

**Giving My Heart**  
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer  
Sunday, December 17, 2017

**First Unitarian Universalist Church**  
Rochester, Minnesota

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**READINGS**

A Winter Daybreak above Vence by James Wright

An excerpt from *In the Bleak Midwinter* by Christina Rossetti

## HOMILY

Maybe you've heard the story –  
maybe you've even read the book, or seen the movie –  
maybe you know it by heart –

*about the person whose heart was two sizes too small.*

As the people of the village prepared for the winter holidays –  
hanging evergreens and ornaments -  
decorating trees and preparing gifts and singing songs –  
and the one whose heart was too small  
seemed to hate it all.

He hated the noise, he hated the feast,  
and most of all  
he hated the songs and the singing.

Sometimes,  
when you haven't felt very happy –  
when you haven't felt very welcome –  
when you haven't felt included or invited –  
when you haven't felt that you belonged  
or you were angry at someone else or someone angry at you –  
it's easy for a heart, for your love or joy, to feel like it grows small.

Sometimes a heart will grow smaller and smaller  
the more it feels lonely or afraid – resentful or angry.  
A heart, a soul, happiness – will grow smaller and smaller  
until you feel like there is no room in it anymore  
for love or for laughter or for joy.

*Ann and Amy and Joyce are going to help hand out some baskets – in each basket  
there are hearts – red or green – and some crayons – I want each of you to take a  
heart, and use either a crayon or a pen or whatever you want to write with.*

In a moment, I'll ask you to write a few things,  
but first – do you remember what happened  
to the one with the heart too small?

Out of his loneliness and isolation,  
which turned into anger and madness –  
he snuck into the village  
and shoved into his bag  
all that was joyful and festive –  
all the decorations and evergreens,  
all the lights and trees,  
all the stockings and stars –  
he searched and seized everything that was creating joy  
he shoved his bag full  
of anger and madness  
and took it away,  
up the hill  
as all the people of the village were fast asleep –  
doing everything he could  
to take away all that he thought would make them happy –  
because he wasn't happy and didn't want anyone else to be.

I want you to think about a time –  
think about a time when you have felt like your heart was small –  
when the weight of other people's joy that you weren't feeling  
felt larger than what you could carry -  
a time when you didn't feel joyful,  
or didn't feel welcome  
or didn't feel loved –  
a time when you felt angry or sad  
like your heart, or soul, or happiness,  
had shrunk.

Think about what, if anything, helped you feel better –  
lifted your spirits, your soul – brought you love.  
Or, if nothing did that time,  
think of what could have helped you –  
feel loved, or cared for, or lifted up.

On one side of the heart, I want you to write down a word –  
a person, or a song, or a place, or a moment –  
something big or small, something simple –  
that helped you  
when you felt like you were carrying a bag of anger  
that was dragging you down.  
What helped you – what or who showed you love?

On the other side, I want you to write down a word –  
of what you can give to help others needing love or hope?  
What gift do you have,  
what, from your heart,  
can you give to someone who needs to be lifted up?  
Maybe its love, or joy, or compassion –  
a smile, a hug, hot cocoa –  
what can you offer to help create joy in the world?

So, during this music,  
on one side – what gift have you been given to help you feel loved?  
on the other side – what gift can you give to help someone else feel loved?

***Musical Interlude – ‘Tis a Gift to be Simple***

And you know what happened next, right?  
You know what happened –  
as convinced as the one with the small heart was  
that all the people of the village  
would wake up sad and gloomy  
and have no joy –  
and, for a time,  
they were sad –  
all of their decorations, gone –  
no gifts under the tree or in the stockings,  
sad that someone had taken away  
all that they had joined together to create.

But then,  
even with the lights gone and the food gone  
and, well, almost everything, gone –  
their love and their hope was alive and well –  
they joined hands  
and went out of their homes  
into the bright morning sun of a winter's day,  
and they gathered their family  
and they gathered their joy  
and hand in hand, heart in heart,  
they went to the center of their village,  
as they always did,  
and gathered around the now bare and simple tree,  
and they sang –  
they welcomed the day of love and hope and light, singing –  
*Christmas day will always be just as long as we have we.*  
And the one with the small heart heard the singing,  
a surprise to his ears,  
and puzzled, his heart began to grow – 3 times its size.

So, this morning, as Connie plays,  
we will gather the gifts of our hearts 'round our tree.  
A few helpers will come around and help gather the words written on your hearts  
to bring them forward –  
and I want to invite the children to help –  
children, and any adult feeling so compelled,  
can go around and help gather gifts and bring them forward –  
I invite those with gifts to hand them off to any helpers -  
gifts for the *Giving Peace Tree*,  
and you can pass your hearts to the end of the row and helpers can help bring them  
up to the baskets up front. Connie will play as we gather our gifts.

***Musical Interlude - Green***

*Now on the mountainside,  
writes poet James Wright that Ann read for us today –  
now impossibly hovering above everything  
how can I feel warm, he asks, in the middle of winter?*

There, atop the mountainside,  
much to the surprise of the one with the small heart,  
when he couldn't have expected to hear it –  
and in fact had worked hard to be sure  
no joy was had by anyone else that day –  
there, hovering above everything,  
finding warmth in the midst of cold and the piles of snow –  
now sitting  
all together, strangely, on top of the sunlight –  
he, and now we, hear the voices –

*all the Whos down in Whoville  
the tall and the small  
were singing without any presents at all –  
Christmas and love and joy came –  
it came without ribbons, it came without tags,  
it came without packages and boxes and bags.*

The simple message of the season  
is that heart to heart, and hand in hand,  
we bring love to life,  
we become, together,  
love and song and hope and joy in living flesh –  
we are, to one another,  
the song that echoes up the mountainside,  
helping our heart to grow  
three times its size.

What we need most –  
is not more stuff, more sugar, more online orders  
what we need most –  
is to hear the song that one another is singing –  
the join in that song,  
whatever joy we can sing into this broken and beautiful world –  
heart to heart,

hand in hand –

to travel up the mountainside together,  
strengetly, on top of the sunlight,  
let our heart grow,  
grab our trumpet,  
and join in the song  
down in the center  
of life in this village we call home.