



On *holy* *night,* *the stars are brightly shining.*

December 2021

Tidings of great joy to you!

In the now classic Christmas movie *Elf*, the main character of Buddy, played by Will Ferrell, excitedly tells the busy department store associate Jovie, played by Zooey Deschanel, that “the best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear!” Buddy tells Jovie this after he overhears her singing to herself. Not convinced by Buddy’s childish proverb, Jovie gives Buddy a few reasons why she won’t sing to spread Christmas cheer. Perplexed by this, Buddy is persistent throughout the movie to get Jovie to sing and spread Christmas cheer. What Buddy finds out is that Jovie doesn’t want to spread Christmas cheer, not because she’s embarrassed of her singing or because she’s a sour and cynical person, but because she doesn’t feel Christmas cheer for herself.

But by the end of the movie, Jovie sings loud for all to hear and she ends up spreading Christmas cheer. What caused her to change? What allowed her to feel Christmas cheer for herself? It was her friend, Buddy, of course. If it wasn’t for Buddy’s goodwill and acts of love to help Jovie move beyond the obstacles that prevented her from feeling Christmas cheer, Jovie might still be stuck, not able to experience the cheer of Christmas herself, and consequently those in her world might have missed out on the unique gifts she has to share.

During Christmas, Christians definitely “sing loud for all to hear,” in order to spread Christmas cheer. The angels proclaiming Christ’s birth to a few local shepherds in Luke’s gospel certainly believed in “singing loud for all to hear!”

But Christ’s birth is cause for something more than just singing and being cheerful; it’s cause for different living. Christians believe that the God of the universe becoming one of us and living amongst us is the start to a whole new way of doing things. The birth of Jesus is truly the birth of a new world — a world beginning to bud with hope, peace, joy, and love. This is why Christians sing loud for all to hear.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. JOHN 1:9 (NIV®)

Consequently, and a bit like Buddy helping Jovie move beyond obstacles in her life, Christians begin to live differently in their lives because of this new budding world by giving gifts of generosity — radical generosity. Generosity demonstrated to us by God through the gift of Jesus.

Here at the First Church in Albany, we have a beautiful tradition of choosing one local and one global organization to gift our Christmas Eve offering to, so we too might help others move beyond certain obstacles preventing them from experiencing the good news of Christmas.

This year, the two organizations we have chosen are: The First Church in Albany Food Pantry, which serves thousands and thousands of pounds of food to our local Albany community; and Kekeli, an organization in Ghana which provides advocacy, resources, and training for the inclusion and active involvement of children with disabilities in their communities.

We chose these organizations for two reasons: First, we trust them because we know the wonderful work that they do. Second, we also know that gifts like this will tangibly help them to continue to improve all the ways they help people move beyond certain obstacles that hold them back, like food insecurity and exclusion due to disabilities.

So this Christmas Eve, I encourage you to live out of this new world that is budding around us, all because of the birth of Jesus, by giving generously. And while you're at it, sing loud for all to hear. Merry Christmas.

- Rev. Trey Tirpak
Minister of Discipleship & Outreach
Albany Synod Fellow

P.S. Please join us for our beautiful, candlelit Christmas Eve service on December 24th, starting at 7 p.m. We will be singing loud for all to hear!