

The Eggplant Ornament

II Kings 8:56-60

Christmas Eve Homily

December 24, 2024

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I.

For the Christmas Eve homily this year I have but one modest goal: to provide an opportunity for everyone gathered here tonight, or reading this sermon, to catch their breath. I can appreciate that this might seem like a rather modest goal, one which is far more practical than seasonally spiritual, but I would ask you to bear with me for the next 30 or 40 minutes as I elaborate in excruciating detail.

Now, if this is your first time attending the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service here at the Church on the Park, I can well imagine this comes as very unwelcome news, indeed. If, however, you *have* been here before to share in the service on a night such as this you know full well that I'm just pulling your leg. Like Christmas itself, tonight's service is ever changing but never changed. You'll be donning your 'kerchief or cap shortly, and visions of sugar plums shall be dancing in your head soon enough.

II.

I will confess, it was very nearly a "Bah-Humbug" Christmas for jocular old Rev. Mike this year. Thankfully, I have been swept up in the Spirit of the Season yet again owing to one very interesting item: this eggplant Christmas tree ornament. (*I know, star of wonder star of light, who hangs vegetables at the tannembaum site?!?*)

Frankly, we almost didn't get a tree this year; which would have been a first. However, when my wife, Linda, and I learned that our Mary and Joseph daughter and son-in-law would be arriving great with child to stay in our stable, there was no question we would be putting up a tree once more. It is a somewhat modest tree, however. Not quite



on the order of Charlie Brown's, but nowhere *near* the girth of those in years past; still shapely and quite slender. So, or course, the smaller circumference yields less bough area which results in the need for fewer ornaments on the tree this year.

III.

Like most of you of a certain age, I'm sure, we have a ridiculous number of ornaments. Far more than even the Grinch could steal on any given night. Clearly, choices would have to be made. Which, for me, would have been no big deal. Except that this year all of the usual ornament hangers would be arriving just a few days before Christmas, so circumstances dictated that I be pressed into action; albeit somewhat reluctantly. You see, in the 26 years of our married life I've never hung even a *single* ornament on the Christmas tree until this past Saturday. For a great many years, our tradition was to have Wanda Renick over for a dinner of seafood lasagna and she and the kids would trim the tree. These past few years, that duty fell to the kids. For a quarter century I have been perfectly content to just sit, watch, and enjoy. This year, however, it was "game on." So it was that I found myself looking down at 7 boxes stuffed to the gills with ornaments arranged willy-nilly without rhyme or reason.

IV.

The very first one that caught my eye was the eggplant. "Where the heck did we get this?" I asked Linda. "Nick and Carlene Baffaro," she replied. Her words warmed my heart and set my mind to wandering amid a mountain of memories of such dear people from a congregation now past. So much joy, so much delight, so much love. From there we moved on to three silver cradles, each with the name and birthday of one of our children. There were cardboard ornaments with macaroni glued on then spray-painted gold. Kid crafted ornaments made with crayons and grade school photos. Antique and very fragile glass ornaments from Linda's grandma Zukie. One from my first church in Allegany, NY. The "Let It Be" Nicolas Pendl ornament made from a wooden disc cut from a tree limb and given to us by his parents, Linda's sister and brother-in-law, the first Christmas after he died tragically in a drowning accident at age 19. (That one got me all choked up and teary.). Another from the White House when Linda worked for a member of congress. One from Richard Cassara, who always gave the kids an ornament each year; along with Hersey's chocolate kisses.

V.

Soon we got into a rhythm, with Linda selecting the next ornament, placing a hook on it, handing it to me, and then telling me its story as I hung it on the tree. When we were done there were angels and bells and sleighs and reindeer and snow crystals and all manner of ornament adorning the tree, each with a story representing a chapter in our life together. Though all of these ornaments have hung on the Christmas tree for years, I admitted to Linda that I had completely forgotten a great many of them. What a delight, then, to re-live so many moments, memories, and emotions. Doing so chased away my “Bah Humbug” blues, saved me from prematurely entering into a long winter’s nap and, moreover, allowed me to simply catch my breath.

VI.

This is my 28th Christmas Eve Service here at the First Presbyterian Church on the Park. Every December I wonder if, perhaps, we might try something different this year. However, I always come around to the realization that the horn blowing, the caramel corn, the Erroneous Christmas Story, the lessons and carols, the candle lighting, and the dripping wax during Silent Night are all like ornaments on the tree and without any one of them it wouldn’t quite be Christmas. While each is unique and interesting, it is the overall effect they impart which is the goal of telling the story of our life together gathering every Christmas Eve in this old church in this sleepy little town, even as we remember the reason why we do so: that one night long ago, a child was born to this world, and through this child the world would come to feel love, and have hope, and to believe in the possibility of peace.

VII.

My wish for you this night, is that each of you might simply catch your breath. For those of you who are younger elves, that you might catch your breath from all the shopping, the preparation, the travel, and the frenetic energy which abounds in the house so that you might truly enjoy and appreciate those sacred and special moments which come only at Christmas. For those you are older elves, that you might catch your breath from a lifetime of Christmases which are whooshing past too quickly. That you allow for the inevitable melancholy and blue which comes now with this time of year, but fend off the “Bah Humbug” which resides so close by so that you might recognize all the blessings of the season; not only in what was, but is and yet will be.

In Genesis 2:7 God forms the human from dust of the ground and breathed in the breath of life so as to become a living creature. This night, may God breathe into all of us that we might come alive with the spirit that comes with Christmas that is ever changing but never changed.

VIII.

I leave you tonight with these words from II Kings 8:56-60:

“Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to God’s children according to all that was promised; not one word has failed of all God’s good promises.

The LORD our God be with us, as God was with our ancestors; God will not leave us or abandon us, but incline our hearts to God, to walk in all God’s ways, and to keep God’s commandments.

Let these words of mine, with which I pleaded before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, and may God maintain the cause of God’s servant and the cause of God’s children, as each day requires; so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other.”

May our God truly bless each of you, your families, this community of ours, and the entire world to which we belong.

Then they heard Rev. Mike exclaim as they drove out of sight, “Happy Christmas to all.... *and to all a good night!*” Amen.