

Holidays

Opening words and Chalice lighting:

(#625 from Singing the Living Tradition)

An Eye for Miracles

You who have an eye for miracles regard the bud now appearing on the bare branch of the fragile young tree.

It's a mere dot, a nothing.

But already it's a flower, already a fruit, already its own death and resurrection.

~ Diego Valeri

Welcome and check-in (A time to share what is on your mind in order to clear it and be in the present.)

Reading for discussion

(Send out before meeting so that members can read ahead of time.)

Garrison Keillor column "Don't Mess With Christmas..." 12/15/09

Blogs responding to Keillor's column

Questions for discussion

What is your reaction to Keillor's column and the bloggers' reactions?

Thoughts about other holidays? Why do we celebrate them?

How does our UU faith affect our celebration of holidays?

Do you have a favorite holiday? (It does not have to be a religious holiday.) Why is it your favorite?

What version of "Silent Night" do you prefer? Note: Even our *Singing the Living Tradition* has 2+ versions. See # 251 & # 252.

Check-out (A time to share likes and wishes, such as "I like how we..." "I wish we would...", or express how you felt about the group.)

Closing words and extinguishing the Chalice:

(#615 from Singing the Living Tradition)

The Work of Christmas

When the song of angels is stilled,

When the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home,

When the shepherds are back with their flock,

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,

To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,

To release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations,

To bring peace among the brother,

To make music in the heart.

~ Howard Thurman

Thanks to everyone for their participation and commitment to our group!

Tuesday, Dec 15, 2009 20:16 EST **Don't mess with Christmas
It's a Christian holiday, dammit, and it's plain wrong
to rewrite "Silent Night." Unitarians, I'm talking to you!**

By Garrison Keillor I've just come from Cambridge, that beehive of brilliance, where nerds don't feel self-conscious: There's always someone nerdier nearby. If you are the World's Leading Authority on the mating habits of the jabberwock beetle of the Lesser Jujube Archipelago, you can take comfort in knowing that the pinch-faced drone next to you at Starbucks may be the W.L.A. on 17th-century Huguenot hymnody or a niche of quantum physics that is understood by nobody but himself.

People in Cambridge learn to be wary of brilliance, having seen geniuses in the throes of deep thought step into potholes and disappear. Such as the brilliant economist Lawrence Summers, whose presidency brought Harvard to the verge of disaster. He was the man who, against the advice of his lessers, invested Harvard's operating funds in the stock market and lost the bet. In the cold light of day, this was dumber than dirt, like putting the kids' lunch money on Valiant's Fancy to win in the fifth. And now the genius is in the White House, two short flights of stairs above the Oval Office. This does not make Cambridgeans feel better about our nation's economic future.

You can blame Ralph Waldo Emerson for the brazen foolishness of the elite. He preached here at the First Church of Cambridge, a Unitarian outfit (where I discovered that "Silent Night" has been cleverly rewritten to make it more about silence and night and not so much about God), and Emerson tossed off little bons mots that have been leading people astray ever since. "To be great is to be misunderstood," for example. This tiny gem of self-pity has given license to a million arrogant and unlovable people to imagine that their unpopularity somehow was proof of their greatness. And all his hoo-ha about listening to the voice within and don't follow the path, make your own path and leave a trail and so forth, encouraged people who might've been excellent janitors to become bold and innovative economists who run a wealthy university into the ditch.

Unitarians listen to the Inner Voice and so they have no creed that they all stand up and recite in unison, and that's their perfect right, but it is wrong, wrong, wrong to rewrite "Silent Night." If you don't believe Jesus was God, OK, go write your own damn "Silent Night" and leave ours alone. This is spiritual piracy and cultural elitism and we Christians have stood for it long enough. And all those lousy holiday songs by Jewish guys that trash up the malls every year, Rudolph and the chestnuts and the rest of that dreck. Did one of our guys write "Grab your loafers, come along if you wanna, and we'll blow that shofar for Rosh Hashanah"? No, we didn't.

Christmas is a Christian holiday -- if you're not in the club, then buzz off. Celebrate Yule instead or dance around in druid robes for the solstice. Go

light a big log, go wassailing and falalaing until you fall down, eat figgy pudding until you puke, but don't mess with the Messiah.

Christmas does not need any improvements. It is a common ordinary experience that resists brilliant innovation. Just make some gingerbread persons and light three candles and sing softly in dim light about the poor man gathering winter fu-u-el and the radiant beams and the holly and the ivy, and you've got it. Too many people work too hard to make Christmas perfect, find the perfect gifts, get a turkey that reaches 100 percent of potential. Perfection is a goal of brilliant people and it is unnecessary where Christmas is concerned.

The most wonderful Christmas of my life was 1997, a quiet day with no gifts and no tree, waiting in a New York apartment for my daughter to be born. And the second most wonderful was one in the Norwegian Arctic, where it rained every day and the sun came up around 11 and set around 1, not that you ever actually saw the sun, and the food was abominable, boiled cod and watery potatoes, and the people were cold and resentful, and there was no brilliance whatsoever. And I had the flu. Why was I there? Good question. But every year it gladdens my heart to know that I will not be going to Norway for Christmas. A terrific investment. Mr. Summers should be so smart. For one week of misery, I get an annual joyfulness dividend of at least 25 percent. Merry Christmas, my dears. (Garrison Keillor is the author of "77 Love Sonnets," published by Common Good Books.)

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Friday, December 18, 2009 [Christmas controversy](#)

posted by Kenneth Sutton **UUs and Christmas**

"Plaidshoes" admits, in a post that you will soon see was premonitory, distaste for the practice of rewording hymns.

Today in church we sang Joy to the World. I thought I knew all the words to it-- especially since I have been singing it for thirty+ years. Evidently, according to the UU hymnal, I don't. As most UUs know, we have a long tradition of rewording hymns to fit our more inclusive perspective. In all honesty, I don't like this practice. ("Everyday Unitarian," December 13)

Julie Lepp reflects on seasonal celebrations, inspired by a *UU World* article by Meg

Cox, "Tis the season for your own family rituals."

Being intentional about this time of year is hard. We have messages from our childhood traditions, the media, and our own expectations about what it takes to do it right.

Rethinking how we celebrate the winter holidays, while not simple, can be quite radical.

("A Journey of Ministry," December 14)

Garrison Keillor

The swift (and prolific) Peter Bowden responded with a post to which he has added links to other places the essay has appeared online as well as links to other bloggers.

It is true that the hymnal published by the Unitarian Universalist Association has a slightly different version of Silent Night. But I think Garrison Keillor is missing out on some key information about the origins of this holiday. He is such a smart man. Isn't he aware of the origins of this holiday? ("The UU Growth Blog," December 17)

Kari thinks there are more important things than the words of a hymn.

I think if Jesus were here on earth today he would be way too busy working with homeless teens and teaching children about hope and love to be bothered. A lowercase "c" christian--the religion of Jesus, not about Jesus. ("Chalice Spark," December 17)

Paul Oakley addresses the dimension of cultural ownership.

Unitarian Universalism is not a Christian religion, but its Universalist and Unitarian roots are fully Christian, if heretical. Therefore, everything that was part of Unitarian Christianity or of Universalist Christianity is part of our heritage. No exceptions. No one has the standing or would be in the right to deny any organization its legitimate inheritance. And every heir within a particular lineage has both the authority and the need to reinterpret his or her own heritage in ways that are meaningful to that heir. ("Inner Light, Radiant Life," December 17)

The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Landrum has been a regular listener to Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion."

Keillor rightfully calls all the trappings of Christmas not what the holiday is really about. But the song "Silent Night" is just one more of those trappings. His attachment to his particular set of words for the song isn't about the spirit of the season. It's about one more chance to attack Unitarian Universalists and other religions. And I'll tell you what Christmas is not about: this type of religious prejudice. Peace on Earth, goodwill to all. This Unitarian Universalist has had enough. On Sunday afternoons, my radio will get tuned elsewhere. ("Rev. Cyn," December 17)

Meanwhile, Jess has a literal translation of "Stille Nacht." ("Jess's Journal," December 17)

The Rev. Thom Belote thinks Keillor doesn't like UUs.

Garrison Keillor comes across as a confused, angry man grinding his axe.

But, what he says is pretty ugly. There is not a UU version of the Anti-Defamation League, but I would expect that the actual ADL might take offense at a few of the tired Jewish stereotypes trotted out in the article. Furthermore, I think I am pretty familiar with the Gospels but I don't ever recall Jesus saying, "If you're not in the club, then buzz off." Let's see. Blessed are the meek. The last shall be first. Keeping company with sinners, tax collectors, and lepers. ("RevThom," December 18)

Jim Magaw argues for a "third way" of honoring Christmas:

There is a human tendency to believe that Christmas as it was kept in our memories of our own childhood is the Christmas that is right and sacred, and that any other way of keeping Christmas is a blasphemy, if not an abomination. This tendency is on display in Keillor's recent *Salon* article.

There is another human tendency to simply go along mindlessly with the dominant culture's way of marking Christmas, including crass consumerism, incessant busyness and so forth—most of which has nothing to do with the Word made flesh and coming to dwell among us. This is the tendency that I think Keillor is really railing against in the *Salon* piece.

But there is, I think, a third way, which is to carve out a way of keeping Christmas that honors the Christmases of our childhood while being true to our contemporary beliefs and our best hopes for ourselves and our descendants. ("Word, Music, and Meaning," December 18)

"Lizard Eater" thinks Christmas should just be done "wrong," anyway.

Christmas Eve, it was just the 4 of us. At some point, we decided to go downtown and take a carriage ride up and down Congress Ave. What fun! We were singing some of our favorite holiday songs – Merry Christmas from the Family, Please Daddy Don't Get Drunk This Christmas, and others of that ilk.

Our carriage driver was not pleased. "Look at the other carriages!" she hissed at us. "They're singing things like 'Silent Night.'"

See. We were doing it wrong. And having a blast. ("The Journey," December 18)

Two of Keillor's sentences have drawn the ire of Jewish bloggers:

And all those lousy holiday songs by Jewish guys that trash up the malls every year, Rudolph and the chestnuts and the rest of that dreck. Did one of our guys write "Grab

your loafers, come along if you wanna, and we'll blow that shofar for Rosh Hashanah"? No, we didn't.

Avi Weinstein expresses his ambivalence about the Jewish songwriters jab, pointing to a history of appropriation and co-optation:

Now Orrin Hatch has written a snappy Chanukah song out of his deep respect for Jews and Judaism. Conan O'Brien and his Jewish drummer Max Weinberg view this as an opportunity to gently spoof Mormonism, as if there is something bizarre about Senator Hatch writing a Chanukah song. This is a peculiarly, but not uniquely, American phenomenon. Why not uniquely? Marc Chagall created a number of paintings of Jesus, some of which equated his crucifixion with Holocaust victims. Mounds of irony in that comparison, even though it's hard to figure out who is co-opting whom. ("Scorchin Torah and Strange Thoughts," December 18)

Marissa Brostoff also picks up on the irony:

"Dreck?" Really? Who's co-opting whom? ("Tablet," December 17)

Some responses from Christian bloggers

John Carney urges moderation.

It's about a century or two too late to start declaring that Christmas is exclusively a religious holiday. Christians need to be respectful of those who are, by simple cultural fact, obligated to live through our holiday schedule even though they belong to another tradition. Non-Christians need to recognize that this is a special holiday, with a deeper meaning, to some (but not all!) Christians. (Even here in Bedford County, we have some churches that consider Christmas an unnecessary and anti-Biblical contrivance). ("Lake Neuron," December 18)

Christian blogger Jeff Skaret agrees with Keillor.

I recently read an article by Garrison Keillor for Salon.com, which I think speaks for many Christians on the topic of Christmas. While there may be several reasons to dislike what Garrison Keillor has to say on many topics, this isn't one of them for me. Putting politics aside, I think Keillor nails how most of us feel about the deconstruction and commercialization of Christmas and how many continue to try to turn the birth of the Messiah into something less. ("A Different Look," December 18)

And finally, from a non-religious blog, Chauncy Mabe at the blog of the Florida Center for the Literary Arts at Miami Dade College:

The essay, though written in a sprightly, readable style, has a sharp tang of bitterness. Even if Keillor means to overstate his case for satiric or rhetorical value, the plain thrust of his argument--Christmas is for believing, practicing Christians only--seems to run counter to much of the Christmas spirit. ("Open Page," December 18)