

“Blessed Distraction”:  
A Sermon for Trinity United Church (Nanaimo, B.C.)  
for December 24<sup>th</sup> 2019 (Christmas Eve)  
by Foster Freed

Luke 2: 1-14

Let’s acknowledge—right from the get-go—that it would be far from difficult to preach a grumpy sermon at Christmas; there are certainly no shortage of things about which one could **choose** to be grumpy although...to be fair....

...most of those things involve the remarkably strong force...

....if there are any physicists in the room they would likely speak of it as a **centrifugal** force....

....the remarkably strong centrifugal force that pulls away from what really ought to be the “**centre**” of our Christmas celebrations—the baby Jesus and his blessed family:.

Easy for those who preach...and for those who don’t preach...to be unsettled—and yes, grouched—by the ever present force that seems to leave the Christ child and his parents far off in the distance while we pursue a zillion other things: ranging from Frosty and Rudolph, Santa and the Grinch, winter-solstice and year-end planning and—of course—the frenzy of gift-making, gift-buying gift-giving, house-decorating, card-sending and—God help us—the sort of non-stop activity that causes us almost to envy grandma when she gets run over by that reindeer.”

In the process...in the process we manage to turn December into a month so hectic that the real Christmas miracle is that anyone manages to survive it! And yes, in the process, we also give ample grist for any number of the mills operated by those who wish to condemn this season for its commercialism, those who wish to use this season to virtue-signal that they do Christmas far more faithfully than the rest of us....and those who gently but firmly admonish the rest of us by placing those “keep Christ in Christmas” bumper stickers where we can’t possibly miss seeing them. Trust me...all of that is a tempting path for any self-respecting preacher on such a night as this....as we finally take an hour to step outside the busyness of our December routines, in a very real sense to put Christ back into Christmas since far too many of us haven’t done a very good job of keeping him there over the past month.. Tempting to let my inner grinch out of the closet. But rest assured: that temptation is one to which I cannot possibly succumb, not on such a night as this.

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In part...in part that has to do with **us**....with you and me and the frantic activity into which most of us plunge this time of year. It’s easy to issue stern warnings about

commercialism....and even easier to stand back, view all the hustle and bustle with bewilderment, and recall the not entirely wrong-headed saying: the one making the claim that if “the devil can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy”. There’s a lot of truth to that....and we forget it at our peril. And yet!

Also in truth: so much that makes this time of year frantic....so much of what makes so many of us a wee bit crazy throughout the month of December...has to do with a deep-seated yearning to make this time special. To make it special for the people in our lives: the little ones, the aging ones, even the ones in between who tend to labor under the illusion that they have the responsibility of keeping this turning world right on turning. My point is this: much of the busyness in which we indulge throughout this graced season, is nothing more than our ham-fisted efforts at creating beauty and goodness and joy for those we love, which is to say: ham-fisted or not, that which motivates so much of the craziness this time of year, is a craziness grounded in love. To borrow from the opening monologue of a favorite Christmas movie: “If you look for it, I’ve got a sneaky feeling you’ll find that love, actually, is all around.” That’s true right here. That’s true right now. Helping to explain, in part, why I cannot be grumpy this evening. But here’s the other thing, simply this.

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If the core Christian conviction is true...namely, that in some wonderful and mysterious way, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself....if it is actually the case that it is God’s own face we get to behold in the face of the Christ child....then it must also be said that God did not enter blindfolded into this strange and marvelous adventure we call the incarnation. You see. If it is true—and I believe it is most certainly true—that the Word became flesh in the flesh of the Christ child, then we can take it as given that it is to this very world—not some other, imaginary world—to which God-in-Christ chose to pay a house-call. **This world!** Filled with hectic people, frantic people, sometimes seeking to do harm, more often seeking to do good but in all of the ham-fisted ways in which we men and women seek to do good: in short a world filled with endless dead-ends, endless false starts, and yes, endless distractions....

...distractions which now, in light of Christ’s advent, we have no choice but to count as “blessed distractions”: distractions into which God’s love has freely chosen to enter, a whole world of human yearning and human striving and human busyness into which the Son of God has chosen to enter as a full participant.

May he always find us ready to welcome him when he knocks at our door. And may his light, and his life, and his love be known in and through us, now and forever more. Thanks be to God.