

“Remembering Christmases Past”

A worship service by Pastor Steve E-M
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, December 4, 2022
The Second Sunday in Advent 2022

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org>;

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click the **Digital Worship Archive** button.

Scripture Readings for the Day:

✠ Isaiah 9:2b [NLT] and Luke 2:8-14 [NRSV]

Also references to Rawle, Matt. *The Redemption of Scrooge* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016).

OPENING

Images like that (*A Charlie Brown Christmas* OR the themes in the anthem, “Bring Us Hope”) have such power to call to mind remembrances of Christmases past for us, don’t they?

And those can be remembrances filled with the shimmer and joy of the Season or they can be fraught with difficulty and pain. They can make us excited for the Season once again this year or they can fill us with dread: “Here we go again...”

SERMON THOUGHTS

It funny how, for me anyway, the notion of “Christmases past” doesn’t bring up recent memory – I mean last year’s was a “Christmas past”, right? But I’d have to work at bringing up specific memories from then! Nor do memories of Christmases in the

middle decades of my life spring immediately to mind, but Christmases when I was a child. Three in particular are very vivid to this day:

1. Christmas tree “hunting” in mid-November with our bag of thick pretzel sticks which we ended up bringing back as a gift to the proprietor when it was time in mid-December to go and cut down our tree and bring it home.
2. Santa’s sleigh, pulled by two horses, through the back yards in our neighborhood to help my younger sister and me feel the authenticity of the season.
3. A recollection of the first time I was allowed to stay up late enough to go to Midnight Mass with my family, rather than be tucked into bed hours earlier with “visions of sugarplums dancing in my head”. (*Not only Midnight Mass, but the amazing 2 AM brunch my Mom made afterward!*)

The funny thing is I only remember one of each of those episodes, even though they were repeated over several years. And I think what I enjoy most today about those remembrances is how I *felt* as a kid at the time: the shimmer and joy of the season that makes me excited that it’s, once again, that time of year.

But mixed in with those magical memories are ones fraught with difficulty and pain, too. A couple rather trivial, like:

1. The move south to Virginia from our Winter Wonderland in Connecticut, where “a white Christmas” wasn’t the subject of dreams and whimsical seasonal music but *the reality* – right

outside our front door!

2. Or the bitter disappointment I felt when I didn't get the 50cc Honda "mini-bike" I'd desperately wanted one year!

Some were not so trivial... Like the first Christmas without my mother, who'd died from ovarian cancer in August the year I turned 12.

Truth is, we all have remembrances of Christmases past like this – mixtures of life-giving memories and those that sap us of life this time of year. I share mine with you to help you conjure those in your own life.

TRANSITION

For Scrooge, the images shown him by the Ghost of Christmas Past began his journey toward redemption. Surprisingly, Scrooge's icy heart began to melt when he saw himself in the distant past as one rejected and mistreated by others in his own community. You see, at one point, Scrooge was a person of decency "before he lost himself in his pursuit of wealth" as an idol [Rawle, 58].

And, he wasn't filled with bitterness or anger at anyone at the scenes the Ghost of Christmas Past showed him, but rather, he was moved to compassion for others. Scrooge's words to the Ghost in his dream/nightmare: "There was a boy singing a Christmas carol at my door last night; I should like to have given him something..." [Ibid.]

That's the beginning of the change we were talking about last Sunday. Again...if Scrooge can find

redemption in the Christmas story, anyone can. Or in words aligned with today's worship focus, if Scrooge's difficult remembrances of Christmases past can find healing, so can yours and mine.

Oftentimes, it is our inner "dis-ease" – our loneliness, our disappointments, our brokenness – that longs for healing, creating expectations no holiday season could meet.

(*Segué into the Scripture texts for today by pivoting on the role that *the Christmas story* plays in this dynamic of healing.*)

TO THE SCRIPTURES

(**Ad lib* preaching on the Scripture texts for today and the fact that the only "perfect" Christmas was that first one. Not in its "particulars"...but in its ultimate meaning: עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים, God with us!*)

Peace and Hope ensue, along with great Joy, when we see Christmas as the expression of the greatest love the world has ever known – the greatest love *you and I* will ever know.

TRANSITION to COMMUNION LITURGY

Matt Rawle writes that it is through a broken body – the Body of Christ – that we find salvation. "Christ died and was raised...so that our brokenness would be redeemed, our faults would not define us, and our sadness would not be the end of the story." [Ibid., 55] And in response we can only cry out, *Hallelujah!*

♪ "Cohen Communion Hallelujah"