

Wonder at Christmas

This Advent and Christmas, I would love every child I know, to receive the gift of wonder. Not the excess of tinsel and paper but that experience of being swept up in something bigger than themselves, that certain experience of being lost, that in turn helps you more truly find yourself. Wonder is that lens where your life is found to be too small, and at the same time it opens you up to connect to the biggest most astounding things possible! You can see this pictured in the small figure of a child in the Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, standing in the centre of the Labyrinth that has been permanently placed into the pavement stones, looking up into an amazing array of brightly coloured ribbons that cascade into the space from the heights above. What a delight, what an amazing thing, what an extravagant and generous thing to create for anyone, let alone for this one singular child both lost and found in wonder.



This child will remember this moment for the rest of their lives. I however, do start wondering how many meetings this idea took to develop. Who took the concept to Church Council and addressed the health and safety issues of scurrying around the cathedral 's lofty ceiling structure? Who put up the budget for the ribbon and how many hands did it take to cut them to size, install them and get them so right, as if they belong? Mind you, this child cares very little for such concerns. Their eyes, heart and mind are full, and all of this, is surely just for them! Wonder arrives supported by generosity and joy. Wonder is contagious. It pushes up against customs and conventions, topples over arrogance and isolation, and undermines opinions, theories, hunches and beliefs. Wonder brings people together drawn out of pure delight. It is dangerously powerful, unable to be monitored or controlled, and prone to create extravagant acts of grace and generosity.

Clearly tinsel can't do this. Paper wrapping just falls apart at the touch! Christmas excess just ends up in a pile of unwanted debris! Wonder is most powerful when it is born out of love, a generosity writ large. So one possibility is that we as adults might be for the children in our lives, a place where they find wonder. Not just that moment when they scratch their heads trying to understand our eccentric behaviours, but more deeply as they learn from us, what it is to be truly human. I remember working out as a primary school child that my grandmother was a sad woman who missed her husband who died at the young age of 43. She was at times quite grumpy and at other times outrageous, joyful and funny, breaking all the rules our family had invented. In her vulnerability she was also a source of wonder, she amazed me at her resilience and the passionate ways she would let me know that I was loved. Wonderful wonder is always most eloquent when it is compressed into human form!

Be a true form of wonder to those you love.

Rev Rod Pattenden