

“Would we practice a Whoville Christmas?”

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“An Immaterial Christmas”

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Imagine an alternative ending to Dr. Seuss’ “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.” Imagine if the Grinch had dumped the Who’s toys and food for the feast from the tiptop of Mt. Crumpit. Imagine if he then heard them singing merrily down in Whoville, both the tall and small. He gets the message of Christmas. “It came without ribbons! It came without tags! It came without packages, boxes, or bags! Christmas doesn’t come from a store.”

Nevertheless, in our twist, the food for the feast and the toys are gone. Dumped downhill. There’s no Christmas goodies for little Cindy Lou Who, who was no more than two. What if the Grinch had nothing to bring back to Whoville? In our alternative ending, Christmas may not have been stolen by the Grinch, but their stuff was.

Sure, the book’s ending, as Seuss wrote, offers a happy ending for everyone, when Grinch and Max whizzed through the bright morning light and brought back the toys and the food for the feast. We readers want this restorative kind of happy ending. But suppose the happy ending only is the Grinch’s apology, sorrow for what he has done. The Who’s already had shown how a Christmas without bags, boxes, packages, tags, or ribbons doesn’t make Christmas immaterial, them rejoicing regardless.

Rejoicing regardless? Yes, rejoicing regardless, for as the TV animated version adds: “Christmas Day is in our grasp! So long as we have hands to clasp!” How’s our Christmas spirit in comparison these days? Imagine now if Grinch had packed up and dumped our Christmas items. Would we rejoice regardless? Would we practice a Whoville Christmas?

My narrative turns the cute story into more morality play than the childish delight intended by Seuss. Please don’t think I’m an utter cad and unsentimentally pedantic. Actually, the older I get the more I blubber. I’m quite the fan of garish wrapping paper and Elmer’s glue clothespin ornaments. I like stuff too. I just don’t want my stuff to own me. What’s on your Christmas wish list? How many pages? Will Santa loot make you happy?

Keep your weather eye out for what we call God at work, for Christmas pushes us to look in places we don’t suspect. Forget the bluster and bombast of domination from those who think power means to be served rather than serve, those bent on exploiting others, those who use violence and lies to get what they desire. Hear instead the brutal, wonderful truth of Christmas: Christmas announces the failure and weakness of cruel Herods.

God plays favorites, and it’s sure not in favor of the users and takers. Lullabies inexorably win over against noise, anger, falsehoods. God plays favorites: look instead at ordinary folks dear to God when they try to hold onto integrity, goodwill, truth, faith, hope, love.

Driving home from Fort Collins, Colorado, a night ahead of storm and tornado, we woke in Springfield, Ohio, to learn how Christmas will be very different for thousands of persons. Scant joy. Still, the Christ is in the midst of their hurt. Persons who only weep for themselves have never truly wept. While

stringing lights, decorating trees, wrapping presents, what we oft overlook is how Christmas reveals what's truly in our hearts.

My grandmother wrote a page for our home church's Advent Devotional. Granny, as a little girl in the 1890's, had contracted an illness that required her being quarantined in her bedroom for months. Her parents slipped her Christmas dinner underneath her door.

Then there's the story of the eight year old boy suffering from serious bone disease, strapped to a board to immobilize his spine. Family fearing the worst. How kind were his relatives giving him appropriate Christmas gifts for a child bedfast and ill. Checkers, books, stuffed animals. Except his Uncle. Unk gave him a pair of roller skates. "This was the greatest of all the presents," the boy smiled. It was the only present for when the boy would get well.

I may write my list (or pray my real wish list), but the best gifts are the ones I never thought of, those never imagined for myself but gifts somebody else chose for me. Not necessarily gifts I wanted but the gifts others, loved ones, wanted me to receive. Can presents make you happy? Or do they inspire us to choose happiness? Happiness, like love, like goodness, always is a choice. Best of all, these happiest presents didn't come wrapped in wrapping paper or delivered by Amazon.