

Touch holiness

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 24 December 2018

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Christmas Day C

**Isaiah 52: 7-10; Luke 2:1-20; Contemporary Reading:
“Christmas Comes” by Ann Weems in Reaching for Rainbows (adapted)**

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under “Sunday Gatherings” tab

The Day is here. The time is now. On this Christmas morning, we are gathered here in this place, made holy by the human search for the sacred, for meaning and community over 170 years.

We have come once again, searching for the “something more” of Christmas that is found in the stories of Jesus’ birth.

We meet on the land of the Gadigal people who have encountered the Rainbow Spirit here for tens of thousands of years, attesting to the profound and primal human awareness that life is fuller when lived in consciousness and connection to the Divine Presence, which is both within us and beyond us.

But now it is time to be still, to reflect, to sing, to pray. After the busyness; after the preparations for our cultural Christmas – the work year ending for some, gift buying or making, family travelling and gathering, culinary preparing – some of us joyful and expectant, others unsettled and half wishing it was already over – now is the time simply to be, to claim stillness, to touch holiness.

It is time to be journeying with Mary through the expectation of new birth, new life, and a world transformed. Time to remember and treasure Mary’s response to the divine entering our reality: “*let it be*” she said.

Let this child be born. And let our world be not as it is now, let it be different. Let there be justice and peace and a welcome for all people. It is time to ponder these things in our hearts...and to make connections to who we are and how we live our lives.

One year ago today, I told the congregation that was gathered here about a hostile Twitter comment that had been left on the Pitt Street feed on Christmas Eve. Someone had written: “*We attend Christian churches, not a church that only welcomes the gay community.*” I talked, last year, about my anxious response that people in fact might think, after our involvement in the Marriage Equality campaign, we were just a church for LGBTIQ people!

But also, how my initial reaction was tempered as I reflected that it was not a bad thing to be known as a church that welcomed, and included, queer people; and that some of the people who came to Pitt Street at Christmas, whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity, came because they understood the story of the Christ child, born in a stable, and laid in a manger, because there was no room for his family on the inside. That that story calls us to live with nothing less than radical hospitality and passion for justice.

I concluded my Christmas Day reflection last year by suggesting that next year (now this year), that if we lived into our calling, perhaps someone would write a message on Twitter saying: “*we go to a Christian church, not a church that welcomes only people seeking asylum and refugees...*”; or perhaps: “*we got to a Christian church not a church that only loves people affected by climate change*” because really, truly being a Christian church means risking identification, guilt by association, with outsiders among whom the God made known in Jesus – and the God made known in Jesus, is found.

Well as some of you will know, that actually happened... In early December, Pitt Street’s lovely choir participated in “Carols Against Coal” a campaign organised by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. The carols were posted on our YouTube channel and the video has gone viral, globally. It’s been viewed over four and half thousand times.

Some of the people who have left comments have appreciated the humour of the new words to old carol tunes (“*Deck the Halls with Solar Panels*” and “*Cool Down the Earth*”) and they’ve been encouraged that Christian churches are engaging and advocating for action in response to the climate emergency which threatens our life on earth.

However, the reason that the video has gone viral is that it was subject to a lot negative commentary from the right-wing media here in Australia and in the US. And so, I got much more than I wished for last Christmas. Not one, but hundreds of social media comments, saying that we were not a real church, not real Christians because of our care for the earth and for people and creatures affected by climate change.

One of the comments said that: *God created coal, and therefore, we ought to burn it!* I responded that God created some things that we were just supposed to love and care for. And, someone else commented that the original commenter’s comment was a very good argument for legalising Marijuana!

Some of the comments were quite nasty, so I think I should be careful about what I wish for this Christmas.

But having said that, I seriously do think that we should intend to make a difference in the world this coming year, particularly by joining with other Australians of many faiths and none, to do everything that we can to ensure that next Christmas there is no man, woman or child held in detention by the Australian government on Manus Island.

And if people are mad at us because of that, we will know that we have heard and responded to the call of Christmas.

Within the gospel stories, when we read the vulnerability of Jesus’ little family in Bethlehem, ordered by the government of their time to travel from home for reasons of taxation and political control, our minds turn to the millions of people in our world, refugees and asylum-seekers, displaced and homeless, stateless and searching for new homes in foreign lands.

We do not just come to church at Christmas because of sentiment and memory, but because we desire to hear again, to touch again, the springs of hope that are held in the story of Jesus' birth. The story of God encountered, not among the proud and the powerful, but embodied in the vulnerability of a child.

Heaven touching earth in the lives of a young family who will soon be traveling in fear to Egypt, seeking safety in another country as they flee from the threat of political violence after the birth of their child.

The Christian story that the gospel birth narratives reflect assures us that the sacred energy of life and love, God, is with us in all of life. God is present in the mess and complexity of our world, redeeming and sanctifying, turning cruelty into loving-kindness, and the ordinary into the amazing.

This is the world-changing message of Christmas:

The 'sacred' is now incarnate... embodied... here in this life, on this earth.

Born among us in blood and tears. Not far away nor long ago. But in every here and every now.

The humanity of God is found at Bethlehem. God became one of us that we may all become restored to God's likeness.

On this Christmas Day, let us affirm that we are God's body on earth with one common vocation: to live in right relation with the earth and with each other.

Let us do Christmas like God, by becoming fully human. Living well as creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace...

Happy Holy Christmas, to each of you, each one of you a sacred child of Divine Presence.