

Christmas Eve  
December 24, 2008  
The Rev. Canon David W. Lovelace

William Sloane Coffin wrote in *Alternatives*, "Christians are properly troubled by the commercialization of Christmas. My own greater concern is with the sentimentalizing of Christmas. A commercial Christmas at least never pretends to be anything else. Sentimentality, however, does not arise from the truth, rather it is poured on top, blurring and distorting the truth."

Let me share a story that for me illustrates Sloane's point. When Billy was very small his father was drafted and deployed to Viet Nam. It was September when his father called home and was talking to Billy. "Billy, what do you want more than anything in the world?" It did not take but a second for Billy to respond, "I want a puppy."

Months went by and Billy forgot about his conversation with his Dad. Well on Christmas Eve there was a knock at the front door. His mother answered the door and called to him, "Billy, there is someone here to see you." Billy came running to the front door to discover Santa standing right there. "Are you Billy?" Wide eyed Billy answered, "Yes." "Well, Billy, I understand you want a puppy more than anything in the world." "Oh, yes," Billy responded. Santa reached down and handed Billy a puppy. Billy was so happy he hugged the puppy close and ran to his mother with his new friend.

Months passed, the war dragged on. Billy's mother longed for her husband to come home but it appeared another year would go by with him still in Viet Nam. "What would you like for Christmas?" his Dad asked during one of his many calls home. Billy thought for a minute and said, "I would like a bicycle like Tommy's."

"You will have to tell Santa." his Dad reminded him. Soon it was Christmas Eve. There was a knock at the front door and sure enough it was Santa. "Billy, I remember that you wanted a bicycle for Christmas. Here is a bicycle just like the one your friend Tommy rides." Billy could not contain his excitement.

Months passed by and Billy's father was still deployed to Viet Nam. He called home and broke the news that it appeared he would not be able to take

his leave around Christmas to return to the States as he had hoped. He was looking forward to being home at last with his family but things were not looking good in the area where he was assigned. He asked Billy what he wanted for Christmas. "I want you to come home." "I am sorry, son, I want to come home but it is not possible." "Your mother says you need some new shoes, would you like a pair of new shoes for Christmas?" Sadly Billy replied, "I suppose so, yes, new shoes."

Time passed and it was soon Christmas Eve. There was the traditional knock at the front door. Santa asked Billy, "What can I give you for Christmas this year, Billy?" Billy broke down and cried on Santa's shoulder. "I want my Dad, that is all I really want." Santa said, "I heard you need new shoes." He handed Billy a brightly wrapped package. Billy's mother invited Santa in to watch Billy unwrap the package.

As Billy began to unwrap the box, Santa pulled off his beard and white hair. Billy looked up, "Dad." Running over he jumped in his father's arms and hugged him with all of his might. "You are home." "Yes, it was a very long trip but I made it, I am home in time for Christmas."

You see more valuable than puppies, bicycles, even new shoes, more valuable than gold, silver or jewels is the gift of one's self in love. This is the wisdom of the Christmas season.

Christmas is about the night that God came down the stairway of the stars to give God's self to us in a baby named Jesus. We come to know the loving nature of God in the face of Jesus. We come to know the healing power of God in the ministry of Jesus. We come to know the intention of God that all might live in peace, justice and harmony in the sacrifice of Jesus. So for tonight, let us lay aside our frantic bustling and in silent wonder adore the power of God's love.

In the Words of Charles Dickens, "I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time as it came around; apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that; as a good time, a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time, the only time of the year when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut up hearts freely..... Though I believe it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe it has done me good." We do well not to try to analysis, explain or justify the power of Christmas. Rather to just allow Christmas faith to fill us with wordless peace and joy.

Tonight God comes down to you and me once again - comes to fill us with the gift of God's self, God's love, God's peace. May the loving Spirit of Him to whom we dedicate this season prevail on earth again. May hunger disappear and terrorists stop their senseless acts. May people live in freedom, worshipping God as they see fit and loving each other as God intended. May peace, God's peace, reign supreme among us all. Amen