

Christmas at the Movies: We Need a Little Christmas

John 1:1-14

One of my favorite Christmas movies, though it's not really a Christmas movie, is *Mame*. It's was a stage play and a movie; Angela Lansbury and Bea Arthur played Mame on stage, Lucille Ball and Rosalind Russell on screen. Mame is a wild-partying flapper in the roaring twenties, who unexpectedly gets custody of her young nephew Patrick. She has no idea how to raise a child, but she brings him into her high-flying and high energy world. She once declares, "Life is a banquet, and most suckers are starving to death!"

But then Mame's world collapses around her. Her investment manager calls to give her the bad news – the stock market has crashed, and all of her resources are gone. And the trustees are sending her nephew away to a boarding school. So Mame decides to build her life and win Patrick back, this boy who has come to mean so much to her. She'll get a job, something "nice and stable like the theater." And she lands a spot, but it doesn't work out and she loses that job. Next comes a telephone operator, switching the various connections. Mame sits at the desk with hundreds of possible connections, crossing all the wires and connecting no one. She loses that job. Then, a checkout clerk at Macy's. The only slip Mame knows how to write is a C.O.D. So every person who comes to buy anything, she encourages them to, "send it C.O.D." Isn't that easier anyway – as she stands there with a huge pile of carbon copy paper, twisted and confused. She loses that job too.

In the midst of all this collapse, job and family and finances, Mame decides that they "need a little Christmas." So she comes into a cold and empty apartment, and begins to decorate, singing the famous song, "We need a little Christmas." The song goes:

Haul out the holly
Put up the tree before my spirit falls again
Fill up the stocking
I may be rushing things, but deck the halls again now
For we need a little Christmas
Right this very minute
Candles in the window
Carols at the spinet
Yes, we need a little Christmas
Right this very minute
It hasn't snowed a single flurry
But Santa, dear, we're in a hurry
So climb down the chimney
Put up the brightest string of lights I've ever seen
Slice up the fruitcake
It's time we hung some tinsel on that evergreen bough
For I've grown a little leaner
Grown a little colder
Grown a little sadder
Grown a little older
And I need a little angel

Sitting on my shoulder
Need a little Christmas now

For I've grown a little leaner, grown a little colder, grown a little sadder, grown a little older, and I need a little angel sitting on my shoulder, need a little Christmas now.

Why do we need Christmas? Why do you and I need Christmas now? Today at the 10 a.m. worship service we're decorating the sanctuary and highlighting the symbolic meaning of the decorations we put up. These decorations tell us why we need Christmas, and they show us the deep meaning of Christmas. *The evergreen that we hang*, in wreaths on the doors, and garland on the porches and stair railings and fireplaces, this evergreen is a symbol of the eternal and unchanging nature of God.

The world around us is always changing. Sometimes it's for the better, and sometimes it's for the worse. There are times in our lives like the time in Mame's, when it seems that everything is changing for the worse and all the leaves are falling from the trees. When the all the trees in our world are bare. Perhaps it's through the loss of a spouse, or a dear friend; perhaps someone close to us is fighting a serious illness, or we are; perhaps it's the loss of a job; perhaps it's a season of life where everything is stretched too thin – we feel, as the line of another movie says, like too little butter spread over dry toast. If we pay close attention the world around us, we will always see and feel suffering. Sometimes it is close to us, and sometime it's with others far away – people on the news, victims of natural disasters, of warfare, or violence and crime. There are times when we feel that suffering, when the leaves are off the trees – when life is laid bare. And for some of us that time is now.

But while the world around us is changing, the eternal God does not change. Just like the evergreen trees that remain green in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter – that remain green even when every other tree is laid bare to the cold winds – the eternal God does not change. God's mercy is renewed every day, and is poured out even more on those who need it and recognize that their need for it; God's goodness toward us is renewed every day; God's goodness, in blessings large and small comes into our lives. Even in the dead of winter, God's blesses our lives – if only we have the eyes to see it! God's presence is constant day in and day out, never waning and always there. And in times of winter, just as the evergreen stands out in the forest when nothing else is blooming, so the presence of God stands out in our lives when it seems there is nothing else there.

The red of the poinsettias that decorate the church and that we give to friends, put in hospital rooms and in living rooms; the red of the berries that decorate our tables and are sprinkled among the evergreen; *this red symbolizes God's unconditional love for us*. The red reminds me of the blood that Christ shed on the cross. Christ's death on the cross is the proof that God loves us; if nothing else shows it, this shows it. That even when we were far away from God, even if we did nothing for God or cared nothing for god, God loved us with everything he had – giving his own Son to be with us. Most people believe in God – I rarely meet someone who doesn't in some way believe in God. The question is, what God do you believe in? Do we believe that God loves us? Is God more than just "there?" Does God love us and want to be with us and for us, not without us and against us? The cross of Christ tells us that yes, God does indeed love us more than anything.

Many of us, and many, many people, never know the unconditional love that they are created to know, that they need to know. There are so many of us who feel respected or liked, but do not feel loved. As human beings, we struggle to give unconditional love to one another. Parents, even the best parents,

can't do it. Spouses can't do it. Friends can't do it. We don't have the never-ending reservoir of patience and forgiveness and mercy that it takes to show a person true unconditional love. We can point to it in the way we love each other, but it can only come from God. When you begin to know the unconditional love of God; begin to know that you are loved no matter what you've done in the past, no matter what your secrets are, no matter what your hang-ups and habits are, when you begin to know that they are really and truly loved and that nothing can change it, you begin to become the person you are created to be. You begin to live in the truth, you live with openness and honesty, admitting your own faults and failures, and showing grace and mercy with others who have their own faults and failures. You begin to heal and your relationships begin to heal. This is the fruit of unconditional love, and it's symbolized for us in the red of our decorations.

Finally, *the light of the candles reminds me of the flame of God's Spirit*, the presence of the Holy Spirit among us. Jesus promised that he would send an Advocate, the Holy Spirit who would lead us into all truth. And on Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and rested on the disciples gathered there in tongues of fire. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God with us. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God with us; and after he ascended into heaven, his presence continued by the Holy Spirit – God with us. There are many ways of talking about the Holy Spirit, but the word Jesus used was the Greek “paraclete.” The translation is advocate, or helper – “one who consoles or comforts, encourages or uplifts.” In other words, the Holy Spirit is the best friend you and I could ever hope for. A friend who consoles us when we grieve; who comforts us when we are in pain; who encourages us when we're down, un-motivated, discouraged by the pain and suffering around us; who lifts us up and sets us on our feet again, who gives us the strength and the hope to continue living, to continue loving, to continue giving, to continue serving, to continue following Christ even when where there are no leaves on the trees and we live in the dead of winter.

We need the presence of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit *is* the presence of Christmas. It is the presence of God with us, Emmanuel. Christmas is a very difficult time for many; underneath the celebrations with family and friends and parties and gifts and general happiness, lies hurts, broken relationships, grief, loss, disappointment. These feelings and these realities are not foreign to Christmas; they are the heart of Christmas. This is the world that God came to heal; this is the world that God came to save. This why we *need* Christmas.

The eternal God, who gave his son Jesus Christ, who loves you and me more than we love ourselves, and who lives with us in his Spirit is present here – and is present this Christmas with healing, comfort, and power. Thanks be to God. Amen.