



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Christmas Eve, 2013

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

Blessed, and Merry Christmas to you. There are so many hopes and expectations around this holy night. We receive cards and greetings proclaiming the hope of peace on earth and good will among all people, whether or not we actually expect it. People gather with family and hope that good will will prevail around the tree and dinner table, that people might, at least for the day, overcome differences. We hope that people will like and appreciate their gifts. We look for the actions of this time of year to show us that people are kind and caring. And there is the profound hope, but maybe not an expectation, that Christmas will matter, that a birth so long ago in Bethlehem, is more than a lovely story. We hope that the world might be changed because of that birth, despite 2000 years of evidence to the contrary.

What does this hope look like from God's perspective? The incarnation, the arrival on earth of the purest form of the divine presence was and is, an event out of the ordinary. A lot of the language around the birth of Jesus invokes the specter of sin. He came to save us from our sins. What we expect from the incarnation will depend on how we understand that idea. For tonight I ask you to consider a particular definition. The Jewish understanding of sin is missing the mark, not disobedience of rules but a falling short of humanity's true nature and potential. God had an expectation and put the target out there, living together in harmony and love, with mutual enjoyment of the blessings provided by this planet and our life on it. We have systematically missed the target. So the remedy for this missing of the target was an infusion of that divine hope - the mind of God in human form. I believe that God's intention was that this presence on earth of the purest form of love would redirect us and help us hit the mark.

To illustrate this, I want to tell you about the work of Dr. Masuro Emoto who has done some intriguing work with water crystals. In 1994, Dr. Emoto was struck anew by the often cited fact that every snowflake is unique, which inspired him to look at water in its crystalline form. With the help of a young researcher, he began to try to freeze water and photograph individual crystals. It proved to be quite a challenge but eventually, they succeeded. They began to observe differences in the crystals produced by water from different sources. Some produced deformed crystals, some wouldn't yield a single crystal. Tap water didn't do so well; the higher the chemical content, the more misshapen the crystals were. But natural spring water invariably produced beautiful geometric forms. One day, the young assistant suggested exposing the water intended for freezing, to music. Distilled water was put in a container which

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was between speakers, and Beethoven's *Symphony Pastoral* was played. The resulting crystals were beyond their expectations; unexpected beauty. Many composers were tried, each leading to crystals of different characteristics but all exquisite. Then they tried violent, heavy metal music and the crystals were fragmented and malformed at best.

This music experiment led to another idea - different messages through words taped onto the glass containers. The message of "Thank you" produced lovely crystals, but insults or threatening words produced the same kinds of crystals as did the heavy metal music. Dr. Emoto says that the most beautiful and delicate crystal he ever saw was produced by water with the message "love and gratitude" on it.

Now, a disclaimer...most scientists don't even think Dr. Emoto's work is worth trying to duplicate - it's too far from their ordinary realm. However, there has been third party, independent research that does produce similar effects and results. Dr. Dean Radin, an engineer and physicist from the Universities of Mass. and Illinois has observed differences in water crystals apparently affected by thoughts projected from around the world. For the purposes of Christmas, I really don't care whether anyone accepts Dr. Emoto's work as sufficiently rigorous or not. Because, like the story of the Christ Child born to a virgin, it tells a truth that is deeper than verifiable fact. Think about it, you are more than 70% water. The water in your body can be beautiful or distorted. What you put into your body, the sounds and thoughts you are surrounded with, matter. The incarnation, this birth in Bethlehem, is God's intentional application of the thoughts of love and peace and joy so that we may be the most beautiful water for the life of the world.

For 2000 years, we have continued to miss the mark as a species. And yet, there are glimpses of success of the experiment in Bethlehem. Here's a particularly fine one. It's from a while ago, 70 years to be precise. It is the story of two pilots; one a German ace Luftwaffe pilot, Franz Steigler and the other, a rookie American bomber pilot, Charlie Brown. It was Charlie's first mission over Germany and his B-52 was badly damaged; only one engine was functioning at full capacity. The plane's metal skin was torn and mangled. Charlie and most of his crew were injured; the tail gunner was dead. The bomber, named *Ye Olde Pub*, couldn't maintain altitude or speed and Charlie found himself flying alone and about to fly over a Luftwaffe base.

On the ground, Franz Steigler was refueling his Messerschmitt. He had already shot down two Allied bombers that day. And there was another one, just asking to be his next. He saluted his crew and hopped back into his fighter. As he approached *Ye Olde Pub*, he was horrified by what he saw. He couldn't imagine how the plane could still be flying. The guns were hanging, useless. He saw the dead gunner through the broken tail, half of the rudder was missing, metal twisted every which way. The turret gunner couldn't defend the lumbering bomber either.

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Steigler was a devout Catholic and had already worn the finish off his rosary beads. As he felt those worn bead he heard the voice of his mentor, Lt. Gustav Rodel who had told him before his first mission, ***"You follow the rules for you, not for the enemy. You fight by the rules to keep your humanity. If I ever see or hear of you shooting at a man in a parachute, I will shoot you down myself."*** ***Steigler pulled up to the front of the bomber and motioned for Charlie to land the plane. Charlie ignored him. Realizing that the American would stubbornly keep flying his wounded plane, Steigler chose to help him get home. He flew in close as they passed over anti-aircraft guns, knowing that the gunners wouldn't shoot at the Messerschmitt. He also knew if he were identified, he would be court martialed and probably shot. When the B-52 finally made it to the coast of England, Steigler looked at Charlie and saluted. He told his commander that the bomber went down in the Channel. Charlie and his crew told of their chivalrous escort during their debriefing. They were ordered to keep silent about it.***

The war ended and both men went on to successful lives. Steigler had emigrated to Canada and was living in Vancouver when Charlie finally tracked down his compassionate enemy. On their first meeting since that December day in 1943, they lamented that they had lost so many years for what would have been a great friendship. Franz Steigler was the only German pilot awarded the Order of the Star of Peace by the Federation of Allied Combatants in Europe. He died in 2008 at the age of 92. His obituary listed his immediate family who survived him, and at the end lists, ***"...special brother Charlie Brown."*** Charlie died eight months later. They were crystals of the most beautiful kind, formed by the message of love and peace, the very purpose of Christmas.

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