

Mixed feelings at Christmas

By DAVE HARLEY
Herald Special

May I share a part of my Christmas experience with your readers.

For most, Christmas is a time of joy and happiness, a time of family and friends, a time of giving and receiving gifts, and a time of reflection on one's life's condition and one's relationship to the rest of creation and to creation's Creator, through the birth of a Saviour. On the downside, for others, it is a time of despair, depression, oppression, loneliness, hunger, apathy, confusion, and the same everyday lack of caring-selfishness. It is the last mentioned that I would like to share with you as it affected our Christmas this year.

At Christmas, we sing of love, share love, express love, worship Love (love), and love Love (love). But not all the world experiences or extends love at Christmas.

Is it hatred that they express.. Maybe some! But mostly it is lack of caring.

You know-rushing past the Salvation Army kettle after spending a fortune on booze, saying that you have already given (once this year) when you are approached to share just a small bit of your food for the hungry through the Foodbank, or - thinking of those who are alone, lonely, or not feeling well and not visiting them believing that others will do so (it's their turn) and then continue on in your busy-ness and partying.

How about disregarding loved ones and friends - celebrating Christmas but missing the real meaning, you know, celebration with lots of form but not with any real positive, creative, constructive, character-building substance. Christmas without a solid, undergirding foundation soon crumbles and people find themselves plunged back into the abyss of the world's perplexities and mundane things of life.

Christmas is a time of Good News. It is about God's love shown to us in the birth of a Saviour 2000 years ago. It is about God still loving us today and speaking to us today and blessing us today. That is the best Good News there is.

Another form of good news for me this Christmas was that my recent operation in the hospital showed that I had no cancer. It was also good news for my wife, Jean, whose mother died of cancer 12 years ago and whose father died of cancer just last August. He had had other bouts with cancer and had the cancer treated to remission, but this past spring, he developed cancer of the bowel and subsequently succumbed to it in August. The operation to remove that portion of cancerous bowel almost killed him. I don't know how a man of 86 could live through all that pain. We spent as much time as we could with him including our holidays. We watched him fail and fade away until his dying day. If you have ever had to experience this, to lose some one so dear, you will know how much it hurts, how it tears at your heart, and you realize even more how much you love them and will miss them.

Despite all the joy and happiness of Christmas, this bit of heartache carried through. It was our first Christmas without "Pop". In late November, my wife and her brother visited the grave site and placed a Christmas flower display on the tombstone. The silk flowers added beauty and showed that there was still love and fond memories in the hearts of those who cared. Jean's father is buried with his wife who died 12 years ago, father and mother together.

This Christmas, despite our celebrations with family and friends and times of worship, we decided to have Christmas dinner by ourselves, at least for this year. It was the first Christmas dinner that "Pop" had missed in a long time. It was quiet but we were glad in our hope that was "Pop's" and is ours too in our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. After dinner, we decided to wish "Pop" a merry Christmas and also a merry Christmas to Jean's mother.

When we arrived at the Norval Hillcrest Cemetery as the sun was setting, we were shocked to find that someone had stolen the lovely flowers. Jean broke into tears, wondering what kind of person could add grief to grief and especially at Christmas.. What kind of person robs from graves.. How low can some people go..

I held Jean and comforted her. I was sad too. She wondered aloud again. What's the point.. What's the use of decorating the grave when people just come by and steal the flowers.. I wondered why there are those who either don't care about others and the experiences of life that they have been through or find some diabolical amusement in adding grief to grief or take great joy in trying to extinguish one's life-light.

My sadness then turned to the person who had committed this stupid and useless act, either knowingly or unknowingly, that it would rip open a wound that death causes. This person, no doubt, had missed the understanding of Christmas altogether.

It is said that actions speak louder than words. Perhaps this person bought all kinds of gifts, sang the songs of Christmas, went to the traditional Christmas

Eve service, and had a great time over the Christmas holidays with family and friends. But it is evident that this person has missed the "Foundation" of Christmas. There was form without substance.

My heart goes out to Jean and the sadness she felt at that time and yet I know her hope in and relationship to the Saviour will make her glad again to face the coming years and all the lonely times that come when one remembers loved ones who have passed on. Hers is an eternal gladness. But as for the person who tried to steal a chunk out of our Christmas, you did not succeed. What you thought you gained, you really didn't. In fact, you lost a lot more than you gained. You lost your integrity as a human being and that saddens me, especially when the Christmas story is so evident.

To Jean, I encourage you to continue on in the hope that you have, not to think that your life-light can be extinguished, for it can't be; to continue to bring beauty to your parents' final resting place; and to do all those things which show that you have experienced the Light of the world. And to those who have read this letter, we must remember how this life goes on as we follow the Christmas story through to the Easter story so that it becomes the basis of our own life's story. Life does not come without its hurts and disappointments. And "Jesus wept" too. In the end, there is love for us all and an understanding of the truth about, "What is Life." - a precious gift from God to be shared with all people.

May you always have a blessed Christmas, all year round.

It is written...

If God should punish men according to what they deserve, he would not leave on the back of the earth so much as a beast.

Koran, ch. 35

It is written...

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

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