

The Rabbi's Wife
December 24, 2003

Reverend Sharon Dittmar

First Unitarian Church
536 Linton St.
Cincinnati, OH 45219
(513) 281-1564

Imagine. It is Christmas Eve and a mother and father have come home with their newborn baby. Their baby is healthy, but he cries and cries and cries. The mother is exhausted. The father, also exhausted, does not know how to help. They have no family in town, some friends. But really, whom do you call on Christmas Eve? Who will come to help you on Christmas Day when so many people go away or spend time with family? Who is a neighbor? Who is a friend?

An out of town friend calls to check on the new family. Sensing their need, she tells them she will find help. The next morning, at 11:00 A.M. on Christmas Day, a woman comes to the front door, a woman unknown to the father, a woman that the mother had briefly met months ago. This woman is the rabbi's wife. She dropped her teenage daughter off at a friend's house. She comes in jeans with no make-up. Yes, she can stay two hours. No, she is glad to help.

The mother sleeps. The father sleeps. The baby sleeps. The mother wakes, showers, wonders about sleeping so

soundly while a stranger watches her newborn child. She comes downstairs to find her baby, the one who cried and cried, sleeping, wrapped like a burrito, and nestled on a pillow next to the rabbi's wife. The mother is overwhelmed; a stranger has been the best friend of all, a stranger who owes her nothing, a stranger who will probably never be seen again, a stranger who does not share her faith. Why is this stranger so kind?

The mother stammers out her thanks. The rabbi's wife replies "I know I have helped you on a day that is special to you, sacred to you. Isn't this what Christmas is about in your faith, loving people, helping people?" Imagine. Isn't this what Christmas is about?

Each night a child is born is a holy night. In a real and concrete, humanistic way, one thing's true, that child is our savior. There was a night or a day maybe, several years ago, when the rabbi's wife was born. Let's call the rabbi's wife, Ruth. Ruth grew to be a woman who married, raised a family, and chose, chooses to help strangers in need.

What did Ruth think when asked to help a stranger? "Am I going to have to hear one more annoying Christmas carol? I would rather spend today with my family. Does this family think I am going to hell because Jesus is not my personal savior?" We don't really know what Ruth thought. We only know that she chose to transcend religious lines and help someone else in need. We only know that she had the self-confidence and the compassion to help someone in ways different from herself, but in other ways the same, just another mother with another new child.

Each night a child is born is a holy night, a night for humanity to redeem itself. The world's children, you and I, we are the saviors. We are the ones who have the power to choose personal attention over bureaucracy, hope over despair, peace over war, compassion over indifference, unity over division, religious diversity over religious fundamentalisms, love over power.

Jesus as Messiah is a story for our Christian friends. Jesus as a man who preached a wide vision of rebellious love,

and stopped to learn that strangers deserved compassion, no matter their faith or circumstances, this Jesus is a story for all human friends. Ruth knows the human story. That is why she is so kind. She learned it within Judaism, where she also learned about the importance of *mitzvahs*, good deeds.

What does the human story of Jesus tell us? That we must carry each other. That each baby born into this world must be carried, and some day must carry others. We are called to carry each other, to help strangers, friends, and family in need. This is how we throw a drowning man a line. This is what and all our shared life is worth. This is the journey of Peace on Earth.

We do not hate, we choose to love. We do not despair, we choose to hope. Isn't this what Christmas is about? You don't need to be a person of any named faith to understand that human lives are bigger, much bigger, than anyone's big ideas.

Who among us has not been in need, in trouble, in over our heads, and so grateful when a human savior appeared, someone who cared enough to listen, or help, or wait with us, to hold the flood waters at bay. Our stories are so average, even the story of the homeless refugee is so painfully average, but the human saviors within these stories are special, because of their chosen actions. Imagine. Peace on Earth. Imagine. We must imagine so that we can dream, so that we can act.

The Christmas story: so much of it untrue, at least in the form we know. But the story that began this homily, this story is true and so utterly average. I am the mother of this story. My husband is the father. And our son is that baby. We were the family helped by a stranger, the rabbi's wife. All of us have the power to choose to be the rabbi's wife. Imagine. Peace on Earth.

—With grateful acknowledgement to the band, U2,
for inspiration

First Unitarian church, founded in 1831, was the original Unitarian voice in Cincinnati. First Church

is proud of our long-standing commitment to an urban presence that draws our 260 members from a wide geographic area. We are a church rich in tradition and alive with a diverse, caring community.

Our sanctuary brims with history, inviting us to reflection and service.

Sunday services begin at 10:30 a.m.
Religious Education information is available by calling RE Director Carly Smith at 281-2150.
You may also call the church office at 281-1564.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our urban Unitarian Universalist community celebrates and SUPPORTS ONE ANOTHER on our SPIRITUAL AND ETHICAL PATHS.

We work for JUSTICE, dignity and respect for the web of life.