

Are you feeling some Christmas spirit here this afternoon?

“Christmas spirit” is a phrase we might hear a lot at this time of year, and I think it’s worth having a think about ... and, there are all sorts of surprising places to learn a little bit about what Christmas Spirit might mean, and why it might be important for us.

I wonder if you’ve seen the movie, Elf. In it, a human, Buddy, is accidentally raised by Christmas toy-making elves in the north pole. Eventually Buddy realizes he’s not like the other elves and he takes off to New York City to find his Dad, which he does. Despite finding himself in an urban, hostile environment, Buddy still loves Christmas, he’s over-the-top Christmas, his whole life has been Christmas, building toys and living at the North Pole with Santa. The year buddy finds his dad, on Christmas Eve, Santa’s sleigh crashes in Central Park and it looks like Christmas toy delivery that year is going to be a bust ... the sleigh can’t fly because there’s not enough Christmas Spirit. Buddy and his newly found brother save the day! They get folks to gather together, to sing carols together, to believe, together, in the magic of the season. The twinkling lights, the carols, strangers sharing in the wonder of it all ... eventually there’s enough “Christmas spirit” to fuel Santa’s sleigh, and off he goes to deliver all his gifts, which is, after all his purpose, it’s his reason for being.

The idea of “Christmas spirit” as a kind of fuel, fuel for purpose is an interesting one, I think. Maybe you start to sense a different kind of energy when Christmas trees start appearing, when yard decorations pop up, and children start getting excited ... and, despite the consumer rush and the very many real pressures and complexities of this time of year, there’s still something different about it. The world around us gets dressed up, wrapped in lights, normal operations shift a little, the bell ringers are posted outside the grocery store, Christmas music’s playing, the color red is everywhere. We might smile a little more, chat with strangers a little more, be a little more generous with our time and our resources...

Christmas spirit as fuel for purpose is also interesting because the word spirit means breath, or life source. So what we seem to be saying, when we speak of Christmas spirit, is that this season has life, especially when compared to other times of the year. The Joy and Hope of the season, blended with the reassuring warmth of Love and Belonging, these are signs of *life*, part of the deep goodness of our shared human experience; and we all co-create this Christmas spirit, together, we give the season life, as we break from routine a little bit, together, the gatherings, the gift giving, caring and checking in on one another, sharing meals, singing together! We collectively make space for all this it at this time of year, and when we do, we can sense the energy of Christmas spirit.

But we do have to make space for it. Just as we make space for actual breath, the air that fills our lungs as we breathe, we have to make space. At Christmas, we make space for one another, for community, to slow down just a little and enjoy the goodness of this life we share.

Christmas is all about the goodness of life, it's the beginning of new life in Jesus, the Savior of all Creation, whose birth ushers in a new era of abundant life for all – it's about the essential goodness of human life, the great and miraculous possibilities for the healing, the transformation, and the freedom of each and every human life. Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, the Word of God, the eternal self-manifestation of the Creator of the Universe, who took to himself the fullness of being human so we might come to know the goodness of all Creation.

Unlike in the movies, Christmas spirit isn't important for itself, so we can have a jolly old time of gift-giving and a colorful break from the rolling routine of the year – Christmas spirit, all this, all this goodness flows from the deep truth of that first Christmas, and it affirms that life matters, this life matters, sanctified as it was, made sacred, by the birth of Jesus.

And this Christmas goodness, the spirit of the season we're all at least a little familiar with, the Joy, the Hope, mixed with the reassuring warmth of Love and Belonging need not end when we take down the tree and stop singing our beloved Christmas carols. The birth of Jesus changed everything once and for all time, *and* the spirit of that first Christmas has the power to change everything all year round, but we have to make space for it, by slowing down just a little, noticing the beauty that's always around us, caring and loving the folks we share this life with, seeing the goodness in it all; worshipping together, praying together, singing together!

Christmas spirit could be the fuel for our purpose, give us the energy we need to make and hold space for the deep goodness of this life in Christ all year long; it could be the fuel for our own transformation and the transformation of this world we live in; fuel to keep Joy, and Hope, the reassuring warmth of Love and a sense of Belonging, keep it all real and felt in the world all year round; fuel for each of us to keep the spirit of that first Christmas flowing through all our days, all our lives, not just once a year, and not just for a season.

.. and I believe we can generate- more than enough Christmas spirit for that! Amen!

Merry Christmas!