

## Christmas 2006

Dear Family and Friends:

There was a season in my life when I spent a good deal of time sitting in airports waiting for flights. One of the upsides of these delays was the opportunity to see other passengers greeted at their points of destination. I have witnessed touching scenes where tears of joy flowed as people hugged and embraced each other. Something inside savors these snapshots of acceptance, warmth, and spontaneous outbursts of affection. I still laugh at the memory of a weeping mother holding her embarrassed college son's head in her hands, telling him how she missed his face.

I associate that kind of warmth and acceptance with home and, in my mind, home and Christmas go together. When my brothers and I were in college, we all longed to come home for Christmas break. We would stay up all hours of the night, chatting casually, playing table games, and watching football while devouring like locusts whatever goodies we could find.

One of the unofficially scheduled events, weather permitting, was a two-on-two game of hoops under the lights. JH Arena (our driveway with a basketball hoop on the side) was the scene of a spirited, if inept, contest. We are five siblings, so one of us, on a rotating basis, would announce the game for the "fans", who were conspicuously absent. Their truancy did not faze us. We knew that they would be pining for a verbal rendition of the court exploits of these athletically impaired guys in the "game for the ages". It was delightfully ridiculous, with the banter being the best part.

Even as I write, I am humming the tune "I'll be home for Christmas". What is it about home and Christmas that we so naturally put together? Years ago, my answer was associational. People are accustomed to a certain pattern and they project that on Christmas. Now, I think the reverse is true.

Christmas presents us with the basis for home—acceptance, connection, a kind of enveloping wellness. Home is about belonging and "with-ness," and in Christmas we commemorate that Christ is Emmanuel, God with us.

He enters a world decidedly different than the picture of home set out above. He meets us, if we let Him, in our brokenness, aloneness, and disappointment. He enters our joys and successes. He is our solace in pain, our companion in the night watches, our lodestar in times of uncertainty and doubt. He comes to be with us, to put us on the mend even as we live our lives in a broken world that is hard and cold without Him. Being with Him is central to the kind of belonging and wellness for which we all long and that we often associate with home.

Pardon my rambling. It is time to write to those for whom we care, and my initial newsy format just fell flat. We are doing fine along the line we've been on for several years. We

hope that you are doing well too. But whether this year was joyous, somber, or ho-hum, Yuletide is a wonderful time for reflecting on what is foundational, for relating to the wellsprings of life. We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a New Year in which Emmanuel, God with us, will be your happy measure.