

Christmas 2004

Dear Family and Friends:

Our Sunday mornings in November have a regular cadence to them. We travel an hour to National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. and Dottie uses this time to prepare music for a pre-Advent concert, The Festival of Praise. Our car is a sight. It is stuffed with music and other event paraphernalia in an order that is “perfect” only to the properly informed eye.

Dottie settles into the passenger’s seat with the score in front of her, directing an orchestra and choir in her mind’s eye. She quickly loses herself in the music, waving her arms around as she practices conducting, calling for the bassoons in measure 176, reminding the altos to hold that last note in measure 182, and muttering about Greg highlighting something, somewhere or other.

Meanwhile, RV is playing chauffeur on this gig (he has his “Driving Miss Dottie” cap on order). As he navigates the Capital Beltway, full of traffic even on Sunday morning, he observes the looks we get from our fellow motorists. People find our mad maestra mode odd, even amusing. Imagine that! He is waiting to be pulled over one Sunday because of a concerned citizen calling the 1-800-263-TIPS line that is frequently advertised along the roadway.

This scene somehow fits our year. The Festival of Praise came off gloriously, but there were preparatory scenes, akin to the one related above, that would have given pause to the casual observer. Likewise, our calendar year ends with Yuletide, a season traditionally full of joy, after a preparatory period that was something of a patchwork quilt.

Then there’s RV. Well, the truth is that RV does not “feel like Christmas” this year. Concern for beloved family members and dear friends with health or personal struggles lends a somber note to the season.

This sentiment drives him to reflect on one of C.S. Lewis’ remarks that joy is the serious business of heaven. Like so many of Lewis’s comments, RV must chew on them a while before he begins to understand what the sage meant. He was not speaking primarily of heavenly glory and our yearning for it, albeit joy has that dimension. He was referring to heavenly joy invading our earthly toil, aches, and pleasures and transforming them while we live in this present order.

That transformation has an attitudinal dimension. Ah, the nub of the rub! This involves choosing to see a fallen creation as it is—fallen, but with surprising visages of beauty and

glory. We are not so perplexed by the pain associated with our fallenness as we are to explain the pleasure that still comes to us despite it.

And Christmas serves as a wonderful occasion to remind us that God is far from being a cosmic killjoy, but the source of redemption and grace, of pleasure and delight. More than that, he entered and suffered with his creation and by his grace transformed it and will yet finish that transformation. We can lift our voices in praise of a Creator who has lavished gifts on the world and who is our constant source of hope for its redemption.

We wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and a most Happy New Year.