

**“Grouchy, Grumpier, Grinch”**  
Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden  
Meriden, CT

December 13, 2015

“I’m a grouch... And you know what I think?  
That all of this Christmas stuff...really stinks!  
I don’t like it here and I’d rather be home.  
So have your party and leave me alone.

I don’t like the music,  
the food  
or the tree.

Let Christmas happen  
but please,  
...without me!”

Such is the mood of our “grumpy-grouch angel,” at least in the beginning of the story. But let’s not jump too quickly to his change of heart, because I’m guessing that there might be a few grumpy-grouch angels in this morning’s congregation.

We never did find out exactly why our own scowling angel was in such a mood, but for any of us who are or have found ourselves not quite basking in the presumed magic of Christmas, it probably wouldn’t take more than a few minutes to hear a litany of reasons if anyone bothered to ask thank you very much!

This past week, my husband Dan and I were ordering breakfast at Perk on Main in Durham. I had probably mentioned to Suzy—the seemingly ever upbeat proprietor of this breakfast and lunch haven—that the holidays could be overwhelming. “Holidazed I call it!” she replied. “Yes! Can I quote you?” I asked. “Sure,” she responded with a big smile.

The “shop ‘til you drop” syndrome, the worries over enough money at this season of lavish spending, the realities of loved ones or any of us moving through a crisis of well-being in so many possible forms, the relentless news coverage of a presidential candidate proclaiming in his not so humble way that there is absolutely no room at the inn with a high decibel chorus cheering him on, and the swelling rhetoric and rancor demonizing our Muslim neighbors suggest that “holidazed” just might be an understatement.

I’m not inviting you into a circle of anti-celebration. Rather, I’m suggesting that some of us might be grown-up grumpy-grouches because when “the world is too much with us,” our feelings need escape valves. A surly mood, withdrawal, a short fuse, and overt cynicism are outer masks of inner hurt, bewilderment, and yes, seasonal depression and for some, chronic depression. All we need is another round of “Deck the Halls” to feel the urge to deck the holidays or .... to retire to a private space where we can have a good cry.

I wonder how many of us can recall a Christmas—or bring into focus the Christmas at hand—when we struggled for a smile in response to a carol invoking “Joy to the World.” I wonder how many of us can recall a Christmas—or recognize the Christmas upon us—when we were flooded with the readiness to proclaim with our little angel, “Let Christmas happen...but please...without me!”

When I think of “the Christmas story,” my mind instantly goes to the story of the birth of Jesus as told in the Gospel According to Luke. A million memories surface, most of them filled with loved ones no longer here, many of them filled with the longing for loved ones I wish were here, more of them filled with gratitude for these moments with you and anticipation of that time when there are no more tasks to complete, no more items to scratch off my to-do list, and we gather in the subdued light of this sanctuary, sing carols, hold silence, hear age-old stories, and open our hearts to a precious moment of peace in a circle of candlelight and “Silent Night.”

As I think of what it took to divert our grumpy-grouch angel, one of those carols that I learned as a child comes to mind

“Away in a manger, no crib for a bed...”

but that doesn’t sound too comforting. Where did the baby sleep?

And then...

“The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes!”

Wait a minute! Mary and Joseph were trying their best for quiet. A cow lows—which really means he moos loudly, with absolutely no respect at all for the tiny infant nearby. Of course, the baby wakes up. And of course, he yells his little head off! His parents are already exhausted. Labor and birthing are no easy matters. Seeking shelter on a chilly night far from home was met with one rejection after another. Then there was the burdensome reality of being in Bethlehem to pay taxes to an occupying power. Did this family of two, now three, have what we glibly call a Merry Christmas?

The baby’s crying. What to do? Hold on to all the worry and bewilderment coursing through you? What to do? You know exactly what to do. Pick him up. Hold him close. Sing to him...whatever songs you know....”Hush little baby... Twinkle twinkle little star... Down by the station...” Slowly, surely, the crying wanes to a whimper wanes to a coo moves into a heavenly peace of sound asleep. Slowly, surely, you’re comforted by your own comforting.

Close your eyes for moment. In the arms of your heart, hold a baby...hum a bit...rock a bit.

This is sanctuary. “When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place?” This is a holy place.

The reasons for that not really distant distress have not gone away. The world is still with us. Stuff that we don’t need is still the commodity of the season. Fear is still rife in the media and the marketplace. But we are not helpless, and we are in caring company.

Who, what is the baby you will hold close in this season of rancor? What will you reach out for and cradle in spite of yourself? How will the melodies in you find voice that renders not just comfort, but peace, peace so deep that it becomes compassion—compassion for that which you hold, compassion for yourself, compassion for this world of which we are a part, compassion that counters the seduction of despondency?

How will that which you choose to hold close and hold dear endure beyond this time and this place? How will you hold hope? How will we hold hope in community intimate and global, yearning for the birth of deep and abiding love?

**Sources:**

Judith Campbell, *The grumpy-grouch angel*, illustrated by Lauren Buckman Jerzierski, self-published, 2013.

“When Our Heart Is in a Holy Place,” words and music: Joyce Poley, in *Singing the Journey: A Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition*, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston, 2005, 1008.