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Christmas Eve Sermon
Stories, Memories and Hope
December 24, 2017

Christmas Eve, that time between dark and light, here and there, spirit and flesh. In this fertile time, this fecund, mossy pool where tides that feels like home and stranger carries us into the new year, what is it that is being asked of us as people of faith, as people who are Unitarian Universalists? I hear the call, the invitation in the howling wind: Who are you and why have you come? This is of course the question that was asked of Jesus many times in his brief life. Who are you and why have you come? That question still whispers to us across centuries and seas. Can you hear it too?

I lean toward Jesus as a man and I want so much to know what were his words, how did he live his life, what did he feel in his bones. I have translated pieces of the New Testament from Ancient Greek to English during my time in divinity school and during these translations, I have often wept. Mary Magdalene finding the rock moved away from the burial site of Jesus and the chamber empty and crying out that the Lord has been taken by thieves. Slowly, ever so slowly in my cumbersome understanding of Ancient Greek, laboring word by word by word, Mary sees a gardener who is Jesus but she does not recognize him and says, her heart bleeding, "They have taken my Lord away." She only recognizes it to be Jesus before he when he says her name, Mary.

Under the labor of each word, I would feel my hand and heart moved by something I could not see or understand. Even the Greek bible was written and edited and rewritten many times before it came to be but nonetheless, it is as close as I have ever come to *feeling* the lives of those who loved Jesus.

What I can say that seems true, and even these small claims are disputed by scholars, is that Jesus loved deeply, he made sacrifices, he was a revolutionary, he refused to be content with what was not right and risked everything for what he believed. Jesus had a mother. He loved and was loved in return.

In this, in these bare bones, I find much that is worthy of contemplating with you this morning, this sacred morning of remembering. Who are you and why have you come? Many of our answers to this question will involve relationships. I can hear us calling out to the wind: I am a mother, a father, a brother, a sister, a friend, a teacher, a seeker, a lover, a child, a husband, a wife. I hear the wind answer: Honor the people you love with your authentic presence. Honor the people you love with your love. Roll back the stone that keeps you from knowing what is in your heart, what is in another's heart while there is still someone inside to greet you.

When I think of what I can know about Jesus this is what I always come back to: I imagine he would have answered this question, Who am I, the same way, through naming his relationships and declaring his love, risking everything for this love.

This Christmas Eve, listen to the wind. Sit in the stillness and darkness for a while and let the questions be asked and let the answers find their way to you. Who are you and why have you come? I believe Jesus would say, You are love and you have come to love.

As you leave here this blustery day, let the sun bathe you in her ancient light, let love be your guide. Let love show you the way home, let love caress you as you cook and wrap presents and make calls and greet those you love and those who come to your door and those you have to take a deep breath in to make space for: let love wake you to a Christmas morning that awaits your arrival, that opens you to

a self that you do not fully know, that dresses you in a grace that your loved ones look twice at to recognize.

Will you open yourself to becoming something you have not allowed yourself to be yet when your daughter or wife or husband or friend or son calls your name? Will you allow yourself to know who you are newly, indeed allow this name that is yours to awaken you to a new part of what it is to be you?

That's what I want from Christmas this year, more. It doesn't matter to me that I am not a Christian and do not believe Jesus to be the son of God. What difference could that possibly make? What matters to me is that I am here now, being invited into this time and space as witness, revolutionary and lover of peace and compassion all at once and to claim all of that,

I must be willing to allow those whom I love, those whom I serve, all of you, access to my heart of hearts so that I can come to hear it all in a new language, ancient and never spoken, and understood so deeply it cannot be denied.

Merry Christmas my dears. And not because I have to say it! But because I love you.

Amen.