

## *Bribery and Peace on Earth*

Christ the Redeemer Church  
December 13, 2009  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent/Candle of Peace

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
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Don't be afraid and don't give up. That is what the prophet Zephaniah writes on this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent when we light the Candle of Peace. Don't Give Up.

Today we light the Peace Candle. Peace on Earth. Don't give up on it. Peace on Earth.

Peace on Earth. I am preaching about Peace on Earth and I can not even get peace in our own church pageant. This past Sunday night, when I killed the part about killing the buffalo in our Pageant entitled What if Jesus Had Been Borne in Texas?, one youth wise man got so disappointed he wanted to quit. He really wanted to kill the buffalo and I let him get carried away with the part in rehearsal. Then I killed the part.

Monday night one of our church elders asked me how my Monday went. I told her it had less problems than most Mondays have. But I did have two major problems this Monday.

I called the young wise man early at his house this past Monday and he barely wanted to talk to me. I told him I wanted the buffalo to be alive to see the baby Jesus.

I told him I would pay him \$20 if he would become real happy about the Christmas Pageant and if he would let the buffalo live to see the baby Jesus. He suddenly got interested in the Pageant again. I asked him if he was happy now about the play. I had him repeat after me, "I am real happy about the Play now!" I told him to tell his mom he was now real happy about the Play. He told her. She got on the phone and asked me what in the world I told him. I told her that he is now \$20 richer and that he can take the bribery money and go buy lots of Legos.

I told him he could never tell anyone about this \$20 because then all the youth would threaten to quit and each would want \$20! He agreed.

57-year-old minister on his knees begging a 9-year-old wise man to not quit the Pageant.

Visions of Legos dancing in his head. Peace on Earth. Bribery works. Parenting and directing Christmas plays are matters of negotiation.

One problem solved by 8 am on Monday. Peace on Earth. And it only cost me \$20.

Problem two stared me in the face. Peace in the family.

Pam has been making fun of our Christmas trees the past few years. Says they are too short. I thought Pam liked my selections. Sunday night she said again "I hope we get a

taller tree this year. Or an artificial tree.” That was a conflicting message to interpret.

Peace of Earth begins with Peace in the Family. Difficult to get there some years.

One husband told me this week that his wife and he were having a tense time on a trip and that his wife placed a baby stroller around his neck and told him to get into the car. Then half-way home she told him to get out of the car. With the stroller. Peace on Earth.

Don't give up on Peace in the family. It takes work to strive for Peace.

I drove to Dripping Springs over lunch time this past Monday. Time to give Pam the tree of her life. It was under the tent out there in Dripping Springs, a 40-minute drive from our house. We had seen the tent and trees on Sunday when driving out there.

I found a 9-foot-tall tree. \$70. Noble fir from Oregon. Others were much more expensive.

I bought it. Two men loaded it into our truck. Our long-bed truck. 8-foot bed. Tree did not fit in our long-bed truck. It was raining. We all were wet. I was the only customer.

I got home and tried to carry the tree into the house. I could not lift or budge the tree.

I had to drag it into the house, one inch at a time. Peace in the Family is exhausting.

It barely fit through the double doors. Then I had to manhandle it to get it into the tree stand and to try to get it to stand straight. 9-foot is a lot of tree to work with.

Pam says she finally has a tree that holds all of her 34 years worth of ornaments.

Peace on Earth. Expensive and exhausting. Monday night I flipped on all of the outside Christmas lights, placed St. Nicholas on top of the tree, and thought about our wise-man.

When I told some church members Monday night about bribing my wise man with \$20, the church member busted out laughing and handed me \$20 bill. Said the story was worth \$20. I gave it back, saying I wanted to pay the wise man out of my own pocket.

What is all this about? All this negotiating makes me think about about Mae Smith. In 1998 in Boston I had spent months getting the money from the Catholic Board and the Protestant Board to buy trees and lights to decorate the inside and outside of the chapel at Hanscom Air Base in Boston. It was expensive and exhausting. Lots of negotiating between Catholics and Protestants about timing, etc. The Catholics finally agreed to give me money for trees and lights in exchange for my agreement to put Protestant money toward a Nativity Scene for the outdoors. The outdoor figurines cost \$3,000. I agreed. The lights and trees cost another \$3,000.

Both the Catholics and the Protestants combined had over \$100,000 in the bank and did

not want to use any of it for decorations. Finally through months of negotiations the Catholics anted up for a Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus – weather proof and beautiful for outside. We Protestants got our lights and greenery for inside and out. And two trees.

Life and parenting and ministry is all about negotiating. Bribery. Don't give up.

By Christmas week I was tired and wondering if it was all worth it. On December 20 at 3:30 in the morning of a frigid and snowy Boston night, Mae got a call from Maine that told her she needed to come home quickly for her father had just had a heart attack.

She got dressed and jumped into her cold car. She adored her dad. She was in tears and had a long 3-hour drive ahead of her in the snow and cold.

She drove out of her neighborhood. There it stood in the dark storm. Through the pine trees she could see it. The beautifully lighted up Chapel. Lights outlining the chapel and steeple in the middle of the night and in the storm. The lights shining in the dark.

But Mae said that lighted up Church on that dark night was so comforting and encouraging to her. It helped her to get home to see her dad that dark Advent night. The lighted up church steeple in the snow and cold reminded her she was not alone in what she faced.

The Wise Men helped save the newborn Messiah. They tricked the jealous and lethally insane King Herod by not letting him know where the child was *borned*. And they took expensive gifts to the new *borned* baby.

Peace on Earth. It takes a lot of work and grit and stomach. Joseph knows. And the work begins with trees, lights, bribery of a wise man, allowing a buffalo to see the baby Jesus.

Mae's dad survived that Christmas. So did the rest of us. Barely.

The Story goes on year after year. With our help. I paid Mark his \$20 this morning. After he took my money he told me he was just tricking me all along...that he had never really planned to quit being a wise man. But he kept my \$20. I paid him another dollar...in exchange for his permission to use this story in a sermon.

Mae wrote me recently and said she can not wait to hear how our Pageant goes tonight. Neither can I. The tree and the wise man and buffalo have only cost me \$91 this week so far. Amen.