

**“The Post-Ghost Scrooge Pledge”**  
Reverend Bill Gause  
Overbrook Presbyterian Church  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas  
January 3, 2021

**Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2, 9-21**

<sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>9</sup>Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup>love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup>Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup>No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



**Sermon: “The Post-Ghost Scrooge Pledge”**

Happy New Year! I hope you got a chance to ring in this new year in a fun and festive way although it might not have been as exciting as usual. With the pandemic still going on, there probably weren’t as many parties as in years past, but people still celebrated in their own ways. Watching *Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve* on TV, waiting for the ball to drop in Times Square, and of course, making our resolutions; committing ourselves; resolving to do better and to be better this year.

It’s a new year and the world seems to have moved on from Christmas, but the church has not. Because Christmas isn’t just one day, it’s a whole season. And Christmas day is actually the *beginning* of that Christmas season. That whole *Twelve Days of Christmas* song, is based on the actual length of Christmas and it runs from Christmas day to the day before Epiphany. So, while today may be the third day of the new year, it is also the tenth day of Christmas. According to the song, it’s the day Leaping Lords are scheduled to join the growing menagerie of calling birds and laying geese and all the rest. There’s only two more days of Christmas left and then it’s on to Epiphany, and before you know it, Lent and Easter!

But most of the world has already moved on. The local radio station that switched its format to all Christmas music back at the beginning of November, had already switched back to rock and roll this past Monday (just 3 days after Christmas day!). And one grocery store I visited the week before Christmas, already had pallets of Valentine’s Candy in the aisles ready to put out as soon as Christmas Day had passed.

Chances are, you’ve begun moving on from Christmas, too. Maybe you’ve taken down the tree, put away the decorations, tossed out the leftover eggnog, and eaten what was left of the fudge. And if you haven’t, then it’s probably something you’ll do very soon. Maybe that was even one of your resolutions. But in the church, it’s still Christmas. Which is important because of the things we celebrate at Christmas.

Christmas is about God breaking into this sinful world in the life of the child Jesus to bring us salvation and life eternal. Christmas is about celebrating that moment when God sheds the trappings of divinity, the privileges and the power of being God, to enter this world as a vulnerable, fragile, powerless child, to show us what unconditional love looks like, and what service, and sacrifice, and grace, and mercy look like.

And practically speaking, Christmas is a time where peace and good will to all people is almost universally observed. People tend to be a little nicer, and kinder and more patient, and more generous, at Christmas. And our expectations of what is acceptable change around Christmas, too. I often hear people say things like “No one should be hungry at Christmas” or “No one should be in need at Christmas.” And so, we give to charities that help the poor and the hungry and the needy a lot more at Christmas. There’s a certain magic that makes people more compassionate and humane at Christmas. But then the presents are opened and the guests return home and New Year’s Eve happens and the world kind of loses track of that joyful, compassionate feeling of Christmas.

No matter what the church calendar says, as far as most people are concerned, another Christmas has come and gone. And all the trappings and joy of the holiday will all too soon be forgotten, too. Which is understandable. I mean, the Christmas story just sort of stops at Jesus’ birth. The gospels tell us the story of Jesus’ ministry and teaching, but we never

again hear from the people who were so important in the nativity story. The shepherds receive good news from the angels. An innkeeper is confronted with the holy in his cattle stall. Wisemen from the east follow a star to worship the newborn King. Mary and Joseph give birth to a child and wrap him in swaddling clothes. But what happens to them after that night? Were their lives truly changed by the experience? What was the next day like? And the next? Have you ever wondered?

And even our secular Christmas stories leave us hanging in much the same way. The Grinch celebrates with the Who's down in Whoville, singing and carving that roast beast.<sup>1</sup> Charlie Brown's friends discover that Christmas is about something more than decorations and parties and consumption.<sup>2</sup> George Bailey realizes he really has lived a wonderful life.<sup>3</sup> People encounter something holy and powerful, but what comes next for them? Do those moments translate into changed lives? Do they still carry the joy and peace of Christmas in their hearts, months, years, decades later?

What comes next and what happens *after* Christmas is just as important as what happens on Christmas.

One of those popular Christmas stories gives us at least a hint of a changed life beyond Christmas day. In Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly old curmudgeon, encounters the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, who show him how he has wasted his life and help him understand the meaning of Christmas. Even if you've never read the original story, you've probably seen a version of it in a movie or on a very special Christmas episode of your favorite TV show. I can tell you that I knew the story long before I ever read the book. And what we tend to remember, is the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future, and the fact that Scrooge undergoes a transformation. But what we may not always remember is the pledge he makes toward the end of the story: "*I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.*"<sup>4</sup>

Scrooge's transformation doesn't just change how he sees one holiday. It changes the way he sees the whole world and his place in it. Which is exactly what Christmas should do. I imagine that those shepherds and wisemen and everyone else who encountered the newborn Christ child were changed by that experience. And I would hope that we would be changed by it, too.

Because the choices we make at Christmas, to be kinder, more patient, more considerate, more generous; the choices we make to be more compassionate and more humane, those are choices we should be making all year long. Not just at Christmas. And the things that concern us at Christmas should be concerns every day because truthfully, no one should be hungry, at *any* time of the year. And no one should be in need at *any* time of the year. And we should all strive to be kind and generous and compassionate *every* day. Not just at Christmas.

Christmas isn't quite over yet, but here we are anyway, with a whole new year of possibilities wide open in front of us. Tradition says we should resolve to be better and to live better; to improve this year in the areas of our lives in which we are lacking. And that's not a bad thing. But as you make those resolutions, I encourage you to add one more to the list: Resolve to not let Christmas fade from your life. Which means, in an odd sort of twist, that we should be making a pledge to be more like Ebenezer Scrooge. No, not the pre-ghost Scrooge with all the bah-humbug, but the post-ghost Scrooge, who was kind, and generous and compassionate. Like him, let us resolve to "Honor Christmas in our hearts and try to keep it all the year." We can even call it the "Post-Ghost Scrooge Pledge."

We don't know what became of the Shepherds, or the wisemen, or the innkeeper, or all the others who encountered Jesus at his birth. We don't know how his birth changed them and the course of their life's journeys. But we can know how his birth will impact our own lives. We can choose the direction our stories will take from now on. In this new year, let us resolve to honor Christmas and try to keep it all the year.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Geisel, Ted. *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*. The Cat in the Hat Productions/MGM Television, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Schulz, Charles M. *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. United Features Syndicate/Columbia Broadcasting Company, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Goodrich, Frances, and Albert Hackett. *It's a Wonderful Life*. Performance by Jimmy Stewart, and Donna Reed, Liberty Films/RKO Radio Pictures, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol ; The Chimes and ; The Cricket on the Hearth*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004. P 81, Print.