

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

How can I keep from singing?

*My life flows on in endless song,
above earth's lamentation*

*I feel the real though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.*

*No storm can shake my inmost
calm while to that Rock I'm
clinging.*

*Since Love is Lord of heaven
and earth, how can I keep from
singing?*

Community of Christ Sings: 263

Christmas season is here again! Traditionally, most of us look forward to this time as a time of celebration with family and friends, a time of reflecting on happy memories from times past, and a time to remember the birth story of the Lord Jesus Christ. This edition of the Herald includes all of this and much more, including some hints about loneliness, despondency and desolation that exist even in the midst of Christmas cheer.

One of my earliest memories of Christmas is my extended family gathering at my maternal grandmother's house in New Zealand to enjoy a sumptuous roast meal which included "Yorkshire pudding", apparently a traditional Christmas inclusion in her native England. For the uninitiated, this "pudding" was not dessert, but was part of the main meal. Dessert was "Christmas pudding", which had sixpences embedded in it and was covered with custard. It was indeed a joyous time.

This Christmas is a bit different for most of us. Covid 19 is still with us and for many this has prevented a physical gathering with our family and friends. And some of us have been affected by the loss of loved ones (some from Covid and some from other causes). Many folk are suffering from depression. There are more suicide deaths in Australia during the Christmas season than at any other time of the year. How can we ask these people to join us in "joyful singing?" And do we even have the right to ask? Katie Harmon McLaughlin touches on this issue in her article, "A Season To Hold Our Desolation" and in her customary penetrating yet compassionate way, asserts that "...we must dispel any assumption that desolation means lack of faithfulness." We are all human and subject to the wide variety of human emotions that are part of our human world. But no matter how deep our despair, in the midst of our desolation God is with us. And we each have the chance to emerge from our



valley of darkness to a resurrected life of hope and happiness. The hymn used as the heading for this editorial reminds us of this as it talks of "tumult and strife", a "tempest" that "loudly roar[s]" and asks in the chorus after each verse: Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

Ah, there we have it:

Christmas is about LOVE! The bible reminds us that God so loved the world that he [sic] gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life

(John,3:16, New Living Translation). Most Christians can probably quote this verse of scripture, but many would not be able to quote the verse that follows: God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it (ibid verse 17). So it is not just love that Jesus offers, but it is unconditional love. We do not earn Jesus' love by what we do: this love is offered freely, with no strings attached. In this troubled and divided world in which we live, this is an essential concept to grasp. And once we have grasped it and really believe it, our lives become irrevocably changed. We see the world, including our fellow humans, in a new and better way. We become aware, that we are called to be, as some Christians express it, "the hands and feet of Jesus" and "instruments of peace" in a world that desperately craves unconditional love and understanding.

Let us not be reticent or ashamed to extend the hands of love, forgiveness and friendship to the unloved and unforgiven. The best gift we can give this Christmas is the gift of LOVE from the fountain of Love from which we ourselves have quenched our own thirst. In the true spirit of Christmas, I wish all our Herald readers the joy and happiness of the Christmas season and my prayers go out to you all. May the concluding affirmation of Hymn 263 be both a challenge and a blessing and a gift for you to ponder:

*The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain
ever springing!*

*All things are mine since I am his! How can I keep from
singing?*

Harry Fielding

Editorial Team Member

Christmas Everywhere by Phillips Brooks

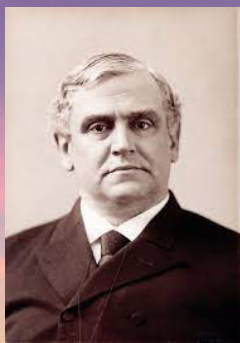
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas to-night!
Christmas in lands of the fir-tree and pine,
Christmas in lands of the palm-tree and vine,
Christmas where snow-peaks stand solemn and white,
Christmas where corn-fields lie sunny and bright,
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas to-night!

Christmas where children are hopeful and gay,
Christmas where old men are patient and gray,
Christmas where peace, like a dove in its flight,
Broods o'er brave men in the thick of the fight;
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

For the Christ-child who comes is the Master of all,
No palace too great and no cottage too small,
The angels who welcome Him sing from the height:
"In the city of David, a King in his might."
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

Then let every heart keep its Christmas within,
Christ's pity for sorrow, Christ's hatred of sin,
Christ's care for the weakest, Christ's courage for right,
Christ's dread of the darkness, Christ's love of the light.
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

So the stars of the midnight which compass us round
Shall see a strange glory, and hear a sweet sound,
And cry, "Look! the earth is aflame with delight,
O sons of the morning, rejoice at the sight."
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!



Phillips Brooks 1835 – 1893

Phillips Brooks was a 19th century poet and writer of hymns. His most famous composition was the carol O Little Town of Bethlehem, a favourite that is still sung around the world today every Christmas. He enjoyed a long career as a minister in Boston, Massachusetts, eventually rising to the position of Bishop.