THE GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS EVE

A One-Act Play

*(And Sermon)*

By The Reverend Jeniffer Tillman, MD

Scene: The decorated sanctuary of an empty church building

Time: December 24th, 2020

Place: A village along the Eastern Seaboard around the Chesapeake Bay.

**Cast**

**Pastor**: A new pastor who is struggling to write a Christmas Eve sermon during the time of a Pandemic. She is visited by Ghosts who remind her about the true meaning of the Christmas Eve Service.

**Dr. Everfale**- The first Ghost of the evening that visits. This is the Ghost of a former seminary Professor who warns the Pastor to "Prepare" for the Ghosts who will visit that evening.

**The Ghost of Christmas Memory**: The second Ghost of the evening that visits. This Ghost teaches about the joys and pitfalls of nostalgia. This Ghost speaks to the Prophet Isaiah's message of joy and expectation during times of uncertainty.

**The Ghost of Christmas Presence**: The third Ghost of the evening to visit. This Ghost teaches about the importance of remaining grounded with God's people. This Ghost speaks to the message of Psalm 95 in singing a new song when songs cannot be sung on this night.

**The Ghost of Christmas Traditions**: The fourth Ghost of the evening to visit. This Ghost teaches about Christmas traditions that linger without question and traditions that thrive with life. This Ghost speaks to the message from Titus on a godly life.

PASTOR

Okay, let's do this. Ahem. Good tidings to you, beloved community, in the name of the one who brings us salvation from our sins… no, to heavy-handed… Ahem, honor, peace, and glory to the Lord of Hosts, who delivers the captives from death and the grave; welcoming all who believe into the eternal spring of everlasting life- naw, too preachy…. Ahem, the grace of our Triune God be with you all. Amen. Okay, so much for the easy part. Ahem… On a cold winter's night that was so deep- nope, plagiarism… In a time when we fear that the holiday season has become too commercialized for God's liking, it is important to remember that 4th Century Christians coopted the Pagan Holiday of Saturnalia, which celebrated the winter solstice with debauchery and hedonism to transition Roman thought patterns towards the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ- no, I don't need to have that conversation with the Council come New Year. Grrr! Why is it so difficult to pen a sermon for this Christmas Eve? It's not like a Pandemic had completely obliterated the world's way of life. This whole year has been a box of dark chocolates with a licorice filling inside. Are you there, God? It's me, your faithful servant. If your will be done, please help me deliver a sermon that pleases the congregation and C&Es so well that they forget that we can't sing "Silent Night" together this year.

DR. EVERFALE

PREPARE!!! PREPARE!!!

PASTOR

What? Who?!

DR. EVERFALE

PREPARE!!!

PASTOR

Dr. Everfale? My old seminary professor?

DR. EVERFALE

IT IS I!

PASTOR

You're a ghost? When did that happen?

DR. EVERFALE

I GOT TENURE SHORTLY BEFORE I WAS FORCED INTO RETIREMENT!!!

PASTOR

That sounds about right, but what are you doing here?

DR. EVERFALE

I HAVE COME TO PREPARE YOU FOR GHOSTLY VISITORS!

PASTOR

Why? I let the staff take Christmas off… of course, I'm the only staff member here, so-.

DR. EVERFALE

YOU'VE ALLOWED GRIEF AND CYNICISM TO CLOUD THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS FROM YOUR HOMILY! THESE GHOSTS WILL TEACH YOU THE WAY, OR NOTHING WILL!!!

PASTOR

I thought that it was your job to teach me about Christmas. You were the only professor of Christian History and Narrative Theology on campus.

DR. EVERFALE

NO ONE LIKES A SMARTALIC. ESPECIALLY OF THE FEMALE VARIETY!

PASTOR

Yet everyone loves to hate a dumbard with She/Her pronouns.

DR. EVERFALE

PREPARE!!!

PASTOR

Yeah, I heard you.

(The First Ghost disappears.)

(Beat)

Well, that was unexpected. What now?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

Remember, remember.

PASTOR

Who are you?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

I am the Ghost of Christmas Memory.

PASTOR

Oh, well, what do you want me to remember?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

*The people who walked in darkness*

*have seen a great light;*

*those who lived in a land of deep darkness—*

*on them, light has shined.*

PASTOR

There was a time of great violence, and God's people felt that hope was out of their reach because God had been silent for so long.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

The people of your time are walking in darkness as well.

PASTOR

Job loss, hunger, and homelessness seem to appear with every news feed I look. People are becoming infected with COVID-19 every day by the thousands. I know that a vaccine’s out there, but it's hard to be hopeful with so much uncertainty brewing in the atmosphere.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

All of those issues were happening before the Pandemic, and they will continue long after it is safer to go outside. The virus only magnified how bad things have always been.

PASTOR

I suppose that every generation grows up believing that weren't this bad when they were younger.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

The past is always remembered fondly when the present is full of the word "no." There's nothing wrong with viewing the past with this fondness so long as there is a present effort to build a better tomorrow. Wars and exiles end in time.

PASTOR

And so will this Pandemic, but it's hard to imagine how when we don't know when.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

Remember what is truly important in the meantime.

PASTOR

What's that?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS MEMORY

Remember…

(The Ghost disappears)

PASTOR

Wait! What am I supposed to remember?

(Sighs loudly and scribbles on the manuscript)

PASTOR

If I'm going to have ghosts visit me tonight, then why couldn't one of them help me draft a decent homily? I don't need a lecture, I need-.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

Presence.

PASTOR

I have enough of those under the tree, thank you.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

No, presence.

PASTOR

Not another one. How many of you are coming here tonight?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

You can complete the narrative of the past and build a better future so long as you maintain presence with God’s people.

PASTOR

And you are?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

I'm the Ghost of Christmas Presence

PASTOR

I walked right into that one. Tell me, spirit, what lesson do you think I should learn?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

*Sing to the Lord a new song;*

*sing to the Lord, all the earth.*

*Sing to the Lord, bless his name;*

*tell of his salvation from day today.*

PASTOR

The last thing anyone wants to do is sing a new song on Christmas Eve. Believe me, I used *Stand By Me* as a hymn one year, and they're still talking about it.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

Think less about dogma and more about doxology.

PASTOR

Go on.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

Give praise to God in all things, good and bad, because God is present in both.

PASTOR

God is everywhere.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

The lyrics and tune are conduits for the message you hope to share.

PASTOR

People have been walking in darkness from the very beginning, and after 202o years, we're still stumbling through uncertainty… but God is with us.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

Bringing good news to all who will hear it.

PASTOR

Making us new with each passing day so long as we… so long as we have… umm.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

Presence.

PASTOR

That's right. We are called to remain present with one another. The way has already been prepared for us to travel, not in terms of physical distances to overcome, but in deconstructing the barriers of fear that set people against one another.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENCE

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,*

*ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

(The Ghost disappears)

PASTOR

Huh, I always found that shift from nations to family interesting. I don't always get along with my family, but I know that we love each other. If the nations of the world were more concerned with this kind of politics, and you're gone… I'm talking to myself… uh, and I still can't find a conclusion to this sermon! Who thought it would be a good idea to have the Pastor preach on Christmas Eve?!?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

Tradition.

PASTOR

What, who?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

I am the Ghost of Christmas Tradition.

PASTOR

Not you! Any ghost but you! Send in the Ghost of Christmas Second Chances, or Christmas Bonuses! I'd be happy with the Ghost of Christmas Miracles, but not you! Look, I personally don't have a problem with traditions; it's how others perceive you that makes it problematic.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

You're trying too hard.

PASTOR

What's this now?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

It's not supposed to be perfectly put into place; it's supposed to mean something. The words you say remain words without meaning. The things you do are just motions you perform until life animates them. Some people make it to the top of the mountain and just shrug.

PASTOR

Well, that's depressing.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

*The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.* We all have important traditions. The grounding principle to remember is that we are all called to make the path a little easier for the families of the earth. If you want a tradition to outlive you once you’re gone, then make it a living tradition.

PASTOR

So, we can light our candles on Christmas Eve for the baby Jesus while shedding light on the issue of systemic homelessness?

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

You’re trying too hard.

PASTOR

Rude.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

That's one way of connecting the tradition to the message. Now try to make it mean something to the listener.

PASTOR

Okay… how about this: Living a godly life is a call to a radical love for our God, our neighbors, and ourselves, just as Jesus taught us… and continues to teach us.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

What makes tonight different from other nights?

PASTOR

Woah, wrong denomination!

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS TRADITION

It's still the right question.

PASTOR

Hmm… long ago, two humble new parents witnessed a miracle, the birth of an extraordinary child. He would grow up to give hope to those lost in despair, share the good news of God's love for generations to come, and inspire those who have been gifted with salvation to make their communities better, year by year, and one family at a time. He didn't fix every earthly problem but calls us to use our talents and dreams for the sake of others. Jesus meets us where we are: alone, angry, confused, hopeful, grateful, inspire, and let down. We may not be singing in our sanctuaries this Christmas Eve, but we have learned to sing a new song of awareness, learning, and letting go. This year has been terrible, for so many reasons, but God's Word is still with us. We don't know what the immediate future will hold, and it will be okay. Tonight is about more than lighting candles, or decorating trees, or singing "Silent Night". It's a night of remembering that we are loved. It's a night of being present with that love. It's a night of sharing the ways of this love with the families of people God blesses and calls beloved. This year will be different from other years, but our God remains the same in loving us at our worst and teaching us to love despite ourselves. Heh, how's that for a punchline?

(Silence. The Ghost has disappeared.)

Well, I guess there's nothing left to say other than merry Christmas to all, and may Christ always be with you. Amen.