

Sermon :: 21-Dec-2025

Advent 4, Year A

“ that your Son Jesus Christ, at His coming,
may find in us a mansion prepared for Himself ”

It is, in a way, all about the *endings*.

Charles Dickens' A CHRISTMAS CAROL is, at heart, a ghost-story*: a philosophical or moral or even **spiritual** (pun intended!) ghost story. It begins with Ebeneezer Scrooge's being haunted by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley ... who comes to warn him of the eternal condemnation that most assuredly awaits Scrooge if he does not amend his miserable, miserly, misanthropic ways. Then ... over the course of one very long, very strenuous Christmas Eve ... the Spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come visit Scrooge ... to show him, first, the personal *past* that has constituted his *present*; second, how vastly—and bitterly—Scrooge's present differs from the present of many, many *others*, who have far *less* wealth, and far *greater* love, than he; ... and finally, a glimpse into the *future*: the bleak—*harrowing*, even—days-to-come, immediately following Scrooge's own death ... when not only does *no one mourn* his passing ... but some even **celebrate** the departure from the realm of the living ... of such an ill-disposed, ungenerous creature as Scrooge.

While the telling of the tales of these visits is both fantastical *and* sobering ... it's how each one *ends*, I think, that captures the *crux* of Dickens' message ... the arc of the Advent transformation that's the object—the ambition—of Dickens' extended reflection on the true Christmas 'heart':

- At the end of the *first* visit, Scrooge is *distraught*—almost to the point of *rage*. Having seen a past—his *own* past—almost too sad to bear ... having grasped the totality of the mishaps that *befell* him **and** the miscalculations he *himself* made ... Scrooge demands that the Spirit of Christmas Past return him home ... where he *promptly*, though also in *vain*, attempts to *snuff out* the light the spirit has shone, anew, over the contours of his younger days.
- At the end of the *second* visit, Scrooge is, we might say, *reforming* but not yet *reformed*. He's realized *not only* that a **misered-together** mountain of money isn't a prerequisite to happiness—for almost everyone he visits with the Spirit of Christmas Present has far less in the bank, but far more in the heart, than he ... *but also* how desperate are the needs of those living all around him, whom Scrooge has steadfastly *refused to see*. *Conscience pricked*, if not yet *keen* ... he asks the spirit if there is "no refuge or resource" for the destitute ... only to have the spirit spit back at him his own infamous heartless line: "Are there no prisons? no workhouses?"
- By the end of the *third* visit, however, Scrooge is an **entirely changed** man. Having not *heard* ... but, no doubt, *perceiving* ... an answer to his imploring question: Are the visions of the future he's seeing what "*Will be*" [sic] or only what "*May be*" [sic]? ... Scrooge, at last, lets go of status and security ... steps into the light ... and is wholly *transformed*: "I am not the man I was. I will not *be* the man I must have been but for this

* Indeed, Dickens' own subtitle for the novella is *Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*.

intercourse [with the three spirits]. Why *show* me [all] this," Scrooge rhetorically asks *himself* as much as the spirit who's standing before him, "if I am past *all hope?*"

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We are not—*any* of us; indeed, any of *humanity*—“past all hope.” In fact, we live fully *for* the hope ... fully *with* the hope ... fully *in* the hope ... of Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom we “belong” ... and in Whom we have “faith”: faith that He *has* “save[d] His people from their sins.”

And yet ... this hope ... that *one day*, **God** will make all things right; that *eventually*, **Jesus** will come to rule again; that in some *age to come*, the **Holy Spirit** will unite us all in love ... is *not* the *ending*: *not* the end of *our* story as Jesus' disciples ... *not* the trite HAPPILY EVER AFTER of *our* faith-lives. Hope in God's *ultimate* goodness is a *starting* place ... an 'onramp' ... of faith. Goodness, for all we know ... even **Old Scrooge** himself might have had **this** much faith! “**God** will sort it all out in the end. But for *now*, it's nose to the grindstone, hand to the plow ... early to bed, early to rise ... every man for himself ... pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.” No, the *full* ... the *true* ... the *authentic* hope ... of Jesus is *neither* a posture of 'eat, drink and be mindlessly merry' ... *nor* of 'toil, hoard and be Scroogily miserable' ... while blithely 'assigning' **God** responsibility for righting all the wrongs of this world, in the *future*.

Rather, the *true* hope of faith expresses itself in our being *open* to—indeed, even *embracing*—the good we can accomplish, *here and now* ... to make the promises of Christ a *reality* for our fellow creatures, in this very *present*. For if Love—capital *L*—came *down* at Christmas ... then It also *went* somewhere ... *entered* someone ... and that 'somewhere'-and-'someone' is *us*. ¶Love entered us to bring good news—*tangible, practical* good news—to those who lack; and release—*physical, spiritual, emotional* release—to those who are oppressed. ¶Love entered us at Christmas so those who are merely limping along may *dance* ... so those who suffer indignity after indignity may hold their heads *proud and high* ... so those who are ground under the boot of misused power, diabolical hatred and corrupting greed may emerge into the *divine* light—*God's* light—of *equality, mutuality* and *sufficiency*. ¶Love entered us at Christmas so we may *share* the Good News with those whose hearts know they're *missing* something ... those who are *lost* or *despairing* ... who have nowhere to *go* and no one to *turn to*: coping with *addiction* or *abuse*; suffering in *silence*; fainting in *fear* or weeping in *woe*. ¶Love entered us at Christmas so—as we hear every week—**we** may *be*—may **become**—the eyes of Christ's *compassion* for this world ... the feet of Christ's *good* for this world ... the hands of Christ's *blessing* for this world.

And, on Thursday, Love will *come* once **again** ... to *bring* us this hope ... *renew* in us this hope ... set *astir* in us this hope. But if we are to see it clearly ... receive it fully ... let it really re-light us with the brilliance and brightness of the Christ Child *that is*, if the Christmas hope God sends us is to *accomplish* what God *intends* ... then we must **transform** ... must make ourselves a “mansion prepared for Him.” We must **reclaim** ourselves, our lives and all our activity ... upon *this* earth, in *this present* time ... confronting *today's* circumstances ... *embracing our* responsibility, in Christ, for the fate and plight of *every* living creature. We must no longer, like **Old Scrooge**, just 'be' whatever our past has made us, and leave *others* to do *likewise* ... but, like **New Scrooge**, prepare our hearts to accept the joyful hope of Christmas not only for *ourselves*—to *hoard*, like some *personal treasure*... but to *share* with and *shower* upon the *whole world*—like the ever flowing fountain of grace that it—that **Jesus**—*is*.

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“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight,” the familiar carol tells us. And in *Him* ... as *His disciples* ... they are met in *us*, as well. Let us, then, use these last waning days of Advent to open ourselves to the fullness ... the overflowing-ness ... the boundary-less-ness ... of the Love that comes down at Christmas ... so that ... *in us* and *through us* ... the whole ***world*** will know the hope ... of the *true* Christmas *heart*.

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