

2022 CHRISTMAS EVE SERMONETTE

I always begin the holiday season with high hopes and lofty ambitions for our Christmas tree. Maybe it is because by the time that we get to December and the holidays are in full swing, I have already watched my fair share of Hallmark and Freeform Christmas movies that have thoroughly imprinted into my head the notion that not only must I have a floor to ceiling real Christmas tree with full branches, but that I have to spend the better part of the afternoon traipsing across a snow covered winter wonderland to find it before I turn the corner—and the shimmering music starts—and I declare with wide-eyed wonder that the tree that I have laid eyes on is the perfect Christmas tree. I then effortlessly bring it home, set it up without breaking a sweat, and cover it in an assortment of perfectly curated Christmas lights and ornaments.

The reality is that our Christmas tree is the same one that we have had for the past few years, and it came from the plastic grocery bag that it was in from the cardboard box in the hall closet. It is two feet tall, pre-lit, made of wire and white plastic tinsel, and is topped with a smiling unicorn wearing a Santa hat. The tree's branches are filled to absolute capacity with all of the curated ornaments that we originally intended to put on the tree, and every single other Christmas ornament that we have acquired over the past few years—my mom's attempts at making macramé Santa hats, the stockings we bought from the church bookstore, 25 ornaments from a Friends themed Advent calendar that we bought this year, the ornaments that we bought in New Mexico in honour of powerful women throughout history—we, of course, chose Queen Elizabeth II and Selena Quintanilla—, and the commemorative ornament for Disney's movie *Luca* which is nearly half the size of the tree. Each ornament has a different story of where it came from and how it got put on our

tree. And every time I look at that little tree of ours, I am forced to smile and am reminded how I would not have it any other way.

If you have been to Christmas and Christmas Eve services in the past, this is normally the part where the minister spends their sermon explaining what the story of Christmas is supposed to mean and signify for all of us. If that is the sermon that you were expecting to hear this evening, my apologies but that is not the sermon that you will hear nor the sermon that I can in good faith give. The truth is that it is not for me to tell you or anyone what the meaning of this Christmas or holiday season is. And, honestly, that is exactly what the beauty of it is.

We all come to the holidays in different ways. We all come seeking different things. I am willing to bet that all of you here arrived at this service for different reasons and different motivations. For some of you, this night is a joyous moment of celebration that the Christmas holidays are finally upon us. For others, this may be observing a tradition that you have been celebrating since you were younger that connects you to memories of the past. Some of you may see this night as the realisation of the prophecy that the Messiah was born in a stable in Bethlehem and that a star appeared as a herald to all of the birth of the Saviour of the World. Some of you may have heard the same story growing up and are here tonight trying to figure out if you still believe it at all. Some of you have discovered and already made peace with the fact that you no longer believe the story, but you still wanted to be here in community. Some have come celebrating other holidays like Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa, or Yule. And for some, it is not about celebrating anything at all; it is about being with other people so that you do not have to spend another night in this crazy world alone. Maybe this night is you deciding to give life another chance.

It is not for me to say what has brought you here and to tell you what this night is supposed to mean. But holidays—and moments, for that matter—are opportunities for co-creation. Just like all of the different ornaments that have found their way to our holiday tree, whatever has brought you to our doorstep and into our sanctuary, you have now become part of this night, this moment, this fellowship, this sacred space that we have created together. I know that there are many of you that I will see again—possibly next Sunday, possibly sooner. Some of you I may not see again for a while, until our paths happen to cross again. Some of you, this may be the first and only time that you come to our little church and our paths may never cross again. And that's okay. The important thing that I need you to hear this night is that you are welcome into this moment that we are creating here together. I encourage you to light a candle. I encourage you to lift up your voice and sing. And I encourage you to be present in the fullness of this moment and may you find whatever you came in search for on this night. And most of all, I wish you and your family—whether they be family by blood or family by choice—a very happy and healthy holidays. And for those who do celebrate it, I also wish you a very merry Christmas.

May it ever continue to be so. Blessed be. Amen. Shalom. Assalamu Aleikum. Namaste. Thank you.