up early. Their purpose was not to open their presents but to decorate for us. They had fashioned elf hats for themselves and for us. The construction paper chains draped over the banister. They were very pleased with the great surprise. We all felt richly blessed.

Our heart thrill to see children dressed up as angels and shepherds and sheep and goats and donkeys because we remember and hold onto to those memories of when we were children, when we were in the pageant. The children's joy gives us joy—and we thank God and life for the opportunity and honor of being with children and having them bless us so richly.

On this holy night, we hold on to holy memories that define us and shape us and nourish us and yes that sometimes burden us.

But this good coming to Christmas, to the celebration of the birth of the Christ, full of grace and truth among us and for the world, the coming requires too that we let go.

In the birth stories only Caesar and Herod are simply trying to do business as usual. For everyone else, the stories are about adventures of travel, of leaving home, of leaving the sheep to up to see this marvel proclaimed by the angels. Certainly the Incarnation itself is about God leaving behind the old way of

doing things. Right. God is not going to rely any longer just on the law and the prophets—God is going to leave that reliance behind and come to dwell among us full of grace and truth, full of hope and risk.

The birth narratives flow with people letting go of their old securities, of striking out to new places to discover God. So tonight in that spirit, I would like to ask you to let go. First of all, we are called to let go of our rationalism, our skepticism about angels and miracles and virginal conception. If that imagery perplexes you, you can always choose Mark's birth story. The question is not whether or not you or I believe in angels, but whether we first of all believe that life has a spiritual dimension to it. Whether we now and our ancestors from the beginning are and were body and soul. Let go of angels if you need to --but hold onto the mystery that you and I are body and soul, matter and spirit. We are that now and will be that—forever.

Beyond this intellectual letting go, there is also a spiritual challenge. I think it was on the TV show *Malcolm in the Middle* where the phrase 'You're not the boss of me' was used and then got popularized. The phrase became a catchword for youthful defiance. Hey, I don't have to listen to you—you're not the boss of me—I am my own boss. But now, we sing and believe that Jesus is lord at his birth. He is the boss of us. We are his followers, his disciples. Sweetly and tenderly Jesus is calling us to come home—and he will insist upon it. So we have some letting go to do. This is a letting go of our own sense of power and control over our own life. We are worshippers to be sure —o come let us adore him. But we are followers as well. Our lives and how we live them are different now. In fact nothing is the same.

Meister Eckhart, the 13th century Dominican preacher and mystic, wrote about the challenge to us believers and followers. He said "Get yourself out of the way—meaning let go of your ego's desire to control and to be the boss—Get yourself out of the way and let God be God in you.

Tonight then, we who believe passionately in the spirit dimension of life are preparing room for this Christ child, for this Jesus, god with us, our hero and leader, lord and savior, the true and eternal boss of us. We are preparing him room by holding on to powerful and painful memories of who we are. And we are preparing room by letting go of some of our rational resistance to the message of the Christ. We work to get ourselves out of the way—so God can indeed be god in us. So our souls can feel their worth—as the soil and seedbed of the savior—as the hearth and home of the Christ—as the reflected light of the Light of the World.