



IN PRAISE OF Spirit

A religion and philosophy of life focused on joy, harmony, and a fear-free understanding of the continuity of life.

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ON SANTA'S TEAM

I can still remember tearing across to town to my Grandma's the day my sister dropped the big bomb: "There is no Santa Claus," jeered my sister. "Even dummies know that!"

My Grandma was not the gushy kind, never had been. I fled to her that day because I knew she would be straight with me. She always told the truth and I knew that the truth always went down a whole lot easier when swallowed with one of her world famous cinnamon buns. Grandma was home and the buns were still warm. Between bites, I told her everything. She was ready for me.

"No Santa Claus!" she snorted. "Ridiculous! Don't believe it. That rumor has been going around for years, and it makes me mad, plain mad. Now, put on your coat, and let's go."

"Go? Go where, Grandma?" I asked. I hadn't even finished my second cinnamon bun.

"Where" turned out to be Kerby's General Store, the one store in town that had a little bit of just about everything. As we walked through its doors, Grandma handed me ten dollars. That was a bundle in those days.

"Take this money," she said, "and buy something for someone who needs it. I'll wait for you in the car." Then she turned and walked out of Kerby's.

I was only eight years old. I had never shopped for anything all by myself. The store seemed big and crowded, full of people scrambling to finish their Christmas shopping. For a few minutes I just stood there, confused, clutching the ten dollar bill, wondering what to buy and who on earth to buy it for. I thought of everybody I knew: my family, my friends, my neighbors, the kids at school, and the people I went to church with.

I was just about thought out when I suddenly thought of Bobbie Decker. He was a kid with bad breath and messy hair and he sat behind me in Mrs. Pollack's grade two class. Bobbie Decker did not have a coat. I know because he never went out for recess during the winter. His mother always wrote a note that he had a cough; but all us kids knew Bobbie didn't have a cough, he didn't have a coat.

I fingered the ten dollar bill with excitement. I would buy Bobbie a coat. I settled on a red corduroy one that had a hood to it. It looked real warm and he would like that. I didn't see the price tag but ten dollars ought to buy anything. I put the coat and the ten dollar bill on the counter and pushed them toward the lady behind it.

She looked at the coat, the money and me. "Is this a Christmas



present for someone?" she asked kindly. "Yes," I replied shyly. "It's for Bobbie. He's in my class and he doesn't have a coat." The nice lady smiled at me. I didn't get any change but she put the coat in a bag and wished me at Merry Christmas.

That night, Grandma helped me wrap the coat in Christmas paper and ribbons and write "To Bobbie, from Santa Claus" on it. Grandma said Santa always insists on secrecy.

Then she drove us over to Bobbie Decker's house, explaining as we went that I was now and forever officially one of Santa's helpers. Grandma parked down the street from Bobbie's house and she and I crept noiselessly and hid in the bushes by his front walk.

Suddenly, Grandma gave me a nudge. "All right, Santa Claus," she whispered, "Get going."

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Throughout our lives we place value upon the things that affect us and are of use to us. The things that matter to us and help us change and progress are the items where we place the most value. We perceive these values in the light of how and why they affect us and the results they produce.

When we consider the value of those things in our lives, however, we sometimes are too quick to judge them for their true worth. Sometimes we see things that we consider not useful to us and discard them because they may seem trite or not worthwhile. We do this and move on and don't give it anymore thought. When we search for things in our lives, we should search for those things that will bring us deep meaning or value that is intrinsic to offering us change, hopefully, change for the better.

But many times, we do what we have always done-been accustomed to doing. We look at a forest and either do not see the individual trees or if we see the individual trees, we

do not see the majesty of the forest those trees created. This is because our linear thinking sometimes protects us from delving too deeply into the meanings of events or things that happen in our lives. We become short-sighted. We can't see the majesty of our lives that these events or things create for us. This may simply be because we are impatient or need quick solutions or fast relief. We are too busy to look for the true value or worth.

As an example, you may notice an old, gnarly tree on a roadside as you pass. You may see it as a useless item as it no longer blooms and is not pretty. It is not good for lumber so it can't be used to create a fine piece of furniture. And then one day, your car breaks down and it is hot and sunny. And as you wait for the tow truck, you sit down under that old tree and lean your back against its trunk. And it shelters you from the hot sun. Now its very worthlessness has turned it into something of great value. It has provided a place to rest, to de-stress

and to contemplate and a place for you to realize its true value.

Lao Tzu illustrates this very well in The Tao Te Ching: "Thirty spokes share the hub of a cartwheel. It is the space in the center which makes it useful."

"When shaping clay into a vessel, it is the empty space within that makes it useful."

"When cutting doors or a window, the empty space that is between makes them useful. Benefit comes from what is there, while usefulness comes from what is not."

So instead of complaining when things come into our lives that are uncomfortable, trying, or even painful, for that event or thing to be of use to us, see it as an opportunity. Look at the value of what is outside our normal response to things and expand your vision to see the true value of those things in our life you simply overlook.

Reverend Bob

ON SANTA'S TEAM

continued

I took a deep breath, dashed for his front door, threw down the present, pounded the doorbell twice and flew back to the safety of Grandma and the bushes. Together we waited breathlessly in the darkness for the door to open. Finally it did, and there stood Bobbie. He looked

down, looked around, picked up his present, went inside and shut the door.

Forty years have not dimmed the thrill of those moments spend shivering beside my Grandma, in Bobbie Decker's bushes.

That night, I realized those awful rumors about Santa Claus were what Grandma said they were: Ridiculous!

Santa was alive and well,
AND WE WERE ON HIS TEAM!
Are you?



Simpler Ways for the Holidays

by Reverend Sharon



Growing up with six brothers you can imagine the excitement in our house around the holidays. My Dad was a good one for building excitement and he would always start at Thanksgiving dinner with his "only _____ many days until Christmas. This would be repeated at every meal. While we were a poor family, and the gifts we dreamed of in our heads were rarely the gifts we would open on Christmas, it did not stop us from sharing with anyone who would listen what wonderful things we anticipated receiving from Santa or Mom and Dad.

While the excitement of the holiday still touches the hearts of kids today, things sure have changed. Trying to

find suitable gifts for our grandsons has become a full time job. They have every gadget, electronic device, cell phone, flat screen television, skis, and more items than I have time to name here.

When I think back to those early years growing up with my brothers, our gifts consisted of new pajamas, gloves and socks and if lucky, something new to wear to school but in the long run, we didn't really care. We always got a stocking too, filled with candy, nuts and fruit. I can imagine what would happen if I tried to pass off such a stocking today.

We get so caught up in the pursuit of more, we tend to forget the

simpler things and how satisfying those things can be. We have so much to be grateful for and gratitude is warmest when it is given without expecting something in return.

So this holiday season, I plan to give my grandsons my time-whether they want it or not! We can do some of the simpler things like take in a movie or have lunch together or bake cookies. And if I want to give them a stocking full of fruit, nuts and candy, by golly, I will.

So this holiday season, don't stress. Go back to the simpler ways and have a wonderful holiday by appreciating time spent with loved ones.

Rumblings



from the President

by Butch Tull
Board President

Here we are deep into the holiday season. I have watched Facebook and friends posting every day what they are thankful for and we how we should be thankful. Life is great, but sometimes it is hard to be thankful. As some of you know, November 4th Connie and I had to put our beloved 4 legged Daughter, Harley Jo down due to illness. She had developed renal failure. This was a very hard thing to do as you know. She meant the world to us.

I can honestly say that I grieved more over her than any human I have ever known. So the first part of November, I did not feel I had much to be thankful for. As the grieving process went on, we got a new puppy and he is great. He hasn't quite filled the void of my girl but

he has made me look at myself and the time we got to spend with Harley. I am so thankful for that time. You see, Harley picked us. She wandered to our house and never left. She was amazing and she was so loved and we were so loved by her. I am deeply thankful for that.

I am thankful for this life, and in particular, for this Church and all it represents and all the people here. The Sunday after Harley passed, during healing service I felt something touching the side of my face enough to feel my hair move. After church, Theresa told me that she saw Harley sitting next to me during healing. I knew it but it sure was awesome to get that confirmation.



Meet you over the Rainbow Bridge

I want to leave you with a poem that someone sent. It made quite a difference to me. If you are ever faced with losing a beloved pet, I hope it helps. The author is unknown.

If it should be that I grow frail and weak
And pain should keep me from my sleep
Then you must do what must be done
For this, the last battle can't be won.
You will be sad—I understand
Don't let your grief then stay your hand.
For this day, more than all the rest
Your love and friendship stand the test.
We've had so many years
What is to come can hold no fears.
You'd not want me to suffer, so
When the time comes, please let me go.
I know in time you will see
It's a kindness you do for me.
Although my tail, its last has waved
From pain and suffering, I've been saved.
Don't grieve that it should be you
Who has decided this thing to do.
We've been so close, we two these years
Don't let your heart hold any tears.



GIVING THANKS FOR ABUNDANCE

by Bonnie Crosier

I was thinking the other day of how much we all have to be thankful. Yesterday I worked a health fair and a group of Mexican students stopped by the table. We tried to communicate the best we could and I couldn't help but to think what they had to do to get to Bloomington, Illinois to get a good education. They struggled with the language but I could feel the determination in their voices. Many of them were studying in what appeared to be fairly complicated fields. They shared with me that they would be going back to Mexico with the knowledge they gained. I could only



As we gather with friends and family during this time of the year, I think about those people. I talked with one of the guides. He told us how they don't have cars and many of the things we take for granted but they have each other. They know their neighbors and are willing to give a hand when needed. As he talked, I thought about who really was the abundant one.

I wish all of you the best for the coming year and that you experience the true meaning of abundance. As we draw to the end of this year, I pray for those who are struggling and give healing to

Abundant Life

A college professor tells of being invited to speak at a military base one December and meeting an unforgettable soldier named Ralph. Ralph had been sent to meet him at the airport and serve as his escort. After introductions, they headed for the baggage area. As they walked down the concourse, Ralph kept disappearing. Once to help an older lady whose suitcase had fallen open. Once to lift two toddlers up so they could see Santa Clause and again to give directions to someone who was lost. Each time he returned with a smile on his face.

"Where did you learn that?" I asked.

"Learn what?" he replied.

"Where did you learn to live like that?"

"Oh," Ralph said. "During the war, I guess." He told the professor how it was his job to clear mine fields and how he watched men he knew blow up before his eyes, one after another.

"I learned to live between steps," he said. "I never knew whether the next one would be my last, so I learned to get everything I could out of the moment between when I picked up my foot and when I put it down again. Every step I took was a whole new world, and I guess I have been that way ever since."



imagine how thankful they were to be in our country to work towards a better life. I felt happy that they could have this opportunity to make their country a better place for their people.

A few years ago, we had taken a trip and one of the places we visited was Mexico. We witnessed the true meaning of poverty when on our way to visit the Mayan Ruins. Many of the houses didn't have windows or doors. They had dirt floors and it really put our lives into perspective. The children played outside and waved to us as the bus would drive by.



those who hurt. I learned a lot from the Mexican students yesterday. Most of all I learned how great opportunities lead to God showing us his wonderful works through the eyes of others.

The abundance of our lives is not determined by how long we live, but by how well we live.

A large bowl of Red Delicious apples was placed in front of the college cafeteria line. The note attached read: "Take only one please, God is watching."

Some prankster attached a note to a nearby tray of peanut butter cookies at the other end of the line that read "Take all you want. God is watching the apples."





Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem

by Dr. Maya Angelou

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their
sunssets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.
It is loud now. It is louder.
Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.
It is what we have hungered for.
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.
We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.
Peace.

Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.
We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,
Implore you, to stay a while with us.
So we may learn by your shimmering light
How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a language
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ
Into the great religions of the world.
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.
Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.
Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.

Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.

Dr. Maya Angelou is one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time. Hailed as a global renaissance woman, Dr. Angelou is a celebrated poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, historian, filmmaker, and civil rights activist.



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Declaration of Principles

We believe in Infinite Intelligence.

We believe that the phenomena of nature, both physical and spiritual, are the expression of Infinite Intelligence.

We affirm that a correct understanding of such expression and living in accordance therewith, constitutes true religion.

We affirm that the existence and personal identity of the individual continue after the change called death.

We affirm that communication with the so called dead is a fact, scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism.

We affirm that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

We affirm the moral responsibility of the individual, and that we make our own happiness or unhappiness as we obey or disobey nature's physical and spiritual laws.

We affirm the doorway to reformation is never closed against any soul here or hereafter.

We affirm the precepts of Prophecy and Healing are divine attributes proven through Mediumship.

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