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# Marin Voice: Holidays remind us to celebrate the light amid the darkness



MARIN CITY CA – MAY 22: Andrea Norwood, pastor Floyd Thompkins and Ruby Wilson, all of Marin City, chat after a Day of Remembrance ceremony at Rocky Graham Park in Marin City, Calif. on Saturday, May 22, 2021. The event was put on by the Marin City Ministerial Alliance to give families and friends who lost someone during the pandemic a chance to grieve. (Sherry LaVars/Marin Independent Journal)

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By **REV. FLOYD THOMPKINS** |

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Many of the holiday stories that we celebrate with joy and gladness this month require us to remember a time of darkness or suffering.

Christmas emerges from the cries of mothers weeping for their slaughtered babies. Hanukkah is a cleansing after war and oppression. The winter solstice celebration rises out of the longest period of darkness for the earth. The celebration of these holidays reminds us that whatever the pain or darkness that surrounds us now there will be dancing in our future.

These celebrations are not based upon tales that deny the pain of life. These celebrations remind us that death is a part of the human experience. Uncertainty is our plight as frail human beings in a universe that is far greater and far more complex than we can possibly fully comprehend. Evil is something that is aggressive and painful. Courage is necessary to bring about a world of justice and peace.

Unfortunately, these myths, stories, messages and witnesses of faith are being used to justify blind acquiescence to tradition. This is the very thing for which they were written to thwart. In this season of a pandemic, seismic economic shifts and emerging new configurations of family, religious celebrations are needed more now more than ever.

However, over the last few years, religion has become a symbol of division. People of faith are presumed to be judgmental. Attending worship services of any kind has literally become a decision which may have life and death implications. Ironically, the messages of the myths of religious tradition were made for times such as these.

As part of the Christian story there is a depiction of a vulnerable family and the danger of popular prejudices. This redemption tale becomes relevant to those who see the radical nature of the assertion of purpose and destiny to those whom others would dismiss as unimportant or trivial. The emergence of a savior was threatened because the savior was to be born to a young woman who claimed an alternate sexuality and unusual family relationships. Women, men, children and those who have been marginalized can see themselves reflected in the struggle of a family and the triumph of perseverance.

Hannukah is a powerful story filled with the pathos and passion of a fight against evil, political pettiness and genocide. It also emerges as Judah Maccabee's critique about the lack of courage and an exhortation of people of faith to stand up for their beliefs and values in the face of an overwhelming sense of futility.

The word of the prophet pierces the complacency of acquiescence and the justification of futility. The political minorities, violated communities and dismissed ethnic communities can see themselves in the fiery orator of Maccabee and the physical resistance to evil and oppression in the face of overwhelming odds.

The winter solstice arises from the earth's assertion of elasticity of time, the redemption of nature and the power of transition.

It's the astronomical moment when the sun reaches the Tropic of Capricorn. Dec. 21 marked our shortest day and longest night of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. This is an annual story and experience which calls us to notice that we are in an ever-changing environment. Earth, its systems and time itself have an internal mechanism of recovery with whom we can and should join to maintain balance.

We who are fellow travelers on Earth can see in these celebrations of dance and harmony an affirmation of the importance of efforts of those who are calling for respect for the world.

All these religious celebrations should be remembered in their historical settings, their critique of parochialism and their inspiration and celebration of multilayered experiences of life. Now is the time to hear these stories in community and become challenged and inspired by their universal and particular importance.

In whatever state we find ourselves celebrating these stories, this is the joy to the world. Celebrate the light.

In our silent nights, nourish the sparks of rebellious optimism from people of the light railing against the cold darkness of pessimist predictions from those who revel in darkness. Happy holidays.

*Rev. Floyd Thompkins, of Novato, is pastor of Saint Andrew Presbyterian Church in Marin City and CEO of the Justice and Peace Foundation.*

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**Rev. Floyd Thompkins**