

**PACIFIC UNITARIAN
CHURCH**

A Unitarian Universalist Community



With a Christmas Heart

A Homily Delivered by The Rev. John T. Morehouse

on

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I have played at being Santa more than a few times in my life. In our house we will leave here and return home and one of us will play Santa and hand out pajamas. I want to assure all the children young and old here this evening that I am not Santa, even though I might look just like him a little bit. Santa is, well, Santa. As real as the night is long. Magically Santa will appear tonight and deliver up dreams. How is it that Santa gets all those presents delivered in one night? I believe he does it with something I call a Christmas heart. What is a Christmas heart, you ask?

Jesus, whose birth we celebrate tonight, had the Christmas heart, giving the ultimate gift of life itself. Jesus spent his short life proclaiming a great truth that if followed, would enlarge even the hardest of hearts many sizes over. Love with all your might; love another as much as yourself. Isn't that what the Grinch learned standing in the snow with his feet growing cold, hearing up the voices from down below, starting out small and starting to grow? Christmas isn't only about boxes and bows, it's about giving, starting with the very life each of us is given to change the world. It was Sophia Lyon

Fahs, the great Unitarian educator, who once said; “Every child born is one more redeemer.” The birth of the one we celebrate tonight is only the sign to the birth of hope, for redemption lies in every child, indeed in every one of us. A starry night in the darkest time of the year only reminds us of what could be. A Christmas heart begins with recognizing that by the very fact we were born we have the potential to change the world.

But it takes more than just being born to have a Christmas heart. A Christmas heart must come to us, earned if you will, through our own efforts and willingness to be transformed. This night also knows great heartache and war across the world. Evil men, born redeemers, have failed to live up to the promise of Christmas. Those who would wage war, lie, steal and deny basic human and civil rights to us have betrayed the Christmas heart. The Grinch was one such failure, but he changed, was transformed, not by some heavenly host, but by his fellow creatures. His heart grew when he witnessed that Christmas is ultimately not about what we get, but about what we already have. The Christmas heart lives already in each of us waiting to be born.

Why is it that Jimmy Stewart's movie *It's a Wonderful Life* is so cherished? Because he realizes that it is his family, his friends, his church, if you will, that makes the real miracle of Christmas happen. The Christmas heart is in all of us and is waiting to be born again through the simple gifts of what we already have. Someone I know, who looks even more like Santa than I do, moonlights every year in a department store playing Santa. One year, after an especially long day, he was about to call it quits (he had a wedding to perform that evening—ah, the pastor's life) when who should appear but an older woman with Down's Syndrome. She approached the stage carefully. My friend admits he was tired, but nonetheless invited her up.

She approached cautiously and stared at him. "How far away is the North Pole?" she asked.

"Ho, ho, very far away indeed."

She looked around. "Where are your reindeer?" she asked.

"I had to leave them on the roof, store policy" he replied.

“May I sit down?” she asked.

Now Santa was a bit worried, she was a big lady. But Santa is courageous (who else would ride in an open sleigh all night long, and brave all those cookies and milk). She was very careful and half-sat gingerly on his knee. “What would you like for Christmas?” he asked.

“A pair of snow boots....” came the reply.

“Anything else?” he asked.

She thought for a while. “No, I think I can handle the rest. My mother is really sick, but I will take care of her, just the boots please, Santa.” And with that she left.

Here was a Christmas heart in its purest form. The woman’s faith that while life can be hard there is always hope living inside everything we do, bore my friend to a higher place than he had ever been. A child is born, with all the hope and fears of this night. But by morning, hope prevails. This woman, despite all her struggles, with a simple trust reminds us of what a Christmas heart can do.

We bemoan the holiday, worry that the commercialism has cheapened the meaning of Christmas. But I say the Christmas heart is still strong. Yes, Virginia, there really is a Santa Claus beyond the myth taken from some Russian folk tale. The Christmas heart beats in every mother's child who has the feeling of expectation that something wonderful is about to happen. The Christmas heart beats in the traditions we follow, this service, the special foods, the stories that are read each year, the memories—even the sad memories—keep Christmas hearts beating. With a Christmas heart hope is heard and the hopes no longer sound so foolish. With a Christmas heart someone is listening. With a Christmas heart, the world, in all of its brokenness and heartache, is still a loving place. With a Christmas heart, the greatest gift of all is love. With a Christmas heart the smile on a stranger's face makes it all worth while. With a Christmas heart, Christmas is a time to be reminded that life is a gift and that light always follows darkness.

All of us have that Christmas heart waiting to grow. Let it grow, all year round. So on this night of nights, I commend to all, young and old, the spirit of Christmas. Be with a Christmas heart, light and bringers of hope. For unto us is born a child, who still laughs within.

Merry Christmas!