

*Diary of a Macy's Elf***A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation****By The Rev. CJ McGregor****Delivered on December 6, 2020**

I love Christmas. But I love it in a quiet, unobtrusive way that often makes people think I'm un-festive. I don't drop and roll in a puddle of glitter and sequins every time I go out. The idea of Christmas shopping makes me break out in a cold sweat.. You will never see me in an energy sapping mall. Despite being so thoroughly un-festooned, I love a great many things about Christmas. I love Christmas films, the joy of rewatching them for the eightieth time and quoting along. Enjoying that most peculiar festive delight: the bit in 'Gremlins' where they put one of the little monsters in the blender. I love Christmas markets, drinking mulled wine and piling the sofa with blankets after the sun goes down at three o'clock in the afternoon. Baking with piles of cinnamon and ginger and making the whole house smell of warmth. Making ginger snaps, short breads and pork pies.

There are a few holiday traditions that my family will keep this year despite the pandemic. I want to share one of my favorites with you this morning. Around this time each year we listen to and read *The Santaland Diaries* by David Sedaris. Sedaris happens to me one of my favorite authors because he can take the most mundane parts of life and spin them into a story of hilarity. His dark sense of humor amuses me. I want to share a piece of the *Santaland Diaries* with you. If you think you're stressed during the holidays just try being one of Santa's elves. Turns out that being surrounded by children, tinsel, and merriment isn't all it's cracked up to be. David Sedaris tells us about the downside of holiday joy as a somewhat flawed Macy's department store elf named Crumpet. I invite you to get comfortable and simply listen.

Play story

That never gets old for me. While humorous there is an important message that we can glean from this story. After the young girl is finally placed on Santa's lap and her photo is taken Sedaris tells us, "everything is exactly the way it's supposed to be. That everything is snowy and wonderful. It's not about the child, or Santa, or Christmas or anything" he says. He tells us it's about the parent's idea of a world they could not make work for them. The idea that it's about a world we cannot make work for us. Sedaris has offered a story for cynical people, and aren't we all peaking as cynics right now?

Sedaris sends us holiday spirit from the front lines. Sedaris has held the mirror of satire and comedy up for us to see what we have done to our Christmas season in the name of unrelenting commerce. And we laugh, deservedly—yet deep down, we know we are truly laughing at ourselves. He portrays the various workers and SantaLand visitors, among them the parents intent on crafting their vision of a perfect Christmas for their less-than-willing kids.

Do you long for perfection these days? Do you yearn for the flawless and without the possibility of failure or change this season? If so, your pursuit of perfection might reveal a prominent imperfection. There are times when we need things to be perfect or near-perfect, such as when constructing a bridge or performing surgery. Falling short of exacting specifications can spell

danger. During this pandemic this season it is not time for normalcy or perfection. We need to let go and simply be.

An attachment to normalcy and perfection demonstrates a lack of self-compassion and wisdom. The failure to embrace this terrible time as reality and accept it for what it is with its joys, sorrows, and imperfections leads to a rigid sense of self that shatters easily whenever things fall short of our unrealistic expectations. Our emotional health requires gentleness toward ourselves as we embrace inevitable limits. We can find satisfaction in doing our best, but this doesn't mean that things need to be perfect. We can't control life in all of its complexity. Moving toward a season of fulfillment and meaning requires us to abandon our ideas of what we think things should be and making the best of our reality, to go with the flow. It takes a sturdy sense of self to be flexible enough to take life in stride. When our self-worth and value are tied to our ideas of normalcy and perfection, we take a hard fall when we fall short of our expectations. We become more resilient as we replace the aspiration for perfection with a humble desire to learn and grow from our experience.

Let's face it, whether we celebrate Christmas, Kwanza, Hanukkah, or the Solstice we will arrive no where near celebrating this season as we typically do. If we try, we risk our health, our sanity, our quest for balance. We will keep bumping into the wall that stands in our way in trying to make a world that works for us-the perfect holiday. Bumping into a wall over and over again brings us bruises, bumps, and a massive headache. Instead, we accept the wall as temporary and embrace our present reality knowing that there will soon be a door in that wall.

Let us celebrate this season. Let us practice self-compassion, acceptance, patience, our creativity in making meaning, and let us be grateful we are not Crumpet.

May it be so.