

“The Peace on Christmas”
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Menifee United Church of Christ

On Christmas, several years ago, I got a present. It was from my daughter's grandpa. It was nicely wrapped and I was excited as I opened it. And it was a couple of batteries. I was confused. There was a note attached that said, "Toy not included." True story.

Christmas is full of joy. Or at least it should be. We sing Christmas carols, which should bring us joy. We give and receive gifts, which should bring us joy. And most importantly, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, which should give us joy. And peace.

Peace was what a man was looking for a couple thousand years ago. In the gospel of Luke, Simeon wanted to see the Christ Child, wanted to see the Messiah, wanted to see Jesus before he died. This would bring him peace and give him salvation. So Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit to the temple, where Mary and Joseph had brought the baby Jesus. They held the baby Jesus and then they let Simeon hold the baby Jesus. Simeon was at peace. Simeon had held the Messiah, the Christ. Simeon had found peace. And we do find peace at Christmas.

War is something we find at Christmas. Say what? Yes, believe it or not, there's something called "The War on Christmas." You've probably heard this. People say there's a war on Christmas when anybody says to somebody else: "Happy Holidays!" instead of "Merry Christmas!" When stores put up a sign that says "Happy Holidays!" instead of "Merry Christmas!" some people say there's a war on Christmas. When Starbucks has a coffee cup that has symbols of the season, Christmas-y kinds of symbols, but doesn't say, "Merry Christmas!" that's part of the war on Christmas. It's probably the most bloodless war ever, not to mention fake, because Christmas is not about war, Christmas is about peace.

Jesus is about peace. Jesus is to usher in peace. The prophet Isaiah says that the wolf will live with the kid and a little child will lead them. This is because Jesus will usher in peace, as he does every year on December 25th. Today, Jesus ushers in peace. Because Jesus is all about the peace on Christmas.

At a store several years ago, I was a soldier in the war on Christmas. I didn't mean to be. I was talking with a woman I'd just met and I didn't know whether she was a Christian or whether she was Jewish, whether she was a Buddhist or whether she was an atheist. I had no idea. So when we parted ways, I said, "Happy Holidays!" Oh no! I was an unwitting warrior in the war on Christmas. I should have, of course, said to her, "Merry Christmas!" regardless of what religious faith, or lack of same, she was. But I didn't. I was just trying to be peaceful, be loving.

Jesus is all about peace. In the gospel of John, Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." Jesus was all about peace. Now I know there's a passage in Matthew that says Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have come to bring a sword." But I believe that that is a spiritual sword that he's bringing, to slay people spiritually, not physically, because, when you think about it, most of the gospel is about Jesus being peaceful and loving. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor." Jesus said, "Love your enemies." Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek." Doesn't that sound like Jesus is all about peace on Christmas? And love.

Love was what I was trying to be about the other day at the Menifee City Council meeting. The mayor had asked me to give the invocation before the meeting. I agreed. So there I was on Wednesday night, a little after 7. But I believe in the separation of church and state, so I didn't want my prayer to sound real religious. I wanted to be more interfaith. I thought that would be the proper thing to be if, you know, you didn't want to break the barrier between church and state. So I began my prayer by saying, "Let us lift our spirits. Spirit of Love, known by many names: God and Goddess, Yahweh and Allah, Dios and Divine, Nature and Spirit of Love." Then I said things like, "We're grateful for the city of Menifee and we're grateful for the city's elected leaders. We're grateful that the city's elected leaders can care about the Have Lots and we're grateful that the city's elected leaders can care about the Have Nots." I said, "We're grateful that the city's elected leaders can care about the city's homeowners and we're grateful that the city's elected leaders can care about the city's homeless." Then I ended the prayer by saying, "Now and forevermore, Amen." I was just trying to be peaceful. And loving. And throw a little justice in there for good measure. So I hope nobody thought that I was having a war on Christianity, I was just trying to be interfaith. I think that's important to be, especially at Christmas time and during the holidays. I think we should be peaceful.

Darius Rucker is peaceful. Darius Rucker is the lead singer of the band Hootie and the Blowfish. I love that name! Hootie and the Blowfish. Darius Rucker sings a peaceful song about Christmas, entitled "What God Wants for Christmas." Darius Rucker sings, "I wonder what God wants for Christmas. Not something you find in a store. Maybe

God wants peace." I believe that's true. I believe that God wants peace. At Christmas and all the time. That's why I believe that God is all about, "The Peace on Christmas," and not, "The war on Christmas."

How about you? Do you say to people, "Merry Christmas!" if you know they're Christian? Or do you say to people, "Happy Holidays!" if you're not sure they're Christian? Hopefully you're not an unwitting warrior in the war on Christmas, because I think it's important that we have love and peace on Christmas and not war.

Let us pray:
*God of Love,
Help us to be about peace on Christmas.
Help us to avoid being about war on Christmas.
And help us to be about peace on Christmas and every day of the year.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes
and was transcribed from a recording of it.)*