

Thank you, Reverend Ken. Good morning everyone.

Some of you may have seen the 1965 animated television special “A Charlie Brown Christmas”. The program made its debut 53 years ago today on CBS on December 9, 1965. In the special, lead character Charlie Brown finds himself depressed despite the onset of the cheerful holiday season. Lucy suggests he direct a neighborhood Christmas play, but his best efforts are ignored and mocked by his peers. After Linus tells Charlie Brown about the true meaning of Christmas, Charlie Brown tries to create his own Christmas cheer, and at the end, the Peanuts gang unites to celebrate the Christmas season.

In casting the characters, the producers went an unconventional route, hiring child voice actors. The program's soundtrack was similarly unorthodox: it features a jazz score by pianist Vince Guaraldi. The absence of a laugh track (a staple in US television animation in this period), in addition to its tone, pacing, music, and animation, led both the producers

and network to predict the project would be a disaster preceding its broadcast.

Contrary to that apprehension, A Charlie Brown Christmas received high ratings and acclaim from critics. It has since been honored with both an Emmy and a Peabody Award. It became an annual broadcast in the United States and has been aired during the Christmas season traditionally every year since its premiere. ABC currently holds the rights to the special and broadcasts it at least twice during the weeks leading up to Christmas. Once was last Thursday, Dec. 6 at 8 pm, and it will air again on Thursday, Dec. 20 at 8 pm.

So why is Charlie Brown depressed at Christmas time? He is disgusted by his peers' rampant commercialism, from Lucy expressing joy at the sound of jingling money, to his dog Snoopy, who has decorated his doghouse and entered into a lights and display contest with a cash prize.

Charlie Brown is also repulsed by the play that he agreed to direct because it is quite modern, with an upbeat jazz score, a "Christmas queen," shepherds, innkeepers and penguins but no identifiable Biblical figures.

He decides the play needs "the proper mood" and suggests they should get a Christmas tree. That makes me laugh because the Christmas tree tradition is an homage to pagan and nature based religious traditions and has nothing to do with Christianity. Lucy instructs Charlie and Linus to get an aluminum Christmas tree that is big, shiny and pink from a nearby tree lot.

When they get to the lot, filled with numerous trees fitting Lucy's description, Charlie Brown ironically and symbolically chooses the only real tree there — a tiny sapling (he is in disbelief that wooden Christmas trees still exist). Linus is unsure about Charlie Brown's choice, but Charlie Brown is convinced that all it needs is some decoration and it will be just right.

Linus and Charlie Brown return to the auditorium with the tree, only to be scorned by Lucy for disobeying her instructions and mocked by the other girls who, along with Snoopy, walk off laughing.

At his wit's end, Charlie Brown loudly asks if anybody knows what Christmas is all about. Linus says he does and, after walking to center stage, recites the Annunciation to the Shepherds from the

Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 8 through 14, as translated by the Authorized King James Version:

8 And there were in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and goodwill towards men."

Linus then walks back over to Charlie Brown and gently says, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

In the Spiritualist religion, Christ is viewed as a way shower, one who said in John 14:12

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

Charlie Brown quietly picks up the tree and walks out of the auditorium toward home, now determined not to let commercialism ruin the holiday. He stops at Snoopy's decorated doghouse, which now sports a blue ribbon for winning the display contest. He takes a large ornament from the doghouse and hangs it at the top of his tree, but the branch, seemingly unable to hold the ornament's weight, promptly droops to the ground. Believing he has killed the tree and that he has ruined everything as usual, Charlie Brown walks off in despair.

Linus and the others, realizing they were too hard on Charlie Brown, quietly follow him to Snoopy's doghouse. Linus admits he always liked the tree while gently propping the drooping branch back in its upright position and wraps his blanket around its base. When the others add the remaining decorations from Snoopy's doghouse to the tree, Lucy agrees that she likes the tree, too. They all start humming "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing".

Charlie Brown returns, surprised at the humming and the redecorated tree, and the gang all joyously shout "Merry Christmas, Charlie Brown!" They all begin to sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," and Charlie Brown joins them as the special ends.

So I have some questions.

Why did all of the other children buy into the commercialization of Christmas? I think that each of them didn't want to be an outcast, an outsider. They wanted to be happy and be part of something bigger than themselves. The corporations and media at the time were telling them that the key to happiness was consumerism, that following the herd was the only way to belong.

Charlie Brown and Linus were the only ones to avoid this trap. Charlie Brown wanted to fit in, but couldn't because in the back of his mind there was always something holding him back, something more.

And Linus was content as himself, willing to carry a blanket long after other kids had given them up. Why did Charlie Brown choose the weak sickly sapling? Because it was the only real tree in the lot. For him, it was a connection to something real, not the fake commercial shiny pink tree of crass commercialism. Why did Linus recite the Annunciation to the Shepherds? Because the shepherds are common folk, doing their duty to the best of their ability. They are characters that anyone can relate to. And then they witness an extraordinary experience, an angel followed by a heavenly host. This is how we common folk can witness an extraordinary experience, we just have to be open to it. Why did Charlie Brown take the sapling home? He wanted to protect it from the vicious world and give it a safe haven at his home, which is a metaphor for taking it into his heart. But when he put on the ornament causing the sapling to bend over, he thought that he had killed it and in turn killed his own reality and safety.



Linus, Lucy, and the rest of the children are shocked out of their commercialism stupor by Charlie Brown's heartbreak. They wake up to the reality of Charlie Brown's tree and its connection to the real world. They feel their feelings instead of what consumerism has programmed them to feel. They open to the joy and love that surrounds them. They realize that the Spirit of Christmas is the Spirit of Community and a connection to the Spirit of the Divine.

When this special first aired, I was six years old. I had only been to church around 6 or 8 times because my parents only went on Christmas Eve or Easter when my dad's parents would drag us along with them to save our souls. I didn't learn anything from those exposures to religion, but when I saw A Charlie Brown Christmas, in all of its black and white radiance, I recognized that I was a spiritual being having a human experience. It is the first time that I remember crying at a happy ending.

The love from Spirit, of Spirit, for Spirit pouring out of my heart made me feel that anything was possible. Since I was the only one in my family that had that reaction, I tucked it away for later. Although “later” took years to arrive, thankfully, it did. That was when I got sober and started the ascent on my spiritual path that led me to the Center of Enlightenment. We gather together at the Center of Enlightenment so that we may realize the Spirit of Community and experience a connection to the Spirit of the Divine.

I will remind you that A Charlie Brown Christmas is airing on ABC on Thursday, Dec. 20 at 8 pm.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for your attention.

Happy Holidays!