

Meditation—Christmas Eve—2009

Just in case you haven't had enough carols, here's another.

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold.

“Peace on the earth, goodwill to all,
From heav'ns all gracious King;”
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

That is a beautiful old carol. I 'm sure many of you know that the man who wrote it, Edmund Hamilton Sears, was a native of Sandisfield, Massachusetts—just a little bit up the road from here. He was a Unitarian minister—no mention of God or the Christ Child is made in this carol. Instead, his focus was on the angels' request for peace on earth. It was written in 1849 when “the clouds of civil strife were setting the stage for the War Between the States.”

There is a verse, not found in our hymnals, that addresses the coming war. It is:
Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world hath suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong.

And man at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.

Our world continues to be a world of strife—if we dare look at the news we discover this. Ideologies and goals are pitted against each other. Civility is lost because, during much of the year, we have neglected to pause, in our pursuit of things that bring us no lasting comfort or fulfillment, to hear those angels sing.

But, “persistence” seems to be the name of the game for the angels and for our Creator. There is no giving up on trying to turn the hearts, souls and minds of humans to a better way of seeing and doing things. It seems that if we don't get things right the first time around, there is always another chance offered us.

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world.

It appears, that often, during this season of Christmas, something moves us to look at our fellow humans and try to discover what it is that unites us instead of what it is that

divides. We hear that angel music and old disappointments and hurts are set aside as we reflect on what it is that might bring us peace in our lives and in the world. We might even become less judgmental and a lot more accepting of the foibles of others, especially those we love.

For those of us who are practicing Christians, the answer lies before us on Christmas Eve as we focus on the babe in the manger. He represents the potential that exists for all of us. We are reminded that if and when we learn to follow his teachings we will find our way into a world that has less strife and more compassion, understanding and love. That is part of the magic of this time of year and this special evening. With the newborn child we can glimpse a newness of life that is offered to all of us—we need only choose to open our ears and hear the song the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way, With painful steps and slow,
Look now for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing; O rest beside the weary road, And hear
the angels sing.

For some the crushing load may involve moving forward with optimism while looking for a new job in our difficult economy, for others the load may be loneliness, for some grief, while for others illness of body, mind and spirit. We need to remember there is hope for each of us no matter what the burdens we might be carrying. There is hope for our relationships with one another and for the world in which we live. While we cannot change everything we may wish to at once, we can begin right where we are in time and space and change those things closest to us. That is the hope that baby came to bring to us. Coupled with forgiveness, joy and love—we will find we can accomplish wonderful things with our lives and in the lives of others.

For, lo, the days are hast'ning on, By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall o'er all the earth its ancient splendors fling,
And all the world send back the song Which now the angels sing.

Amen