

JOYEUX NOEL

Luke 2:14

*Meditation preached by Carolyn Grohman at North Presbyterian Church, Williamsville
Christmas Eve, 2007*

The film “*Joyeux Noel*” (which is French for “Merry Christmas”) tells the true story of something amazing that happened on Christmas Eve, 1914. It was during World War I, and Scottish and French soldiers were fighting the Germans in France. The German troops, who had been given small Christmas trees to decorate their trenches, were being entertained with Christmas music by two German opera singers. Just yards away, huddled in their own trenches, the Scottish and French troops listened to the familiar Christmas carols being sung from the German side.

Finally, a Scottish bagpiper began playing along with the German tenor, who was singing “Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright.” And then the German joined the Scot on “O Come, All Ye Faithful.”

Soon thereafter, the three commanding officers declared a cease-fire for Christmas Eve. The soldiers from both sides laid down their weapons, climbed out of their trenches, and crossed the front line to celebrate a midnight Christmas Eve mass together. They worshiped together, sang together, and prayed together. They ate and drank together. They learned each other’s names, showed each other pictures of their wives and children, and exchanged their addresses back home. That night these enemies became friends as they shared their common humanity and walked together in the light of peace.

This heart-warming true story, however, does not end the way we wish it did. The next day the big brass on the Scottish and French side punished the men for not fighting and killing the Germans when they had the chance. The Scottish chaplain who had officiated at the midnight mass was relieved of duty by his superior for violating orders and being soft on the enemy.

From soldiers in the trenches walking in the light of peace and experiencing the truth of their common humanity, to superiors enveloped in the darkness of institutionalized hatred and demonizing the enemy---it is a story that continues to be played out wherever and whenever there is war.

The Christmas message sung by the angels proclaims God’s will for humankind: “Peace on earth, good will among all people.” On this Christmas Eve, 2007, may we all hear anew that timeless and timely message. And like the troops in the trenches on that Christmas Eve in 1914, may we remember that all people are God’s children, created in God’s image. Let us walk in God’s light of “peace on earth, good will among all people.”

