

Christmas Eve Meditation 2022
Psalm 46:1-3, 10

Psalm 46:1-3, 10 (NRSV)

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

I have always loved this special worship service on Christmas Eve,
and I am grateful to each of you for being here to share this,
because by your presence all of you make our worship better.

It is a wonderful night, so holy and joyful, so sacred and meaningful.

**It is a precious treasure to ponder, to drink in its mystery deeply,
and allow God's grace & hope to flow into our hearts & lives
as we are drawn into the very presence and peace of Holy God...**

... for each time I hear the Christmas story and music of the season,
**I marvel at the wonder of our infinitely wise and powerful God,
who loves us so deeply, that he came to us, the Christ-child.**

And now in the peaceful stillness and the beauty of our worship,
we can let our thoughts and spirits finally pause **and find calm,**
and what a perfect time to consider **God's gift of grace.**

In my 20's, I usually spent the 4th of July, downtown Washington DC,
for a day of patriotic celebration culminating with fireworks.

One year, I remember that I was sitting at the Jefferson Memorial,
and one of the military bands was performing while well over
a million dollars' worth of fireworks were being shot off.

It was truly an incredible and awesome display that year.
And the grand finale was breathtaking and magnificent with
loud explosions of color lighting up and filling the night sky...
... and then the most amazing and contrasting stillness of deep quiet.

It was a most compelling and moving moment --- when after the finale
the crowd sat in a stunned and almost reverent **reflective silence,**
a time to pause - and absorb the full richness of the experience,
a truly wonderful moment of indescribable peace and calm.

But then some drunken idiot started whooping and hollering,
shattering that moment of such depth and serene significance,
as in ignorant foolishness he **trampled on something precious...**
... for obviously, he just didn't get it, and somehow it passed him by.

Furious faces quickly turned toward that thoughtless disturbance,
indignant that he'd so rudely disrupted & disrespected the wonder.
I too was angry at first, but then that changed to a sense of pity,

tragic pity, that alcohol had so dimmed his wit and senses,
causing that poor inebriated fool to miss such a remarkable event.

Something spectacular had happened, and it slipped right past him --
completely unaware of the profound experience everyone else shared.
How tragic, not to grasp something like that, right in front of you.

Joshua Bell is an internationally acclaimed violin virtuoso
and if you want to hear him play his 3.5 million dollar Stradivarius,
I checked, and tickets for his next concert run \$190 - \$517,
and even more at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

In January of 2007, Mr. Bell played for nearly an hour in Washington.
It was at the entrance of the L'Enfant Plaza Metro station,
where passers-by could listen to him in concert for free.

It was an experiment sponsored by the Washington Post
to see if busy morning commuters would notice and stop to listen,
to one of the world's most famous and accomplished musicians
playing some of the most elegant music ever written
on one of the most valuable violins in existence...
...for surely no one would walk away from such a rare opportunity.

Well-over a 1000 people passed by where he was playing that morning,
a few glanced his way, some were obviously irritated by the 'noise'
as several passers-by spoke more loudly into their cell phones.

On YouTube I watched the video that they made with hidden cameras,
and hearing that majestically beautiful and amazing music,
it is shocking that you never see a crowd gather around him,
but rather, most looked straight ahead **rushing right past him.**

On the video you can see some folks standing just a few feet away.
They were waiting in line to buy lottery tickets, and most
never even glanced his way or seemed to notice the music.

The newspaper reporter who set this all up couldn't believe it,
and posed an important question in his article:

“If we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best
musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so
overpowers us that we are deaf to something like that --- **then what else are we missing?**”

Indeed, **“Then what else are we missing?”**

Surely that is one of the most critical and revealing
questions that we need to ask ourselves on Christmas Eve ----
what are we missing? and what is distracting our attention?

Every single year of my life, God has in his great love and mercy
provided some meaningful Christmas event or special experience,
-- some gracious revelation or sacramental moment of blessing,
above and beyond the loud din of this world's frantic noise.

Do you ever just stop and listen and pay closer attention,

and wait in silence for the God who loves us to speak to you? ...

... as the Psalmist wrote, "Be still, and know, that I am God."

The point is, God isn't always in the loud, impressive and obvious,
but sometimes, **it's in the quiet, still & reflective**
that we can hear and discern best the voice of God.

The Master's music is playing all around us, but we've got things to do,
and so we haven't paid attention – we are not hearing the Lord God,
and so we may not have received or understood his message...

... **his message**, that we are all each of us loved and treasured by God,
and that we are all created and called by name by the Lord,
to be and to live as a precious person chosen by Jesus Christ.

Yes, it can be hard to trust and believe how very much God loves us,
with grace enough to come down into this world to heal and save us,
and take on our human flesh, our struggles, hurts and wounds.

In many ways, we've known too much darkness, dread & disappointment,
and so we light our candles on Christmas eve
to help remind us of our hope in God's promises --

- the light that shines into our every darkness and secret place,
the light of hope that keeps us from giving up in broken despair-

- as we heard read earlier in the service from Isaiah 9:2 and John 1:5,

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The Light of Jesus comes as a powerful promise of enduring hope,
as the One whose life and mission demonstrated the amazing truth,
that we are indeed loved & precious and that we do matter to God...

... **that we actually can have a living relationship with the Lord God,**
that there is real possibility for a fresh start & power to change...
... **and that the amazing truth of that Light can redirect**
how we perceive our challenges and live out our lives.

Sometimes, our plans and busyness, the demands we try to fulfill,
can consume so much, and distract us from what truly matters most.

Jesus came as the light of God, lovingly wrapped in human flesh,
here to reveal the awesome depth of God's love, mercy & grace.

Christmas Eve is about that Light, God's grace reaching out to us,
to the discouraged and wounded, to the hurting and broken-hearted,
with healing compassion and comfort to guide us back home again.

Christmas Eve is a uniquely special place to meet Christ the Lord,
a good place to be found, welcomed and invited by Jesus to follow-
- knowing that we are when & where God intends for our lives to matter.

In a few moments, we will light our candles as **symbol** and **reminder**--

- **a symbol** of Jesus' birth, the Light of the world,

- **a reminder** of the promise and hope that Jesus brings...

... he described in John 8:12,

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

That is the true light of hope and endless new possibilities,

and a peace far greater than even our worst fear or anxiety.

For as we light our candles together as a community of faith,

and when that light is shared, passed from one person to another

the world we share becomes a brighter and more hopeful place...

... and may that Light shine in our hearts, tonight and always,

that we may also faithfully reflect that Light out to others.