

January 5 Snow, snow: Acorn Camp in winter and our church shovels out and opens its doors

We are in the grip, the soft arms, of a bountiful, piling-up, maybe record-breaking (at least in the last decades) amount of snow. Three-fourths of the churches in Indianapolis are closed, but not ours.

Our son who lives not far from us (Number Five child), the lawyer, and his family are not going to be going as they usually do to their large colonial church along Meridian Street in Indianapolis. It is closed, "snow emergency."

It is a responsibility, a challenge, and an adventure to get to church.

As we drive along roads that plows have swept, but which are just re-coating themselves as fast as possible, we see beauty that no artist can accurately portray. The branches of the huge pine trees lining the road of Acorn Farm Camp across our street, two rows of them which look like they were created to be a ceremonial avenue for the campers to march though, are bending with the weight of fluff piled up, almost touching the ground. We stop for a moment to look. Crystalline white covers every dried-up goldenrod and blackberry vine through Acorn's meadows. The slanting roofs on the museum and antique store look like iced gingerbread slices I used to make a roof for a candy cottage at Christmas.

The few cars at our church service sit in our church parking lot, picking up three more inches during the service. Mostly just white, white, white, pure, silent, calming, inspiring, blemishes and detritus covered. The silence outside is a spiritual experience, a reaffirmation of the sublime quiet and cleanness at the heart of God. The plow man has been able to do some basic plowing but our ushers are out with the shovels, lifting and tossing shovelful, making clouds and falling swirls of white snow dust and creating miniature drifts by the side of the steps and porch.

Inside, the evergreens, white pine and balsam outside the windows of the church, seen through the holly wreaths that will soon be taken down, bend their branches beatifically. What is it, I ask myself, about these pines and the snow that sits on their branches that makes us fix our gaze, take it away, return to look again. Why is it always a

surprise when evergreens loaded with snow make us slow down along the road and stare again, maybe after a break of a year or two of not seeing it, and appreciate God's world in a new fresh way? Maybe it is because the white of the unblemished snow and the rich and essential earthy green of the pine boughs is a metaphor for our world, stark affirmation of how beautiful the world should be, how it can be at its best. Besides, the snow covers all the dirt.

There are fifteen of us here in our small Williamsburg-style sanctuary. I go downstairs to look in on the Sunday school to see if they need me as a sub but the two teachers who are there can handle the eight or so kids who made it today. Good for them! We are an intrepid bunch. The big Second Presbyterian church on the main road through town announced yesterday it would be closed. I won't accuse them of being overly timid. But it's so like us to persevere, to just be there for God. And that's the subject of the lesson. "God," the beginning of Mrs. Eddy's Bible lesson sequence. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever." Indeed!

Seeing our little group, knowing them all so well, chatting quietly before and after about those among the congregation who may be experiencing something challenging, reaffirming our friendship and faith by sharing good holiday experiences, I marvel again at the stubborn goodness of this small group of Mary Baker Eddy's followers, of the Galilean's disciples, and I do think of them in that way.

Believe it or not, Scott, the reader, has chosen the hymn "Through the night of doubt and sorrow/Onward goes the pilgrim band/ Singing songs of expectation/ marching to the promised land." Those are our guys! First Church Here and Now! I don't want to sentimentalize us all too much and yes, I do know other churches in our faith can have serious differences in their congregations, fighting battles as they face their diminishing congregations and the need to take care of aging sanctuaries. We've been spared that but it doesn't mean we will forever. We should be very grateful.

Yes, I know in the fifteen years we've been in this group that there are instances of small-mindedness, misunderstanding, disagreement over this or that issue. I've seen discussions about whether readers

should always wear suits, whether the Manual means no churches can meet together in a given city—or not, and what color of peach to paint the seats in the auditorium. And what in the world does having the name but not leading the life of a Christian Scientist really mean—and what should be done about that? I've heard of the controversy which split this new church in the earliest days over whether Bliss Knapp's book showing Mrs. Eddy in a controversial way should be in Reading Rooms. Everything seemed to settle down after that. I'm not aware of any major split in thinking or acting in this group in the last few years.

But what I see so much now is a group of individuals boiled down, to the essential essence of personhood, tried in the metal-purging fires and showing a lot of gold, working to reflect as much of the perfection that is our destiny as they can on a given day. I've seen various ones who helped found this suburban church stick with it to help retire the mortgage, I've seen relative newcomers integrated and accepted as family, I've seen everybody wear six or eight hats, moving from the children's room to the readership, to going out and buying poinsettias or carnations for the altar, vacuuming rugs to serving together downtown to help a high schooler who has a service project, to shoveling the snow this morning as fast as it falls down. I've seen caseroles carried in to shut-ins, sudden subbing for the solo, welcoming of new and perhaps lonely "singles," and people taking other people to the hospital if that was their choice or necessity.

I've seen new people join our group through these last years, mostly having been brought up in the religion and returning, strong and dedicated additions. And I've also seen between 75 and 100 people through the years come to our church, visit once or stay for six months or a year, and then leave, never to come again. Where are they? Why did they leave? Some said they were brought up in Christian Science and wished to investigate it again and changing their minds, just vanish. Some said they had been invited at the Reading Room and thought they'd try it. They tried it once. Some didn't say anything and walked out in the middle of the service. We've let it be known that they are welcome without reservation, only wishing to walk the journey with us. By-laws and "rules of behavior" are not

the same any more. We're willing to try new ideas and are trying to understand our church Manual on what the basics are. Wasn't it "Behold, I make all things new" that was the subject of last Wednesday's readings from the desk?

Who knows why these brief occupiers of the pews left? But more important, what did they take from our church and their experience here? They took blessing. That is what they took. And we can feel it here, whenever we come for services. That's why we go out when the roads are slushy and tricky and everybody is warned to stay in if they can. To participate in the blessing and give it back.

And after all, if 62,000 people can go downtown last night in Indianapolis to fill up Lucas Oil Stadium to see the Colts pull out a miraculous win in the playoffs of the NFL, we can surely come to participate in the good of Christian living and worship. A visit to our church, I think, leaves us as quiet and clean as the world of snow I see outside my window.

Pondering: "It is only a question of time when 'they shall all know Me [God] from the least of them unto the greatest.'" (S&H, p. 242.)