

Our Christmas

By Bob Docter –

December dates fill up fast, all in anticipation of Christmas day, Dec. 25. The calendar reflects the action and shouts “busy” to onlookers.

Early activities often become separate from those surrounding Christmas. Social events provide opportunities to discover once again the warmth of old friends, the joy of rediscovered mutuality, the peace of closeness, and the sharing of bliss. Of course, those busy at any Salvation Army corps will have much of their time consumed by helping or feeding others.

Later in the month, we prepare for celebrating the birth of the Christ child with traditional decorations throughout the house. I’ll admit, some are secular like the tree, the blinking lights hanging around the house, the red and green in ascendency and a sumptuous turkey dinner.

Why the secular, you ask? I suspect there are multiple answers to that question. I gather the church followed Pope Gregory’s answer to the growing determination of his Christian flock to continue to follow their own traditions: “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em and then insert the religion into it later,” he said. The Romans, you see, celebrated Saturnalia in late December, the wildest holiday ever. The Christmas colors came from the plants they used for decorations. And the tree, also a pagan tradition, always became heavily decorated.

Our entire family, Diane’s and mine, celebrates together on Christmas Eve. We all gather around the tree, also heavily decorated with lights and baubles and beads. It’s crowded because our six children produced a bundle of their own children—and most are now more adult than youthful. Everybody comes. This is how it works. I get everyone’s attention and then tradition holds that I read the Christmas story from Luke 2. This is followed by every family giving a full report from each of its members of their growth and development this year. All will be present this year, even those serving or learning out of state.

From this experience, I receive “tiny moments of grace.”

Grace spreads her generous beauty in tiny moments—if you look for it.

It passes fleetingly when undiscerned—the moment gone when ignored.

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Grace never pushes herself—never demands attention, never seeks to stay when unwelcomed.

Anger suffocates grace. Self-centeredness rejects it. Grudging reluctance dissipates it. Broken commitment denies it. Dishonesty drowns it in a pool of distrust.

Grace is felt more than seen—experienced more than heard—sensed in the heart more than by touch.

Grace arrives in many ways.

- a grandson's sincere smile and hug on a gray, cold day
- the noise of happy children
- genuine love in any form
- growing old together
- truly connecting
- patience in the face of frustration
- overflowing joy in the eyes of a loved one
- tiredness at the end of a hard day's work
- hearing someone close say "I love you"
- genuineness
- empathy
- learning what to achieve

- growing
- acceptance
- coming home
- peace in the middle of the night
- never-ending, undeserved forgiveness
- the depth a poem brings to the soul
- music
- experiencing freedom
- a flower
- a sunrise and a sunset
- wonder
- finding the balance in safety and risk
- little acts of mercy

It is through grace I have learned:

- that my true humanness is found not in laurels but in love
- that the marginalized of my world are my best teachers
- that diversity is one of God's most remarkable gifts to the world
- that labeling or judging others negatively only diminishes me

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- that what God really wants from me is a relationship
- that he is always available but will not impose himself on me
- that I disappoint him often
- that if I ask, he will always forgive me
- that if I get to know him better I will want to be more like him and find myself in a state of grace

Grace's gift is always pure.

Merry Christmas.