

Have you ever heard Delila? She's on Cozy 101 radio. I often like her—her soft, warm, soothing voice usually makes you breathe a little easier, relax a little more.

But the other night, it did just the opposite. I turned on the radio, heard a wonderful rendition of O Holy night, then on came Delila, warm cozy voice and all.

*“I hope tonight you are nestled in front of a warm fire, a nice toasty cup of tea in your hands. Maybe the Christmas Tree lights are sparkling in your loved one's eyes, reminding you of why you love them so much. Maybe you're wrapping presents, the red ribbon roll laying beside you, as the smells of cinnamon and spice waft through the room and the songs of Christmas move in your heart. Whatever your evening is like, we're glad you're here sharing it with us.”*

I looked around my living room. There was no Christmas Tree because I have two new kitties who already think the whole house is their playground and everything in it their toy. There was no warm fire burning or crackling because it was a no burn day.

I *had* made a cup of tea earlier, it was even “holiday spice”, but my new puppy had knocked it over chasing the kitties about an hour ago. I was indeed wrapping presents, but the roll of red ribbon had long since been strewn through the house—eventually landing somewhere in the midst of a potted houseplant that had gotten knocked over in the ribbon race

Delila's voice again: *“I hope you know the gentleness of this night as we prepare for Christmas together.”*

Delila! Get a grip! The world is NOT perfect! And neither is Christmas!

And, actually, neither is life. We all know that. But Christmas somehow seems to point to that fact so *poignantly*. The rest of the year we can run and hide, but Christmas ironically seems to shine a light on every darker aspect of our days. Imperfect we are. Christmas is like a spotlight, a light fully shining through every crack and crevasse of our hearts and lives.

How do we stand in joy and celebration on this Christmas Eve in the midst of that light fully shining on everything imperfect in our lives? When things get tough, family dynamics fly, bank statements hurt and hope fades, how do we stand in joy and celebration?

We can *reach* for it, listening to Delilah and just wishing it were how she describes it.

We can *fake* it. We can fake it, stacking our days up like empty cups after a party until they just can't help but tumble with a shattering bang to the floor.

But perhaps there's another way. Perhaps there's a way that comes from the core of our beings, a way that waits, gently, for us to join it.

It's the way the Christmas story calls us to, the way of the divine invitation. Pastor Ed Marquart puts that divine invitation this way: "Shhhh. Hush. Take my child into your arms. Hold him. Look at him. A baby. Your baby. Let this child fill your heart with grace."

The invitation goes on, stirring deep in our souls: Let this child remind you what you truly know: that your life is not your own. It belongs to love: You are here to carry the baby, to bring his light into the world, to *be* that light, fully shining.

After all, how can we hold that baby full of grace and wonder and *not* stand in joy and celebration of the Light Fully Shining?

The Christmas story shows us a way very different from the woes of our lives that want to capture us. It asks us to be *delightfully* shining vessels of love in this world. When we hold the baby, that way becomes so much easier. Delight full of love is so easy when we hold the baby.

In my last church there was a little girl, 4 years old who came up and asked me where the baby Jesus was. I winked at her grandfather and said, in with just a bit of pastoral smugness, "Well, Leah, baby Jesus is right here in your heart."

She gave me the funniest look a 4 year old is capable of--you know, the kind of look that said, "What planet did YOU come from?" I looked at her grandfather with a questioning gaze, and he said, "Um... Valerie,... I think she means the *real* baby." At which point Leah chimed in, "Yes! The real baby Jesus—you know, the one in the manger in the big room! He's not there, and I want to hold him!"

The Christmas story invites us to hold the baby. Something changes, when we do. Delight fills our hearts, and the light fully shining moves through us into the world. Christmas becomes real. And so do we. We know our purpose when we hold the baby, who and why we are.

Rev. Cindy Bates tells this story: During WWII, in Poland, a Rabbi gathered the people of his Jewish village one morning. He warned them that the Nazis were approaching, and they needed to go. Now. They gathered a few belongings and began their trek, hoping to find help and safety.

Along the way a young mother gave birth to a baby. As quickly as possible they continued on, but the way was very difficult, especially for the elderly and the children.

Soon an older woman sat down alongside the road and urged the others to continue without her. She couldn't get up. The rabbi walked over to the young new mother, took the infant from her arms, and walked to the old woman. He knelt down placed the child in her arms and said, "Sarah, you have to go on. Who will help carry the baby?"

Some folks helped her to her feet and they moved on together. A few hours later, a child began to cry and begged to be carried. He sat down, too tired to get up. Once again, the rabbi gathered the new born infant in his arms and placed him in the arms of the small child. He said, "Levi, my son, we need you to keep walking. We need you to help us carry the baby." The story goes that they all made their way safely to their destination, taking turns carrying the baby.

Tonight the Christmas story invites us to hold the baby, to carry it out into the world. In the midst of our imperfect lives, surrounded by spilled cups of tea and red ribbon chaos, , we hear the invitation, in the stillness. Shhhh... Take my child into your arms. Hold him. Look at him. A baby. Your baby. Carry this baby. And be the light, delight fully shining in the world. Amen.