

Summerland United Church
 Dec 24, 7pm
 "The Inn"
 Christmas Eve

We Open the Door

All through the season of Advent as we prepared for Christmas, we've been exploring how we as a church can "make more room in the inn," becoming more hospitable to the needs of our community. On this Christmas Eve, we declare that The Inn is open as a community of compassion with room enough for all! The long-awaited Messiah is born and on him the light shines.

Our Advent journey has led us to this moment when the light shining through any closed doors can be opened to new possibilities, new relationships, new growth new life. Tonight we celebrate the light—the hope, peace, joy and love— that multiplies from one illuminated heart and hand to another.

First Reading: *Isaiah 9: 2-7 (NRSV)*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined...

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Second Reading: *Luke 2: 1-7 (NRSV)*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Reflection: I was given this book for my birthday. "What Comes from Spirit" – by Richard Wagamese. Richard Wagamese was an Ojibway Canadian author of both fiction and non-fiction. His writing is provocative and deeply meaningful. Yesterday as I

was working on my reflection for this evening, I flipped through the pages I came upon this story: The True Meaning of Christmas.

In the story Wagamese relates receiving a single Christmas present one year from his siblings. A tiny red truck with a blue cab and a missing wheel. He writes that in 1960 it would have cost about 75 cents and somehow his siblings scraped together the money to buy him this gift. There were no other presents that year, the 4 of them were living in a foster home, having been taken from their natural family, in the infamous 60's scoop. They ate their Christmas dinner in one room with the other foster kids, while the foster family ate in another room.

Wagamese writes about loving that truck and all the adventures he went on in the snowbanks and sandbox of the foster home, until later in the spring when he was sent away from the home and his siblings to live alone with another foster family. He wouldn't see any of his natural family for 20 years.

He mentions that his sister recalled, seeing the red truck with a missing wheel in the sandbox the day he left, when she returned from school.

In the story Wagamese calls it the best Christmas present and writes,

“Some small, little-boy part of me still sleeps with the love and compassion that went into [that present]. It never mattered that this gift was simple, small and perhaps insignificant in comparison to the glitter that's available or that it came wrapped in a paper bag, scotch taped and within ribbon. The reason the memory lingers throughout the years is because of the genuine way that it was offered. And that, for me, is the magic of Christmas. Genuineness and simplicity. I forget that sometimes as I join the hustle and bustle and endure lengthy lineups. But in the quieter moments it all comes tumbling back. I believe that if we could all connect to that genuineness and simplicity and make it last the whole year through, we'd all be one step closer to heaven.”

There's a bittersweetness to that story, as there is with the one we hear on every Christmas eve. We beautify the story with song and lyrics about everything being calm and bright, a sleeping babe, humble shepherds, prayers about peace and hope, and joy and love. All good things. Just as the toy truck in Wagamese's story contains joy and love.

But there's more to both stories isn't there. Mary and Joseph travelled because they were being registered for a tax. The empire wanted a proper accounting of people so they could further subjugate them. They had no proper home, they would later flee as refugees because of power, greed and the fear of losing such power.

Richard Wagamese and his siblings were taken from their family, their home and their traditions. They would be separated from each other for decades.

The little truck would, for Richard, symbolize both joy and sorrow. Just as we know that though this story begins with absolute and unadulterated joy it too will end in sorrow.

Yet, what both these stories do is show us with utter clarity what really matters. Not expensive presents or the perfect Christmas turkey. What really matters is care and compassion. What matters is hope. Hope that we can indeed work towards a better world. A world with Peace and Joy and Love.

Throughout the season of advent we've been engaging with this idea that we – as individuals and as a community can be houses for the holy.

We can, as people hold the light of God, the light of Christ in our hearts. We house the holy within ourselves. In this way, recognize the holy housed within all others too. And that we can, as a community of faith open our doors wide and wider still to welcome people in – and to house the holy here in this physical space in ways we have yet to imagine.

This is the meaning of Christmas, genuineness and simplicity.

How many Christmas movies are about this exact message? Yet, somehow every year we forget. Or rather, we're so inundated with glitz, glam and consume we feel guilty when we resist it. The marketing is really good huh?

If only we could market genuineness, simplicity, compassion, love in the same way, huh?

And so, here's my invitation to all of you this Christmas night as we celebrate the birth of a poor-brown-skinned refugee into an unforgiving world of consumerism, capitalism, and growing prejudice towards the stranger – take a moment to consider just what is genuine? What matters most to you?

And when you have that fixed in your heart, in the very center of your being – how can you live into that with simplicity?

Humanity does a marvelous job and making things harder than the need to be. Let's not do that this time. We live in a time of economic disparity, increased natural disasters, amplified self-righteousness, and fear which is polarizing into a violent us vs. them world view, when we start to think about it, it's overwhelming.

So, my further invitation is to remember – while we maybe can't do it all, we can do something. What are we, as a community of faith, as a community of people in Summerland uniquely suited to do? And how can we do it with genuine authenticity and with the simplicity of God's unconditional love?

We are celebrating the birth of the Christ – Emmanuel which means God is with us. We are celebrating the birth of God's light in the world. How will we shine this light? Where will we, as beloved of God, illumine creation in the years to come?

Third Reading *Luke 2: 8-20 (NRSV)*

(Luke 2: 8-20) Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told.