‘Tis the Season

“Peace on Earth. Good Will Towards Men.”

As one nears the Thanksgiving, the winter holidays, and New Year’s celebrations, this sentiment calls upon our “better angels” in the time of year where the light of day is at its shortest and begins to re-emerge. The diminishing of the light and the colder days and nights direct our energies inwards and we reflect on what is important in our lives and what really matters. And in quietude of the seasonal darkness, it is not hard to recognize that our lives are more joyful when we live in a peaceful world. And the best way to ensure that that wish becomes real is to reach out family, friends, and those in need with kindness, compassion, and charity.

But, let’s go further. Let’s break down this seasonal slogan and put it in the context of our Masonic lessons.

“Peace on Earth.”

How do we achieve lasting or sustainable peace in a world which ebbs and flows between times that are serene and times that bring great pain and distress? No doubt, in a time of environmental chaos, a pandemic, and the vitriol in the political landscape, we are collectively going through such challenging times.

In keeping with what we hear in the Holy Scriptures, Freemasonry reminds us in our First Degree of our intimate relationship with all of creation. We are stewards first and that thought should be in our minds foremost when we think of our sewing and reaping in nature’s bounty and confronting the vicissitudes of sickness, poverty, and warfare that arise as reminders of the fragileness of human life. When our appetites encourage us to exceed what nature can provide and leads to imbalance, we must “circumscribe our desires” to help in the restoring of a sustainable, thriving nature. When we move our own actions and support changes that overcome the habitual tendency of greed, nature responds and a very grounded Peace becomes evident.

“Good Will Towards Men.”

In former days, referring to “men,” was intended to mean all people, men and women. But, with the obvious disadvantages women have had to endure, it became more acceptable to refer to “mankind.” But with “mankind” one could also ask, “why not ‘womankind?” And so, the term “humankind” has become more ubiquitously accepted. Indeed, this is more inclusive.”

So, what does it mean to extend “good will” towards all humankind?

“Good will” can be interpreted as us extending good feelings and trying to correct or make amends in a way that promotes a healing between parties – something that often comes up at holiday and special landmark times.

“Good will” can also imply that the will we extend to work with or change circumstances arises from our efforts to summon the qualities we associate with us in our “smooth ashlar” potential.

So in “good will” we go forward and expend our “good will” for the benefit of all concerned, here exemplified in the phrase “towards all humankind.”

With this intention and effort, we, in Freemasonry, speak of those who can best work and best agree - which is to say in a positive way that we also recognize the truth ihat we can’t always work with everyone, nor agree with them. Why? Because we each suffer from varying degrees of confusion, attachments to our own preferences, and get defensive with those who do not see the world our way. These three – known as the Three Poisons in Buddhist philosophy - get in the way of civility, a potent force in easing tensions and mending fences. Understanding this, Masons embark upon a moral education through allegorical lessons, contemplation, meditation, and prayer. Our inner labor is to smooth the rough ashlar tendencies expressed in the Three Poisons and their companion negative emotional states of pride, jealousy, excessive desire, reflexive reaction, avarice, and hatred. The Scottish Rite mandates also encourages us to confront these poisons seen in their cultural, social, and political guise as ignorance, fanaticism, and tyranny. Our goal? We do our best to build a worldly edifice where the wisdom of Solomon, the strength of Hiram of Tyre, and the beauty envisioned by Hiram Abif brings inspiration and greater light into our daily lives.

We first become a Mason in our hearts. I think at some point, this thought dawns upon us all. I see Freemasonry as the personification of what Buddhists describe as our inherent loving nature. Thus, what Freemasonry sees as the ideals we see in good men made better is that which the Supreme Grand architect has already endowed us with. And our Masonic journey is the process of awakening that leads to a very logical conclusion - that when we circumscribe our desires and labor with all the tools Freemasonry makes available to us, “Peace on Earth” is best achieved when we extend good will towards all humankind. We start with our own transformation, the support and care of our families, the communities in which our families thrive, and finally, our entire earth and all of the nature that makes us possible to eat, drink, and be merry, i.e. to CELEBRATE!

In such a state of moral uprightness and knowing better the purpose for which our Great Creator has spake us into this existence, we selflessly extend these opportunities to all who share our desire to celebrate every moment in Peace on Earth. Furthermore, the greatest joy we shall see in our Masonic journey is when the efforts we extend will also kindle a spark in another to also learn, then know, and act upon that loving nature, that good will which beats in every breast.

Happy Holidays!

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