

**Christmas Eve**  
December 24, 2018

Adam Wesoloski prepared people for his daughter Josie's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday by posting on Facebook things Josie had written over the years. One of the posts was written when Josie was 8 years old:

*Mele Kalikimaka means Merry Christmas in Hawaii. Isn't that cool? There are many other ways Hawaiians celebrate Christmas differently than Wisconsinites. Did you know that Hawaiians wear swimsuits, aloha shirts, shorts, flip-flops and go out on the beach for Christmas? Wisconsinites wear hats, gloves, coats, boots and visit each other's houses. This next difference is Wisconsinites would usually listen to Christmas with pianos when Hawaiians would listen to Christmas carols with ukuleles and guitars. Finally, Hawaiians would have roasted pig (kalua) and sushi for their Christmas feast, rather than Wisconsinites who would have turkey or ham for their feast. Aloha! that means "bye" in Hawaii!*

I don't know about you, but I think I'd like to try a Christmas in Hawaii. Then again, perhaps I would miss some of the traditional Wisconsin winter Christmas things.

We do like to hold onto tradition because they are a link to the past, but we can't stop things from changing.

I know that things have changed at Peace Church during the last 30 years. At one time there was no Advent Wreath at Peace, there was an Advent Log. And there was a special celebration a week or two before Christmas called the "Adult Christmas Party". For some people the name was misleading. It only meant that kids were not welcomed.

The choir used to sing from the balcony of the old worship area. The up side was that it was warm up there in the wintertime. The down side was that those poor people were trapped in a confined area with Ken Jensen.

The church had "real" Christmas trees at one time. They were very pretty, most of the time. (My son once drew the picture of one tree with a very noticeable lack of branches on one side.) There was also fresh garland draped along both sides of the worship area. It produced a very nice evergreen smell. The garland also produced a lot of pine needles that fell into the heating registers and did a great job of clogging the vacuum cleaner.

And 30 years ago there was one service at 7:30 on Christmas Eve. If I remember correctly the place was packed with 250 people. If you were one of them, I have a question. Have you changed in 30 years? I know I have.

Things do change. No two Christmases are ever the same. What does not change is the story, the birth of Jesus. The meaning of the birth does not change either. John summed it up very well. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . ."

Jesus came with and as the gift of God's love. He shared that love with his life, his death and his resurrection. Through Jesus we know love that gives us forgiveness and life along with hope, peace and joy. Jesus also came with instructions. He clearly tells us, "Love one another as I have loved you."

In October of this year, a man burst into Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and began shooting. When the gunfire was over, 17 people had been shot and 11 were dead. The gunman was also wounded and transported to a nearby hospital.

The nurse who began working on him was Ari Mahler. The gunman yelled, "Death to all Jews" as he was taken into the hospital. During this care for the man, the gunman thanked Ari Mahler for the care he was giving him. He did not know and was never told that Ari Mahler was Jewish.

The story about the Jewish nurse who cared for the hate filled man began to spread. Ari Mahler felt he needed to share his side of the story. He ended his story with this:

*I'm sure he had no idea I was Jewish. Why thank a Jewish nurse, when 15 minutes beforehand, you'd shoot me in the head with no remorse? I didn't say a word to him about my religion. I chose not to say anything to him the entire time. I wanted him to feel compassion. I chose to show him empathy. I felt that the best way to honor his victims was for a Jew to prove him wrong. Besides, if he finds out I'm Jewish, does it really matter? The better question is, what does it mean to you?*

*Love. That's why I did it. Love as an action is more powerful than words, and love in the face of evil gives others hope. It demonstrates humanity. It reaffirms why we're all here. The meaning of life is to give meaning to life, and love is the ultimate force that connects all living beings. I could care less what Robert Bowers thinks, but you, the person reading this, love is the only message I wish to instill in you. If my actions mean anything, love means everything.*

*Respectfully,  
Ari Mahler, RN.*

So why do I bring that up? I share that because it's a Christmas story. It's a LOVE story.

The white board in the hallway asks people to share which Christmas Song is their favorite. I'd like to share one of my favorite Christmas Songs right now. I think the message about love is quite clear.

**The Christmas Wish**  
Danny Allen Wheatman

I don't know if you believe in Christmas  
Or if you have presents underneath a Christmas tree  
But if you believe in love  
That will be more than enough  
For you to come and celebrate with me.

For I have held the precious gift that love brings  
Even though I never saw a Christmas star.  
I know there is a light I have felt it burn inside  
And I have seen it shining from afar.

Christmas is the time to come together  
A time to put all differences aside.  
And I reach out my hand to the family of man  
To share the joy I feel at Christmas time.

For the truth that binds us all together  
I would like to say a simple prayer  
That at this special time you will have true peace of mind  
And joy to last throughout the coming year.

And if you believe in love  
That will be more than enough  
For peace to last throughout the coming year.  
And peace on Earth will last throughout the year.

I hope you have a good Christmas. I hope you can celebrate at least some Christmas traditions. Traditions connect us to the past. The most important tradition is sharing the gift of love and that connects us to the past, the present and the future.

Merry Christmas. AMEN