



**NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH**

**Christmas Eve Homily  
9PM**

Rev. Hannah Petrie  
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Originally the worship theme of this month was to be Peace. But before our Senior Minister, Jim Nelson, left for Sabbatical, I emailed him to ask if we could make December's worship theme Joy, instead. I told him I was stumped on Peace, but that Joy would be no problem. This was when my baby was only six weeks old. Jim replied in his email that yes, he imagines there is not much peace to be found in my life right now, but plenty of joy, and how right he is about that.

Even so, on Christmas Eve my thoughts turn to peace, and how much I wish for a peaceful world for my child to grow up in. Exactly one year ago today, I discovered I was pregnant, and it was with great self-control that I resisted sharing the news at the Christmas Eve service. I knew I couldn't risk making the Christmas message about me, because, indeed, the Christmas story is about all of us – not one baby, not my baby, and not even the baby Jesus.

The Christmas story is the story of the human family, and its essence is captured in the story of the Christmas Truce. It's amazing to think that the Christmas Truce of 1914 occurred nearly a century ago. Compared to the complexity of warfare today, the First World War seems almost quaint in its simplicity. By and large each side knew *who* the enemy was, and *where* they were. Perhaps they even had a better idea of why they were fighting, and what winning the war might look like. There was more than one Christmas Truce in the Great War, and perhaps they were only possible because so many practiced the same religion. Perhaps they were possible only because the soldiers shared a similar culture, and the same social class.

It's not as clear if the social classes of *our* side, fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, and *their* side, Al Qaida, the Taliban, etc. are all that similar. The cultures seem miles apart, and in this day and age, Americans have so much more than the equivalent classes of almost any other country. If there was to be a Christmas Truce of 2009, what could it possibly look like?

Chances are it wouldn't have anything to do with Christmas, or even with stuff. But it would be a recognition of the heart of the Christmas story, the part of the story that transcends all times and all settings and all religions. There would be some recognition that all soldiers are children of God, and that to kill each other is a sin against all that is holy to the human family.

We shouldn't dismiss that 'mini' Christmas truces occur regularly in today's wars, between small numbers of people that we never hear about. Perhaps there are moments when the two cultures of soldiers find common ground, and both sides second-guess their reasons for enlisting. The common ground of all people of this earth is vast, and we are already on it, we are already here, if only we could recognize it as such, as what some call the Kingdom of the God.

I can picture today's soldiers of both sides finding this common ground when they start talking about their families that they had to leave behind in order to fight. Like the soldiers of 1914, the soldiers of today would show pictures of their spouses and children, perhaps on their mobile phones. Of course the timeless soothers of tension would also be produced, and they might share a drink, a smoke – they might even break bread together.

While this scene lacks religious scriptures and rituals, it is a profoundly spiritual experience of life's longing for itself, and testimony to the fact that, if only we'd stop to see it, we are all one. The conversation might turn to what really matters to the young soldiers and here the common ground would be named and affirmed; both sides would see that they want the same things in this life: opportunity and livelihood to support their families, a safe place to live, clean air and water, good food, the good health of their children. And conversation would turn to how much they both miss their wives and husbands, how much they both miss their children, how much they both miss their homes.

It's idyllic, I know, a fantasy only, perhaps – but I won't give in to cynicism tonight, especially not on Christmas Eve. As Jim is fond of saying in his Christmas Eve homilies, this is the night, this is the one night of the year when he can believe that something more, something much greater than what we have now, *is* possible between human beings. Once we've seen that, seen that the spark of life is in every one of us – we know that at a deep level, we really are all one. This could be called “finding God” or just “waking up from our spiritual sleep.” It doesn't much matter what we call it as whether we can call it forth. And this is the season to call it forth.

Our faith has certainly been tried of late. The struggle to pass health care reform was exhausting, and the climate change talks in Copenhagen brought little to cheer about, as no nation would commit to a binding agreement. And yet, these are the issues that are common to humanity, that all of us share. When, we might ask, *will* there be peace, *when will* humanity learn to come together, in service of the Kingdom of God, as the one people of this earth that we really are, and forever shall be?

Peace begins in each of us, one person at a time. When the divine child awakens within us, we awaken to what or who we have been created to be – children of God, the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself. Peace begins when this awareness spreads from ourselves to those nearest to us. Such awakenings have occurred on the battlefields, in the form of a Christmas truce, when soldiers are closer to their enemy than they are to their own children. Peace also begins when such awakenings occur in our homes, in our relationships, in our communities. Whenever we meet in the middle of the forbidden zone, we receive the real gift of Christmas.

For every night a child is born is a holy night – a night of peace, a silent night. May all people of the earth, of every nation and faith, know this silence, know this great peace. AMEN.

And now shall we welcome this peace into our own hearts, in the singing and candle lighting of Silent Night . . . please tilt the unlit candle into the lit candle offered to you.