

Did the Grinch Steal your Christmas? (Advent three). Isaiah 55:12-13, John 3:16-21.

I don't know about you, but I love Christmas. I eagerly wait for 1st December so that I can decorate the house, put up the tree, and start to play that stack of Christmas CD's that my husband won't let me play the rest of the year! I like to write Christmas cards, and even though I'm not a baker, I have been known to make Christmas treats. I like singing Christmas carols, and I even like Christmas shopping and trying to find that special gift to make someone smile. In fact, I'm one of those people that start my Christmas shopping earlier in the year. I just find the whole season is a time of joy for me, and to be honest, I find it difficult to understand why some folks are just not into Christmas. I find it hard to identify with the Grinch – who *“hated Christmas, the whole Christmas season!”*

How many have seen the movie, The Grinch? It's a movie based on Dr. Seuss children's classic about the creature that hates everything about Christmas. He lives as an outcast up on Mt Crumpet, and he decides one year to dress up as Santa and try to stop Christmas from coming by stealing everything that he thinks Christmas is about. He steals the tree, the present, the roast turkey, the tinsel ... everything. But he still doesn't succeed in stopping Christmas. He doesn't succeed in stealing the Joy. You see, the Grinch doesn't succeed because he doesn't really know what Christmas is all about.

The Grinch doesn't know about the gift of Joy through Jesus Christ. He doesn't know that:

“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son”

And actually, I can't blame the Grinch. Because if we look around us, do we see the signs of what Christmas is truly about? Or do we see the signs of commercialism, materialism, greed, gluttony, covetousness ... and the list could go on. You see, we live in a country where many organisations and businesses try to take Christ out of Christmas:

- In some places, you are no longer allowed to wish Merry Christmas any more, instead you must say “Happy Holidays.”
- You can't put an angel or a star on top of the Christmas tree in a store, because it might be a reminder of the real Christmas story, instead we put a bow on the tree!
- It's hard to find Christmas cards with pictures of the manger scene, instead they more often depict snowmen or Christmas trees.
- And it is rare that we see any Nativity scenes in stores or public places in case they offend non-believers.

We have tried to be so understanding to our multi cultural society, that we have almost erased Christ from Christmas. And sometimes I think that if the Grinch came down to our world and took the tree, tinsel, presents and food, then he would be stealing all that is left of our Christmas.

Now as most of you know, I am passionate about accepting our global brother and sisters of other faith religions. But I must tell you that I am even more passionate about Christmas. As Christians, this is our time to celebrate with Joy. It is a time for fulfill Isaiah's prophecy and *"burst forth into song ... and clap our hands with Joy."* (Isaiah 55:12)

If it was not for the Christmas story, if Jesus had not come into the world, we would still be in darkness. We would have nothing to shout about. Our lives would be just about the tinsel and trimmings. But instead John 3:19 tells us:

"Light has come into the world" (and) "whoever lives by the truth comes into the light."

Do you celebrate that light at Christmas? Or are you guilty of getting caught up in the commercialism, and pushing Christ into the background of your Christmas? Because I can tell you now, that if Christ is not the front and centre of your Christmas, then as people of faith you really have nothing to celebrate.

When the Who's woke up on Christmas morning and discovered that their commercial Christmas had been stolen – they didn't stop celebrating. As they gathered around the tree in the square, they weren't moaning and complaining to each other about their homes being broken into. Instead, they sang! They sang songs of joy.

And I think that is the vital lesson in Dr. Suess' classic. I think that the Who's knew the true meaning of Christmas. They knew that Christmas wasn't about the things or the meals, but instead it was about celebrating the Spirit – the Spirit of Joy. And when you truly have that Spirit (Spirit with a capital S) then no-one can steal your Joy.

My favorite lines of the story, and the movie are:

Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store.
"Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"

The Grinch is so moved by the Joy expressed by the Who's that his heart literally grows three sizes. When he sees and hears the Who's celebrating without all the gifts and trappings of commercialism, he begins to understand the true meaning of Christmas. He is so touched and moved by their expression of Joy, that he returns the presents and joins in the celebration at Who-ville – and they welcome him into the celebration without judgement.

At that moment, The Grinch changes from wanting to live all alone in the darkness of his cave, to wanting to come into the light and live with Joy. John 3: 20 tells us:

"Everyone does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light."

The Grinch is a story about being saved. It's a story about a sad, lonely creature finding the true Spirit and Joy of Christmas. And it is a story about a community who were not afraid to celebrate the Christ at Christmas.

Jesus is the reason that we celebrate. He is the embodiment of love and Joy without reservation or judgement. This year, let us all be encouraged to put Christ at the centre of our celebrations, let us reclaim Christmas, and let us all remember that "Christmas means a little bit more."

Merry Christmas. Amen.