

# Christmas

## A Sorely Needed Reclamation

Some thirty years ago, I was given the opportunity to be a part of the reclamation of a gorgeous seventy-three room colonial-style mansion, as well as the property and numerous out-buildings that were part of this massive, rolling estate. It had set empty, hauntingly still and seemingly comatose for several decades, with suffocating layers of dust, endless rooms marred to embarrassment by peeling paint, and massive walls stripped nearly naked by faded and peeling wallpaper. All of the morbid decay was edged by generations of lacey cobwebs that seemed like thin, sporadically hung sheets of tissue paper. There was something terribly sad and forlorn about it all, like when something majestic is abandoned and entirely forgotten in the abandonment; something like beauty relegated to oblivion.

It was a very odd and strange sort of dichotomy in that you could clearly see the tremendous architectural beauty of the buildings, the opulent and exquisite designs within and without, as well as the ornate landscaping hidden behind the decay and inattention. Dilapidated, seemingly sullen and falling into gross disrepair, the endlessly rich and prolific artistry of the architecture, as well as the meticulous attention to detail that had gone into landscaping the massive grounds was all still there . . . if you had the eyes to see it. It was obvious that the whole place was something wonderfully marvelous that had been lost, that a treasure had been carelessly handed off to disregard; glory ground underfoot by gross disregard for the glory. Yet, it was something that was not so lost that it couldn't be reclaimed and restored to its former glory. The results of abandonment and foolish disregard could be undone if one had eyes willing to see beyond the carnage of decay, a heart bent on reclaiming that which should never have been lost, and an unshakeable belief in what once was which drove the belief that, 'what was,' could be once again.

### Christmas Lost

Christmas seems achingly hollow; that something core has been disregarded. It seems that it might have been something rich, wonderful and life transforming. Somehow it seems that it too had been ornate, wondrous and marvelous like the old, abandoned estate. Christmas too seems to have been marred to embarrassment and stripped naked. It seems more like a tossed relic; being an ever so slight handful of leftover pieces and parts of something that at one time was precious beyond description. There's something inherently majestic in this holiday that seems to have been abandoned by us; something flippantly cast aside, something that was foolishly abandoned and was tragically forgotten in the abandonment. And so it has set for who knows how long, in decay and disrepair.

Christmas seems like a limp rag that's been rung nearly dry. We have some tiny bit of essence left, some scent of something golden and wildly wonderful, some priceless nard that still has a very slight aroma and a scant bit of remaining dampness. But we've pretty much rung the very life out of it. It has all of the timeless substance that makes something splendidly grand; something that's infinitely more substantial than repetitive carols, rolls of wrapping paper, tangle strands of twinkling lights, spools of red and green ribbon, cutesy cards, as well as festivities of sordid sorts that all seem something of a slight shadow, a nearly indistinct footprint, a nearly lost scent of something that once was, but now is not.

And now we're left with what too often seems like empty tradition, repetitive rituals and substance-less substance that wear us out to the point that we have no remaining energy to celebrate it once we've got it all set up to celebrate. We've stripped and discarded a season that is so little of what it once was, or maybe should have been, that we tend to celebrate more vigorously when the season humanely rolls off the calendar and is over

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than we did while it was actually going on.

### **Stripped and Barren**

It might be of value to ask why we do what we do with life, rather than just blindly doing it without asking why we're doing it. What is Christmas anyway? Where did this all come from? Why have we flippantly discarded the core of it all and gutted it to the point that it's less something of vibrant life and more something of rote and ritual? Maybe we should ask why it hasn't really worked at that well once we gutted it. And maybe we should also ask if we also tend to gut the very life out of life in most of the other areas of our lives as well?

### **What is Christmas?**

That question will be answered differently by different people out of their belief systems, backgrounds, personal experiences and biases. There's not sufficient time or space here to engage that question fully. However, I think that we know a few things:

I think that we know that Christmas is a whole lot more than we've allowed it to be, or caused it to be, whatever the case might be. That there's something inherently deep in this season that's somehow core to each of us. That Christmas bespeaks a desire to believe that hope is worth hoping in, that the world has the potential to be better than it's become and that each one of us is something more than we've allowed ourselves to believe. Christmas seems to say that paradise lost and longed for does not have to be paradise given up on. That all the good that we hope for is indeed reasonable to hope for, and that there's real power and potential to make that 'good' more of a reality than it is a dream.

I think we know that Christmas somehow exposes the hidden richness of all humanity. It gives reason and opportunity for humanity to prove its worth by turning on itself with grace, being wildly merciful to others, loving lavishly (which includes loving oneself), and stepping up on behalf of our fellowman rather than stepping away from them. Christmas is about knowing that whatever we're all worth, it's enough to be sacrificed for, which means we're worth a whole lot. It's a vision that illustrates in broad relief something great that's been lost while delivering a timeless and passionate plea to restore what's been lost. It's a belief that what's been lost should have never been lost in the first place. It's a conviction that all of this can yet be redeemed. It's a message of worth and hope; total worth and endless hope. It's the kind of message that's infinitely bigger than all of us but offered to all of us.

In time, the old mansion and grounds of the estate were restored to their original splendor. Because of that, there's been a reversal of sorts. The photos from thirty years ago tell the story of the peeling paint, faded wallpaper, overgrown grounds and the dilapidated state of it all. They are photos of what was once lost; what it all once looked like. Yet, there were those who refused to let be it be lost, and they reclaimed it. It is now wondrous indeed. Christmas is lost in disrepair, but it remains to be wholly and marvelously reclaimed.