

**Sermon: Inside Out Christmas****Scripture: James 1:16-17****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: December 1, 2024**

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Now we are surrounded by evergreens and wreaths and a tree and we've got some animals joining us down there in the creche. Isn't it nice what we tend to do at Christmas and that is bring the outside inside. Though it's not the only reversal that this beautiful holiday represents. Christmas also brings the Upside down and it confronts our sensibleness with non-sense. Consider with me those three movements of Christmas - bringing the outside in, drawing the upside down and making nonsense out of the sensible.

We work so hard at keeping the outside out and the inside in throughout the year, don't we? We want to keep the warm in during winter and the warm out during summer. We try and keep the dirt, dust and mess out and the neat clean and tidy in. The spiders, the ants, the mice we want out, but the humans, the cats, the dogs for the most part we want them in. We keep the light inside when its dark outside and the light outside until we are ready to get up in the morning on the inside.

But at Advent and Christmas that changes and we willingly and eagerly bring the outside in. Trees that have no business on our nice carpets and beside our fancy couches suddenly appear there. Greens that spread needles across the floor hang on walls and doors and mantles and the boundaries that separate and define our lives are a little more porous, a little broken at Christmas and we welcome it cause somehow it makes sense to break those boundaries down, to remember that our separateness from the earth is an illusion we create for

ourselves and our bringing the outside in is a reflection of God's coming enfleshed from the invisible nothingness (no-thing-ness) outside this realm into the visible material thing-ness of our world.

To this dusty dirty chaotic mess of a world, God did not say "ick, I do not want to get my hands dirty and stay up here in my pearly white heaven" but God said - "beautiful, I can't wait to get down there and get my hands dirty!" Cause the upside comes down at Christmas too. As the Yoruba philosopher Bayo Akomolafe suggests, God "graduates from the eternal to the finite" and takes up the project of having to "learn alongside the many others how to live in the midst of the fade"<sup>1</sup> ...cause it's all fading away and that is life and that is it's beauty and poignancy, it's all coming into being and fading out of being all at once.

So God becomes child, high heaven becomes lowly earthen, and we as humans no longer look up and reach up and claw our way up toward Divinity but we look down into a manger and reach down to a baby and lift this God-child up to us and that's the movement of Christmas. God comes down and humanity reaches down to God and lifts God up. It's very much a puzzle, or to quote Winston Churchill in his 1939 radio speech, it's "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma"! Of course it is. Why would it not be if GOD (!) has truly come as creaturely being among us. It wouldn't make sense in any sensible way. And that's the third movement of Christmas from the sensible to the nonsensical, which Webster defines as "ridiculously impractical or ill-advised". God's incarnation might be considered nonsensical and ill-advised. But who wants sensible when you can have trees inside of houses and gods descending into manger as babies and angels singing angel songs and Kings coming on camels to bow down to

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<sup>1</sup> Akomolafe, Bayo, "These Wilds Beyond Our Fences: Letter to My Daughter on HUmanity's Search for Home" Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, p. 22.

babies, and the powerful toxic leaders thwarted in their violent desires. Who wants sensibleness?!

What a shame if we relegate virgin births and angel visitations and shepherd epiphanies and the healing of intractable illnesses and walking on water and rising from graves as nonsense! What? Because it does not conform to our extremely limited understanding of the way the world works... which we are finding out all the time is not actually as accurate as we thought? The movement of Christmas is a movement to reanimate and re-enliven the sadly anemic, narrowly mechanistic and depressingly utilitarian sense of this world that has infected us. Christmas offers an antidote through story and carol and ornaments and lights, reminding us that there is SO much more beneath the surface. SO much more than meets the eye. SO much more to expect from this great mystery of being. It's one of the ways that the children have access to the Kingdom that adults have long-since shut the door to - a child's make-believe gives ample room for reality to be the mystery that it is in truth.

So this Advent and Christmas may you bring the **outside in** to your home and heart with renewed vigor and gusto, breaking open the tidy containers that sap too much richness out of life! And may you allow the **upside to come down** to the muck and the mess and inhabit your life again with the sacred and the holy. And may you **release the sensible**, rational and reasonable for at least a little while and get better in touch with the truer reality of this world, chock full of mystery and magic and the unbelievable, and be awed by the wonder of it all once more! Amen.