

Grinched

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT
December 24, 2025 – A Message on Christmas Eve
Text: Luke 2:1-20

I don't know about your neighborhood this Christmas season but mine has what seems to me to be an over abundance of Grinch decorations. Inflatable Grinches of varying sizes are visible on most if not all of the side streets in my neighborhood. Some are huge! One I can think of is over 7 feet tall, or so it seems. My neighbor has an entire miniature Whoville on her front lawn! Yikes! I must admit, I never saw this Grinch craziness coming when I watched the animated cartoon version of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* when it first aired on television in 1966. Boris Karloff was the narrator and also voiced the Grinch himself. It was absolutely magical.

Dr. Seuss, the pen name of author and illustrator Theodor Geisel, accomplished the seemingly impossible of making a despicable fuzzy green character with a “heart two sizes too small”¹ into a creature who wasn't really scary but wasn't not scary either. I can still remember how the Grinch's face would contort into a smirking evil grin whenever he was about to do something unkind – like making his poor dog Max into his unwilling partner in stealing all the Whos' Christmas trees and gifts, stuffing them into his bag and onto his sled which Max had to then pull back up the mountain to his lair. In comparison to the *Charlie Brown* Christmas special of this same era, this one was downright odd.

I loved Dr. Seuss books and the Grinch as much as the next kid when I was little. But two things about the Whos' Christmas celebrations were always confusing to me. First, it did not escape my notice that going to church on Christmas Eve was never part of the Whoville Christmas festivities. Going to church on Christmas Eve is

¹ [How the Grinch Stole Christmas! - Wikipedia](#)

something I have done all my life. I literally don't remember a Christmas when I didn't go to church, and that includes the year my son was born on the day after Christmas! I was in early labor on Christmas Eve but I was there! Two services! The second thing that always puzzled me about the Whoville Christmas is that their singing around the town Christmas tree was nonsensical. The words were literally gibberish. Why, I wondered, when there were so many wonderful Christmas carols to sing! After reading up on Geisel, I now understand that he didn't want to get too tied with any one "religious" interpretation of Christmas so he literally tried to create a Christmas experience without really acknowledging why Christmas existed in the first place.² It was genius – and very disingenuous. And that, dear ones, happens all the time when it comes to Christmas.

This year especially, when it comes to Christmas, the simple truth is that we have all been Grinch-ed. Christmas has been stolen by unseen forces right out from under us and we've barely even noticed! Why do I say this? Well, for one thing, just look around. Have you noticed how distinctly un-Christmasy some people choose to decorate their homes? In my neighborhood, I've told you on another Sunday about the guy who had a landing strip on his roof for Santa's sleigh, blinking runway lights and all. That one's not there this year because our neighborhood is on one of the flight paths for landing at TF Green Airport and the FAA yelled at him. But, he still has the elf Ferris wheel out there. Yes, Grinch decorations are everywhere. As I mentioned earlier, my next door neighbor even has an entire representation of Whoville on her front yard. I also have a number of neighbors who have those giant 12 foot skeletons in front of their houses. They're there all year but now they are sporting Christmas lights and Santa hats. It's like they're dressing up death for Christmas. The season of light and life is too happy for them I guess.

² Ibid.

And of course there's the other guy just around the corner who has a super creepy display on his front porch year round – skeletons, etc. This includes a massive pit viper which he has permanently mounted to be at height of about 8 feet like it's getting ready to strike passers-by. The viper has a Santa hat on right now. Why? Just why...

So perhaps you see my point? We have been Grinched, dear ones. Of all these crazy decorations in my neighborhood, only one house has a nativity scene. Two of them actually. On the same lawn. One is a silhouette cut-out of the stable and the other is a plastic Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus in the manger nestled in the front part of the lawn, just in from the curb. Mary and the Baby Jesus are blond, inaccurate but at least they're there! I admit I do not have a creche on my front lawn. I have three scattered throughout my house, the big one right as you walk in the front door. But, none on the lawn. To me, a creche on the lawn has always seemed counter to the story it purports to tell of the birth of Baby Jesus in a shed, barely protected from the elements. I never wanted to have the Holy Family endure that again as a lawn decoration! But, that's me.

Yes, dear ones we have all been Grinched this year. So very much feels wrong in our country at this moment in time – impossibly different from how things felt just a year ago. Since none of us are billionaires like Jeff Bezos, we're worried about our investments, our savings and the cost of groceries to name a few. We're worried about a possible new war being started in Venezuela by us, the USA, for reasons unclear yet all too real. We're worried about ICE coming into schools and even churches. We're worried about mass shootings, even here in Rhode Island, even at an Ivy League school. We're worried about rising anti-Semitism and the hatred it reveals for one part of God's beloved family and our own brothers and sisters in faith. Yes, this Christmas I think there is little doubt that we have all been Grinched in more ways than one. The question for us becomes, then, what are we going to do about it? How are we going to move beyond

the grasp of the greedy Grinch alive and well right here and now? The answer to that question is easy to find in another Christmas story. Not the Grinch one. The other one. The original one. The one we read just a few moments ago in the Gospel of Luke.

When we know what we are looking at, we realize all the elements we encounter every day in our Grinchified world are right there. An imperial decree is the reason for the journey undertaken by the very pregnant Mary and her gentle loving Joseph. The government put them in this position as it did everyone else so by the time they made it to their designated registration location – Bethlehem – all the places to stay were already filled with weary travelers. And, we can also imagine, short on food as well as places to sleep. But, good news, the innkeeper told them. There's room in the stable out back! Go settle in there. It's warm at least. And the animals won't mind. So, to the inn they go and, Baby Jesus is born.

Indulge me for just a moment here to look beyond the lovely warm scene you are now imagining to let the reality of that location settle in. It was a stable, for animals, some of whom were still there. Have you ever been in any kind of outbuilding for animals? It smells. It might have been clean, but how clean could it be really? And, let's not forget it was dark. There was no electricity. No lamps. No cell phone flashlights. And you certainly can't build a fire in a stable, not for light or heat. I ask you to pause to remember this because in our heads, we always see a picture perfect scene of the nativity in the stable. There's plenty of light. Mary is serene staring at her new born son now placed in a manger, wrapped in cloths she remembered to bring with her. Joseph stands behind them both, protectively. It's like he knows they're about to be visited by shepherds and maybe even a few sheep trailing along behind them. Why? Because of the angels of course! Telling them about this long promised birth of the Messiah – in a stable, conceived in a miraculous way. My goodness! What a

lovely scene to behold! Family love, angel graces, shepherds' good will. Surely God is there.

Yes. God was. And God is. In the final analysis that is the real point of Christmas. God is with us – Emmanuel is born. Now, you might be wondering, who the heck is Emmanuel. His name keeps coming up and yet many of us have no idea who he is. Excellent question! Dear ones, Emmanuel is just another way of naming God only this one is unique to this moment. This moment when God takes on human flesh in the form of the most vulnerable of creatures – a newborn human baby. Why? Because God wanted to know what it was we humans face every day as we make our way through life. God wanted to experience the challenges of childhood, the all too human worry about food and shelter for a family. God wanted to understand what it meant to be human and, this dear ones, is nothing short of extraordinary. In the person of Jesus, born as a fragile infant, God surrendered the power and prestige of being God just to understand us – God's beloved people – better. God wanted to know what it was like to be sad and what it was like to be joyful. God wanted to know what it was like to have parents and friends. God wanted to know what it was like to be hated. God wanted to know what it would take to get all these people who drift away from religion to come back and discover for themselves just how much God loved them, has always loved them, will always love them.

Dear ones, that has always been the one true meaning of Christmas – that God loved us so much God was willing to give up being God knowing that meant death would be a reality even for him/her one day. God became us – that's what Christmas celebrates. All the decorations and the trees and the lights and the presents and the feasting – they're all just supposed to remind us of this one simple fact. Emmanuel comes – Jesus is born – a new way forward as God's beloved people begins to come into view. So in the craziness this time of year brings into our lives, our task is simple. We are to resist our

Grinchification by all the trappings of Christmas so easy to succumb to in order to have room for Emmanuel – God With Us – in our lives. This is no easy task, I know. I mean who doesn't love Rudolph or Christmas cookies or presents or lights or ... well, you get the point. Dear ones, we all love the happy parts of Christmas. All I'm suggesting is that you take the time to say hi to that baby in the manger and wish him a happy birthday. Thank Jesus for giving you the chance to get a whole new perspective on what it means to love God and work for God's justice for everyone. If you want to, you can even thank Baby Jesus for the Grinch. But please, no pit vipers with Santa hats. We have to draw the line somewhere.

Merry Christmas. Amen.