

**29 December 2017**

**“T’WAS THE WEEK AFTER CHRISTMAS”**

Now that the “Big Day” is over and we are trying to get back to normal, whatever that may be, perhaps we should try to figure out how to keep some of Christmas in our lives. People tend to feel “let down” after such an intense celebration. It takes intentional effort to keep the spirit of Christmas alive when it is over. So many things mitigate against it. Several years ago, Howard Thurman wrote a free-verse poem about taking Christmas beyond December 25th.

When the song of the angel is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone,

When the kings and princes are home. When the shepherds are back with their flocks;

The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,

To rebuild the nations, to bring peace among people, to make music in the heart . . .

Most of the baubles we got or gave are soon gone, forgotten, or stored out of sight in the attic. What we actually keep from the season are the intangibles. There is the spirit of excited joy we experienced/shared with the children who were too young and innocent to worry about mundane things like paying off credit cards and balancing the budget. There remains the joy of seeing the older children come home from college or distant work places, and seeing how they have grown and changed. There is the lingering memory of having extended members of our families get together to swap grandiose tales of how things were when they were growing up.

Christmas is not a happy time for everyone. There are people who, for unspoken reasons, are glad that Christmas is over. They are weary of pretending to be happy when deep down they are sad. They have felt trapped by the common expectations of the season and the expectations of others, and have feigned as best they could a “holiday spirit.” We all know someone for whom this was the first Christmas after some significant loss such as death, divorce, or one of the many other ways you can lose someone or something. There are those whose historical losses, failures and feelings of brokenness float to the surface at Christmas time, and they find themselves reliving some of the worst experiences of their past. And, then there are also some whose memories of “Christmases past” are just not happy. Be gentle and careful when you relate to people who morph into modern-day Scrooges. There are more of them than you think, and the reasons for their seasonal brittleness may be more complex than you can imagine.

This week between Christmas and the beginning of a new year is a good time to remember resolutions and promises made to ourselves, God, and other people. Did you keep the promises, or will you need to try again? Let me tell you a story of someone who kept his promise.

It was the day after Christmas at a church in San Francisco. As the pastor of the church was looking at the Nativity scene in the narthex and getting ready to store it until the next year, he noticed that the baby Jesus figure was missing from the manger. He went outside and saw a little boy pulling a red wagon down the street. The baby Jesus figure was in the red wagon. He walked up to the child and asked, "Son, where did you get that baby Jesus?" The little boy said, "I got him from the church." "Why did you take him?," the pastor asked. The little boy replied, "Well about a week before Christmas I prayed and told Jesus that if he would bring me a red wagon for Christmas, I would give him a ride!"

May we all be so faithful to our promises—each in our own way.

**Come—Worship; Stay—Learn; Go—Serve**