

Putting away "Christmas"

Today is New Year's day. The Rose Parade is over. The College Bowl games have begun. Now it is time to put away decorations, tree, candles and manger scenes. I remember a short few weeks ago when I was thinking about the process of "getting out Christmas". This usually entails finding the boxes, examining the contents and deciding what should go where, what should stay and what should not. This year I was sick. I had picked up a virus on an airplane and lost my ability to speak. I was struggling some days with a cough and a runny nose and at times a fever. One day I wanted to stay in bed and sweat and sleep, believing that the process would kill the germ and I would recover. The idea of finding and displaying Christmas decorations, baking cookies, sending cards and shopping was more than I could handle.

"Will Jesus Christ still be the Son of God if we don't put up decorations or buy presents?" I asked my husband. He assured me it was so but encouraged me to declare the holiday we celebrate.

I think it really should be impossible to put Christmas Away. The celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ and the story of redemption has turned into a "season of holidays". Many Conservative Christians object to the world taking over the season and trying to dismiss the birth of the Savior. Because we have "always had Christmas (it came via Europe and the UK.) Christianity has spread from one generation to another much like a virus. Or a light into darkness. . perhaps a philosophy, the group of people who follow The Book.

When I "get Christmas decorations out" of the storage and begin to decorate, my purpose is to stimulate and celebrate tradition. I unpack the past, a wonderful "magical story" from history and for my family and in many respects for the future.

I believe that time waits for no man (or woman) and as soon as possible we should go onto a path or get ready to make a big shift in our thinking. Christmas seems to get closer and come and go faster every year. I have celebrated more Christmases in the past than I will probably celebrate in the future. Over the years my family has encouraged parts of the celebration and we have participated in the local community to share with them. As our family migrates - marries, goes to college, the armed services or gets a job that dictates a

geographical move; our connection to the souls of our family members are often tethered by seasons of life; death, birth, illnesses and holiday traditions. As a woman, it is my role in my family in my home to be in charge of the celebration and that means continuing and preserving tradition. When we add people and Christmases (time) to our years we develop a belief and philosophy that we pass on to our future generations.

So today is 1/1/11. The second decade of the 21st century. People send e-cards and they are strangers to who I am and how I celebrate "the holiday season". My season is holy with a capital "H" because of how narrow yet joyful it is. I put up fewer decorations because I am old and it takes a lot of work. It also takes time and part of my tradition is 'more resting' and 'less doing' during this holy time.

So, as much as I would like the season to continue, the more time I am wasting to finish the tasks of the Christmas season. I am putting these Christmas things away while the bowl game plays on the TV. The food is minimal but festive because we have no visitors; but if entertainment was part of the tradition than I am sunk during the "holidays".

I thought about the broken hearts, the sorrowful moods and the disappointed, thwarted expectations that abounded in the airports, hotels, gas stops, and train stations because of snowstorms, mud slides, floods and wind this Christmas season. (2010) In my own reading of the Bible I have learned that God is in the whirlwind, the floods and the storms. Here in this in-between week I begin thinking about revving up from my rest and hit the ground running. . Or I can stretch out the post holiday time into "thinking about 2011 (taxes, travel. Etc). My friend Winnie calls it jubilee. She calls it this because of the way she reads the Bible. She doesn't think about taxes or travel before she prays and fasts and asks God to direct her mission over the next year. She sees the reality of the soil and the harvest on the planet and she knows what the Bible says about farming and fishing. Reaping and sowing. Seasons and storms.

So how do I stretch out this personal, restful, holy time? This year I am going to try to rest more and trust more and read more and maybe write more – if time doesn't get away from me. Thanks for coming back to read this. Penny