

NAME

Christmas Eve Audio.mp3

DATE

December 29, 2020

DURATION

15m 49s

START OF TRANSCRIPT**[00:00:01]**

Maybe you've had the feeling this week that you were running out of time as you hit refresh on a package that you were tracking for delivery, as you thought about all the things that needed to happen, I guess, before Christmas. Maybe that's one of the things that has become clear to you, all of these preparations and plans for Christmas. Which ones really matter?

[00:00:27]

I know I felt like I was running out of time when someone pointed out to me at some point last week that Christmas was next Friday. And I just kind of said, why have we get there?

[00:00:39]

Our minds have been occupied this year by other things, by many, many other things.

[00:00:46]

So maybe you've had that feeling this week that you were running out of time, but maybe you've had that feeling this year that you were running out of time, as we watch the days get shorter and the thermometers start dipping first below 70, then below 50, as we mark yet another birthday or anniversary in these pandemic days. As you saw another headline, yet another headline that wore your spirit down. In this strange and arrested year where it feels like life has either slowed down or sped up, we're not sure which one, maybe it's both.

[00:01:32]

Maybe you've had that feeling that you were running out of time.

[00:01:38]

That feeling of haste, it can make us do things that we don't want to do, it can make us miss what is most important.

[00:01:50]

The movie that inspires our service tonight, the classic 1980 Christmas film Home Alone, is about that kind of a mistake that we make when we're feeling a little too rushed. Kevin McCallister, of course, is the eight year old protagonist of Home Alone, and he gets left behind by his family as they feel a little bit rushed.

[00:02:14]

The power goes out overnight. Nobody's alarm goes off and suddenly they realize it's morning and the airport shuttle is here and they need to book it out of their house to make it on time for that long awaited family trip to Paris.

[00:02:31]

And poor Kevin is left in the attic unnoticed all by himself. He wakes up and there is no family to greet him.

[00:02:46]

Now, Kevin goes through many of the same stages of processing this fact and this experience, I think as as many of us did in twenty twenty, I think we've all felt a little bit of this this year.

[00:03:04]

Maybe some of this. Right around the beginning of April, there was kind of some of this.

[00:03:13]

A little bit of followed by more.

[00:03:20]

We started to get a little annoyed by it all, and then it almost became normal.

[00:03:28]

It's good, I think, for us to laugh because we have to feel every ounce of joy that we can in these kinds of times. But we know the truth is that Kevin McCallister was scared at home alone. He had things that were imaginary that scared him. And he had some things that were very real, real dangers. He wasn't nearly so ready as he thought he would be to be all on his own with no family for Christmas. He was sad and he was lonely. Those lyrics that Melissa just saying, they land differently this year, don't they?

[00:04:11]

Through the years, we all will be together if the fates allow.

[00:04:19]

The power of those fates are so real right now. Way back in nineteen forty four, long before I was born.

[00:04:34]

The minister at my home church, All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., was a man named a Paul Davies. Reverend Davies began his ministry as a Methodist, but over time he found himself more at home with the Unitarian Universalist. And so he started to serve Unitarian congregations. He was called in nineteen forty four in October to a new ministry with All Souls DC. And so just three months into that call, he found himself needing to prepare his first Christmas Eve service in a difficult year. In nineteen forty four, our country was in its fourth year of war with Nazi Germany, one historian later wrote that the Christmas of nineteen nine, 1944, was a season of unimaginable suffering and death. All throughout December, the newsreels told stories of what would become known as the Battle of the Bulge. The deadliest battle in World War Two and among the bloodiest and deadliest battles ever fought in U.S. military history. Reverend Davies was delivering his first Christmas Eve sermon in a year when families were not together, when soldiers were off overseas, when many families had already gotten the word that their loved one would never be home with them to celebrate Christmas again.

[00:06:16]

This was not a year for platitudes.

[00:06:19]

It was a year when it was hard to sing the carols and hear the bells and not feel that they ring a bit hollow. And so Reverend Davies began his sermon that Christmas Eve by reminding us that so many of our Christmas rituals and customs are older than Christmas itself.

[00:06:48]

They're ancient. In fact.

[00:06:52]

The Yuletide observance, he said, goes back to the festival that the earliest people on Earth began to celebrate the passing of the winter solstice. The sons regaining of its powers, the turning point after which there would be no more shortening of days.

[00:07:15]

Imagine people, he said with no assurance. Nothing they knew for sure of the return of life to the Earth.

[00:07:27]

Imagine the earliest humans watching the sun grow lower and weaker in the sky, watching the days grow shorter. There are places on this earth, even still today that are habitable up to Alaska in our own country sees the sun set in November and it does not rise again for sixty five nights. The change may feel subtle to us now in an era of electricity and fluorescent lighting, but the longest night was very long for many.

[00:08:09]

Our earliest ancestors adopted customs, Reverend Davis says the lighting of fires, the feasting, the visual reminder of an evergreen plant held before us, a plant that still grows and thrives throughout the winter as a sign of hope, these earliest humans collected thousands of these rituals.

[00:08:34]

In the end, Reverend Davis says. Some people feel shocked when they discover that Christmas customs are so much older than Christianity, but I think they ought to feel encouraged and heartened.

[00:08:51]

Because this means that these stories, these practices that we still carry forward are deeply rooted there thousands of years more deeply rooted in our common and shared human experience. And in all of these stories, he says from different times and cultures, whether stories of solstice and rebirth, whether stories of Hope's arrival into the world, the prophecy of a savior fulfilled stories of Love's incarnation in a child in difficult times.

[00:09:31]

He says, in all of these stories, Christmas always begins at midnight.

[00:09:41]

These legends, he says, they have never drifted out of the darkness and into a premature daylight, they are set quite close to the inner truth from which they draw their substance, the truth that we must find our faith not in the daylight, but in the dark if we are ever to come to the light of morning, he says, we must carry our own lights with us through the night.

[00:10:15]

Not only that, he says, we must make songs in the darkness too, and sing them first.

[00:10:21]

At midnight, we must proclaim in the desert a highway when there is no way at all we must, and as centuries have shown us, evidently we can.

[00:10:39]

The shepherds and the gospel story we heard read, they're greeted by angels in the dark of night, the wise men in that story are guided to see the child who has been born according to the prophecy, to save the world.

[00:11:01]

They are not guided by bright sun and signs, no GPS, no clear paths.

[00:11:10]

They are guided by a star, a sliver of a clue of the direction that they should go.

[00:11:20]

And Jesus himself is born from the darkness of a womb.

[00:11:27]

Think of it, a place with no light, a place with no light, where all life begins.

[00:11:38]

Just as life first takes root in the darkness of soil, underground or inside the shell of an egg, Jesus is born from the safe blanket of darkness, inside the body of his mother and into the darkness, even at birth of more night.

[00:12:07]

All great change begins like this in darkness and in quiet, in the private thoughts and stirrings of something that you know to be true before you can bring it to light, right before you can speak it out loud in the orientation of a heart coming to trust another person, to learn to love again, to hope for a vision of tomorrow that starts out as a firing of neurons between your ears, amongst tissue and blood in darkness.

[00:12:48]

It is dark inside our bodies. And yet so much life takes place there.

[00:12:59]

A world around us is much more often a sunrise fluorescent light kind of world, and there is, of course, a time and a place of beauty and the rising of a new sun and the beginning of a new day.

[00:13:14]

But in so many stories, including this story that we celebrate tonight, the beauty of possibility is born in the deepest darkness before anything else. Christmas always begins at midnight. This month at Wellspring's, we have told stories to each other of what it means to feel afraid.

[00:13:47]

I think maybe this year, more than ever, we need the reminder to from the Christmas story that fear does not always portend an evil outcome, as the Gospel says that an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were terrified.

[00:14:11]

But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for I am bringing you good news of great joy to all people.

[00:14:25]

Even the things that scare us the most can sometimes bring change far beyond what we could have hoped for.

[00:14:34]

It can happen, we celebrate stories of it happening every day and every year at Christmas.

[00:14:47]

As we learn to trust the hope that comes to us from the darkness of this night and so many others, we still light our fires, we still feast alone and together. And we find ways to trust once again that this winter will not be the end, will not be the last.

[00:15:13]

Just as it has been for thousands and thousands of years before us.

[00:15:19]

On this night at midnight, still another beginning.

[00:15:26]

Amen, and may you live in blessing.

[00:15:33]

On this night, we prayed together in song. So I hope that you will join me from all across the miles tonight in singing together and in lighting your fires wherever you are.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



Automated transcription by Sonix
www.sonix.ai