

Blue Christmas Service and Homily, Wednesday, December 9th, 2009  
 Unitarian Church of Calgary  
 Rev. Fran Dearman

### Opening Words

Good Evening. My name is Fran Dearman. I am privileged to serve as Interim Minister to this congregation. Welcome to the Unitarian Church of Calgary. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, welcome to this place. I am glad you chose to be here this night.

We are gathered here this evening because this time of year is not always merry and bright, because it is not always filled with love and laughter. We are here tonight to acknowledge that painful things can happen – do happen – even at Christmas. This world is not a perfect place, nor is it populated with the perfect Moms and Dads and the perfect children we see on television. Real life is harder than that.

So if you are here because some loss makes this particular Christmas difficult to bear, or because the story of your life makes every Christmas a little bit difficult to handle, or if because for some vague reason you just can't seem to capture the true spirit of the season anymore, or if you are here just because you care and are carrying the burdens of another in your heart, let me bid you welcome to this place, to this hour of readings and reflections. And afterwards, let me invite you to a simple supper prepared as a gift for you.

### Invitation to Meditation

I invite you now to enter a quiet, inward place of reflection, meditation, or prayer. In this season when so many find joy, and so many others can only hope to find it, In this season when the shadows of war, and want, and disease and environmental damage disturb our peace, let us be mindful. Let us be mindful and careful:

For those who suffer the ravages of war  
 For those who bear the burden of oppression and injustice  
 For those who are without friends and are lonely  
 For those who live with constant pain  
 For those who have known disappointment and despair  
     as their constant companions  
 For those who despise themselves and for those who despise others  
 For those who know only failure  
 For those whose lives have been shattered by tragedy  
 For those who do not hear the song of the angels  
 For those who do not see stars of hope in a nourishing dark.

Let us pray for them and hold them in our hearts, knowing that theirs is part of our human condition, that their suffering and their tragedies are only a heartbeat away from us, and

that perhaps they are us. Let us pray for them and hope for them and wish for them and hold them in our hearts. Let us bear witness to their pain and distress. May each one of us find peace and comfort in this time. Amen.

Homily for Blue Christmas at Calgary, December 9th, 2009  
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I do love Christmas. I love the lights and the music, I love oranges and candy canes and ornaments and reindeer. I look forward to spending time with relatives and friends when I return to my family home on Vancouver Island for winter vacation.

Christmas can be a poignant and bitter-sweet time for my family. My nearest and dearest have a regrettable fondness for slipping away during December and early January.

And so for us the season is freighted with memories of loss, which are simultaneously memories of joy, and how we cared for one another through the years. Our Christmas is crowded with memory.

I do love Christmas. I do not love feeling stressed about money. I do not love feeling guilty. I do not love feeling powerless to heal a broken world; and we are a nation at war.

I do not love seeing the drama of the old stories chopped into sentimental snippets. The renewal of the seasons, birth and death and birth again, is a vital, dynamic part of our life experience, this hazardous walk through a challenging environment.

Many of the people who used to walk those paths with me are no longer here to do that, and I miss them, especially this time of year. And I miss all the things I once dreamed of that are not now and never will be and maybe never were.

Perhaps my feelings of disconnection at this time of year grow out of unrealistic expectations. What might I truly do, that is hopeful and positive?

The same as last year and the year before. Go easy on the alcohol and the rich food. Get some sleep. Get some exercise. Drive very, very carefully. Take a walk in the woods. Savor the crunch of snow beneath my feet, the crisp freshness in the cold air. Look at the birds. Cherish a tree. Think of someone else, maybe volunteer my time somewhere. Maketime for someone else. Make time for myself. Sing! Think about what I really, really like – the lights and the music and the plush velvet ribbons – and cherish them. Cherish myself. Spend time with the people I care for, doing things that we care for, and let them know that I love them. Some things go without saying, but it doesn't hurt to say them once in a while.

Let go where I need to let go. Let go. Rest. Honour the dark as I welcome the light. Let my shadow catch up with me. Listen for the small, still voice.

I'll be going home for Christmas this year, once again, arriving early Christmas morning, just in time for scrambled eggs and a midwinter rest in the city where I grew up. It will be different. Old buildings gone, new buildings in their place. Friends gone away, and some returned, and some to be met for the first time. Children grown, elders more fragile, a year of gain and loss to murmur over the tea cups. I shall be home for Christmas.

There have been Christmases when I was not at home, when I was thousands of miles from home, in barracks, or at sea. But wherever you go, there you are, and that makes it home for that day.

Wherever you find yourself, may you find yourself at home with yourself, somewhere, some how.

Take care, travel well, may you rest well and at peace, this still and silent time of year.

At the close of this service, all were invited to be seated at one long table together, and share a supper of soup and bread. There was no charge for this meal. There was no Offertory for this service. Our companionship and this meal were a gift we gave one another, with special thanks to our volunteers.

The Blue Christmas Team included: Bev Webber for the Hospitality Team; Dick Wilson and Dorothy Lloyd who sponsored the event, served the meal, and wrestled objects both light and heavy to where they were needed; Readers Bev and Jeff Webber and Muriel Turner-Wilkinson; Barry Wilkinson on sound; and Jack Paulsen on piano. A warm thank you to the many who lent a hand on a cold, dark, snowy evening.

I also thank the Rev. Brian Kiely of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, in Alberta, Canada, who introduced me to this service, freely loaned me his storehouse of materials, and whose words I have freely borrowed. Many of the stories among which we chose were first gathered together by CBC broadcaster, the late Peter Gzowski.

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