

On this Sunday before Christmas, we light the candle of LOVE, and our scripture readings are about Mary the mother of Jesus; what love Mary must have had to parent such a unique son! Different from day one, even from the womb... Imagine, an angel announcing that you will give birth to a holy child. Imagine, when he was a baby, hearing the spirit say through an elder, Simeon, "Now I can die in peace, for my eyes have seen thy salvation. This child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel" and, "Mary, a sword shall pierce your heart also." (He will be "well-acquainted with grief," and you will be also as you watch him grow and lead). Imagine, going to your cousin Elizabeth's house who says the baby in her tummy was leaping around at your greeting! Imagine, sages coming to your house bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the toddler. Imagine, when he was 12, how he disappeared for days and was found in the temple studying the holy books with the rabbis; Imagine how they must have said, "he is way beyond his years, he asks questions and responds with wisdom not of this world." Imagine, how this 12 year old Jesus said, Hey Mom and Dad, didn't you know I had to spend time in my "Father's house?" Mary may have said: "Son, Joseph is still your father here on earth and under this roof!" So he did go home with them as an obedient son. Imagine, he must have spent time with various groups of seekers, then began getting his own followers! Imagine, how he said one day: "My mother and brothers and sisters are "Those who love God!" Imagine how Mary may have felt. But she would have known that Jesus taught about "Extended Family"... about what Paul later would call the "Body of Christ." ("fellowship" or "Community" of Christ.) Mary must have said many times, "Hey Joseph, this son of ours, like the angels said to us in dreams, surely is Not of This World!"

So what kind of LOVE did Mary and Joseph need to be his parents? In many ways it was a love that knows how to "let go." A love that knows not to cling, not to hold tight, but to give freedom and

uniqueness to the child. Jesus was so unique, so much from another world, so divine, that his Presence really demanded a new kind of love. It was a love that was interested in creating COMMUNITY, an “extended family.” We recall the famous words of Jesus from the cross, “John behold your mother: Mary, behold your son.” It was creating a new “family” that was not just a nuclear or biological family. It was a love that accepted and celebrated differences in the “family of God.” No cookie-cutter uniformity, No tribal rigidity and warring in the love that Mary and Jesus exemplified.

There is another emphasis of Mary and Jesus’ kind of Love. And that is love for the less fortunate, for those in any kind of pain, those wounded or oppressed. It is love wed to JUSTICE. Mary’s song, the Magnificat (“My soul doth magnify” the Lord), is a very radical and prophetic song about God’s love working to lift up the oppressed, and to take good care of the most vulnerable among us, who are weaker in body or in mind. This new kind of love will not accept the ways of the world - that might makes right, survival of the fittest, and the golden rule is “the ones with the gold rule.” Jesus said clearly, “My kingdom is not of this world.” It is love wed to justice. The UCC has an often-used phrase: We are called to “Live the Love and Justice of Jesus.” Adding the word “justice” guards us from simple sentimentality and good feelings. This new kind of love is indeed from another world, where Grace and Love abound for all God’s people, and all God’s creation. It is radical justice-seeking love, sung by Mary in the Magnificat and exemplified so fully in Jesus’ teachings and life.

The pandemic has forced us to focus on the more vulnerable or oppressed among us. The pandemic has forced us to consider all of humanity as our brothers and sisters, since we are all indeed in the same boat, all in this together. And accordingly, we will get through it best if we work together, yes across nations, across political aisles. With a worldwide virus, an attitude of survival of the fittest does not work, as we know it is an equal opportunity bug that will attack

anybody and any nation, rich or poor. Dr. Martin Luther King was right when he insisted that we are not free until all are free. We are connected in one human family, so the wounds of a few are felt by all. We hear that the poverty level (which is 26,000 for a family of four) is increasing rapidly in this country. We hear that job losses continue and unemployment applications steadily rise. So a relief or stimulus package is no trifling matter, and charity also may be more necessary this winter than ever. We need both government help and donations from a thousand points of light. Jesus was called the light of the world, but he also said that WE are the light of the world, so do not hide, but let our lights shine. That is the symbolism of candle lighting on Christmas Eve; that WE ourselves can carry the light of Christ, the light of healing, the light of truth, the light of compassion, the light of a cheerful heart, to any dark area, and surely there are many these days. The ways of the world say “I have my needs met, good luck to you!) But Jesus says “My Kingdom is not of this world.” “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Unfortunately not many Christmas carols talk about the neighbor who is hurting while many are feasting. But one that does is Good King Wenceslas, a song that comes to us with an elegant “old English.” Why was he a good King? Because he saw the “poor man” who was “gathering winter fuel” and he told his servant that they would go, bring food, and feast with that man. Imagine, a king out on a cold winter night, spending time in a humble home, bringing not only food, but his company, his Presence! This is a kind of love “not of this world.” This “Good King” Wenceslas showed a radical kind of love, a love similar to Jesus’ sense of a kingdom, a community of all kinds of people, where good King is one who will spend time with the common or poor man.

I wrote a Christmas song quite a while ago that has a similar theme ... a song that urges us to widen our focus from just the customary “trappings” (or wrappings) of the season, and listen to the

cries of the hungry or the lonely. Yes, of course we need to first love ourselves, to enjoy feasts and greetings. But if we follow the kind of love of Mary and Jesus, we will love those who are different from us, as “extended family” and love those who may be less fortunate or wounded as “extended family.” We will create a wider community, that includes the hungry, the lonely, the sick, the oppressed. Here’s my song, called “Another Song This Christmastime.”

At Christmas time we need more songs that speak of what is real. We can't sing songs of joy and cheer if that's not what we feel! The holidays are packed with things for us to do and say, We think we'll never get it done, and stress is on the way! We often get ourselves in debt for those that we hold dear. So when the New Year comes along there's little room for cheer!

We need another song to sing this Christmas time, Not about gifts and toys, but more about Love Divine. Let's put aside the trappings, and talk about what's really happening. It matters not if the day is “white,” but whether or not we see the light.

Have you seen the hungry one who has no place to stay? No room was there at the inn that first Christmas day. Have you seen the lonely one whose tears often flow? The one who sits at home alone, with no place to go?

But a wounded heart can open, to receive love anew, from one who can be patient, gentle, kind and true. The real meaning of Christmas is not just Santa and his elves. But that we love our neighbor, just as we love ourselves.

We need another song to sing this Christmas time. Not about gifts and toys, but more about Love Divine. I don't need presents under a tree, the greatest gift of all would be: Just spend a little time, Oh, spend some loving time, Yes spend a little time... with me.