

# Christmas, 2023

*The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you.*

Frederick Buechner

Dearest Family and Friends,

My house comes alive at Christmas! This year I decorate early, eager to seize days when sun beams enhance poinsettias, their brilliant red punctuating every surface. It's about *The Season* that for all my life has been most precious. Filled with memories, filled with poignancy, filled with gratitude, infused with meaning. The Season of Grace, when Love came down.

So I burn the pungent fir-scented candle. I play favorite CD's. And I allow myself to feel the ever-present reality that I do these things alone. I am standing at the kitchen sink. I look outside at the overgrown fire pit, the lichen covered Adirondack chairs, the oaks newly bare, their shape and intricacies clearly distinct. Celine Dion sings O Holy Night. I can almost see my husband chopping wood for the nightly fires we will have this winter. I am overcome with longing, a sorrow too deep for words. He is of Heaven. I am of Earth. But what grace to have had him!

Some nights I hear the rumble of a helicopter flying over the forest preserve beyond my balcony. I can see its lights blinking red, gold, red, gold as it travels to Central Dupage hospital beyond the woods. I know it is heading to the ER for an emergency of some kind. Its rumble heightens the anxiety I often feel, that life on this earth is fraught with uncertainty, that I am waiting for the shoe to drop, holding my breath. I utter a prayer for its occupant.

Francis Weller in his book *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* speaks of a sorrow which we feel and hold and may not actively acknowledge. It is a global sorrow, a communal sorrow for all that is wrong in the world. Heaven knows this Christmas we carry grief and groan for it all as St. Paul says in Romans 8.

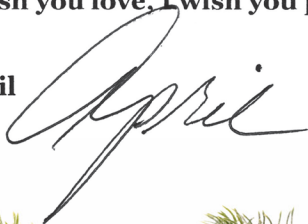
And yet I marvel at the courage I observe in those who serve in the most dire circumstances—war, calamity, natural disasters. I see courage in those who wait for news of life or death, in my clients who are doing the hard work of healing, in my friends who have losses profound and unexpected. And in my own family, gallantly fighting cancer, bravely tending to babies who were born so small yet who are angel warriors each. I see the love and tenacity it takes for us to be supportive to one another with generosity. So much grace given and so much grace received.

Now I'm watching as Natalio tends to the outdoor Christmas lights as he did last year—still favoring his particular brand of creativity. And tonight he brought his three little girls to “help”. At age nine, six and three I invite them into the warmth of my family room instead. Their dark eyes dart everywhere, land upon a bright red book called *This is the Star*. This is the book our grandchildren (now young women and young men) knew by heart, chanting each word in unison. Now Natalio's little girls huddle round. We read together the age old Christmas story. as I see the way Natalio has wound lights row by row around the oak outside our window. My house will not look magazine-perfect—but I love it just the way it is.

The Christ of Christmas speaks into all that is not right in this world with a message of peace. With a message of renewal. With a message of hope. It is grace with a capital G. May we hold both sorrow and joy in equal measure this Christmas on the lookout for beauty in one another and for grace around every corner.

I wish you love, I wish you peace and I wish you grace this Holy Season.

April



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