

Our City

Peace and Love

I ask you to take to heart these words by, perhaps America's greatest poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow on this Christmas Eve.

Christmas Bells

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
 and wild and sweet
 The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
 Had rolled along
 The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime,
 A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
 And with the sound
 The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
 And made forlorn
 The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
 "For hate is strong,
 And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Longfellow wrote these words in 1861 after tragically seeing his wife burned to death in a house fire and losing his son to the Civil War. While I am not an outwardly religious person, I do believe we serve something far greater than ourselves; it is through this service that we find peace and love and through peace and love; good-will to men.

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And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

This particular verse by Longfellow strikes a real cord with me. Why as a country are we so divided, so hateful and full of resentment for our fellow man whose views may be different than our own? WE mock and disparage that which is different, that to which we don't ascribe and that which makes us uncomfortable. Where is God or our greater purpose in that? Like Longfellow my head is often bowed in despair for I seem powerless to change it. Or, am I?

A month ago we started a new trimester at the high school. Part of my introduction to all of my classes is an overview of who we each are and what is important to each of us. I share with my students my passion for equity and the fact that we are all different, that we each have our own story; sadly many of those stories are not happy ones for several of my students, that we don't know what is beneath the cover that wraps each of us and hides what we don't want seen, and as such to be good-willed we need to treat each other with respect and dignity. As the students began to share one was particularly excited as they spoke about who they were and what was important to them. The student concluded by attesting to supporting a political philosophy vastly different than mine. The class was silent and I was set aback given everything that had been shared by other classmates. Later, I was filled with resentment and even anger. Then I remembered my own words and those of Longfellow and was ashamed of myself. Good-will to men; must begin with me.

For there to be peace and love WE cannot judge that which we do not know; it is up to each of us to seek and understand, to learn from one another and find the unity that allows us to bridge that which divides us so we may meet life with greater expectations and purpose.

As you reflect on this Christmas Eve my wish for you is good-will, peace and love. May joy, peace and love be with you always. Merry Christmas.

Until next week...