

Church of the Holy Cross
Christmas Day
December 25, 2018
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Presence Presents Everywhere

Leonard Cohen wrote: “*Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.*”

Merry Christmas. That is merry, happy, wonderful, marvelous, filled with joy Christmas. We celebrate the day Jesus was born, our guide, our light, our teacher, our friend, our counselor, our God. So, how do we celebrate this Day? Much preparation has gone into this day and this season of 12 days of celebration. Most of us have traditions that have been handed down for generations, and some we created only this year. How do we manage all this feasting and celebrating this holiday holds for us?

Balance!

Putting lights on the tree, (my wife) Sylvia starts in the middle and runs white lights up the inside of the trunk. This backlights the other colors and the ornaments. She is methodical in her placement, and if we have a 6.5’ tree, there needs to be at least 300 white lights and 900 in color—that is 1200 lights the last six inches is for the star on top and a foot on the bottom is 240 lights per foot—and even that is not enough. If she had her way, she would add more, to the point where you may actually be able to see our tree from space.

After this task is done, we carefully hang our friends and family on the tree. Well, not literally, but for many of our first years together, we did not have a lot of decorations. Her sister Nancy was in college and she and her housemates threw a party and told people they only needed to bring a Christmas ornament that reflected their personality. We adopted that tradition, and over the years we have collected many ornaments. All of them are unique, most interesting, beautiful, fun reminders that our lives have been blessed with family, friends, and gatherings, where food and fellowship abounded. Frankly, it is a brilliant idea. People bring a bottle of wine or some hostess gift to a party, or you have a potluck and people have to cook and pack something. We asked people to just bring themselves, and something unique that we can remember them by.

We usually call people when we are decorating the tree—we see the ornament, and just call and say hello, catch up, and reconnect. Sometimes I will email, or text, but if we call we say something simple like, “Just hung the Volkswagen you gave me on the tree and was thinking of you—Merry Christmas.”

For us, this brings us into the deeper meaning of Christmas—it is about connection.

Do you ever wonder why, if we find Christmas decorations so pretty and seeing them makes us happy, why more home decor is not made of glass and plastic? And, why don’t we string tree cuttings around every season, and put lights in all of our windows left on until dawn everyday?

We hunger for traditions, rituals, and ways to mark our time—it helps us connect us to God and to the world and to each other. Sending Jesus was God’s way of connecting to us. God’s plan to reconnect to us, His creation, was Jesus. The Word was made flesh. We as humans did not have

the capability to reach out and connect to God where God was. God needed to come down and connect to us here, where we are. We need a visible reminder to connect us, like the ornaments reconnect us to our family and friends, our traditions and rituals act as visible, human, fleshly reminders of God's love for us.

The most perfect gift we can give is the gift of ourselves. Our laughter, our stories, our company, our love and friendship—these are the most perfect gifts we can give or receive. Make room in your life for laughter and friendship. The good news is that unlike the secular world that demands that Christmas end tomorrow, and the radio stations stop playing Christmas music—oddly enough, during the actual season of Christmas. Remember that you have 12 days to celebrate. Make Christmas all you can hope it to be. Fill these next days with yourself, and be the best versions of the person you were created to be. Believe in God, in yourself, and in the good that is the light of the world in all of us. Make room in your life for other people. Love people, reconnect, share stories, and laugh together—celebrate!

A few weeks ago at the Thanksgiving celebration, the Gospel bade us, “Do not worry about things of this world—consider the lilies of the field...” In my Thanksgiving sermon I said that I thought Jesus was asking if we are we excessively anxious about our physical needs? Let's think about that for a moment... What drives us to think we need more than we have, and to see Black Friday as the beginning of Advent preparations? Who are we listening to and following when we choose to consume goods, rather than give them away to those in need? How much is enough? If we are excessively anxious about our physical needs, then we are not focused on the kingdom, and we are not following the light. Today at Christmas, does our need of perfection and having enough, give us room to enjoy life, share love and laughter, and feel good about what we have done in the world?

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That's how the light gets in. --Leonard Cohen*

Merry Christmas! **AMEN**