



“It's going to be different this year.” Dave was excited about heading to the sunny south for the holidays but had hesitations about Christmas being different. Different, that's usually code for something's missing. He said he wanted to talk, then reaching for a piece of fruitcake added, “but it won't be an argument.” An argument? I joined in the old seasonal tradition, whenever you fear a family discussion's going south, reach for fruitcake.

A distinguished looking gentleman with the longest gray beard I'd ever seen was also scooping up the rum-laced cake. “No need to be nervous” his voice was stilted and raspy. Nodding to Dave he reassured me, “He merely wants to know what you believe so he can figure out what he believes. It's understandable the boy has questions given all the terrorism and homelessness this Christmas.” As it turned out, the stranger was right.

No boy, Dave in his mid-forties had lots of questions. “Why should refugees get a free pass into Canada?” After all when he'd immigrated from Scotland he'd had to pay Immigration's fees and jump through all their hoops. “Wasn't I nervous terrorists would come in disguised as refugees?” Seems Dave's neighbour Jack was a Border Patrol officer who believed terrorism is a very real threat even in Canada. “Do you think they even like us?” An elevator-serviceman in buildings where residents were known to be new immigrants, Dave was often met with silent scowls. He was right, while we wouldn't argue over our differences, I didn't feel what he was feeling, fear his fears, or have his experiences. As I answered his questions about what I did feel, fear and believe he listened. Intently.

“It's his questions,” the visitor smoothed a frayed homespun wrap, “and his search for answers that make him a wise man. By the way, I'm Matthew.” The biblical author introduced himself like he'd just come from next door rather than the first century. “Wrote a story of wise men with questions, once. They were also searching for answers. We all were. Israel was struggling with growing numbers of refugees – Assyrians from the East. Gentiles, we called them.” Now I was the one listening. “Like Dave has Jack and America has Trump, we had the Pharisee party. They believed we needed to keep the culture pure, live in isolation.” He slumped in his chair as though deeply tired. “We, the Jesus followers, believed his teaching – love neighbour, stranger and enemy as much as yourself – was the way. In the story, astrologists following a star, searching for the one destined to be King were led to Jesus. My message, unifying love's the way to the future, is ageless.”

It wasn't a reminder to love the neighbour or stranger David was looking for. He loves his family and friends. He's not suspicious of Muslims. He works and plays rugby with people of all faiths and celebrates the diversity of his neighbours. “It's great,” he'd said, “as long as it doesn't affect me.” But this year there were no Christmas carols at his kids' school, no Merry Christmas in the stores. There was a river of refugees flooding across Europe and twenty five thousand destined for Canada. The country he'd chosen to come to and the life he loved was affected. Life was changing.

Matthew nodded, “Love's always challenged by change. Yet change is a given, evolution's the way of the world, stars move across the skies, and wise men follow them. Life's a camel ride in the dark. The challenge is to learn how to navigate by love.” Taking a second piece he said, “Not sweet Christmas-cake love. A deeper, cosmic kind of love.”

A deeper cosmic kind of love! What would that look like? Where does one begin to look? Suddenly there was in the kitchen a caravan of wise ones, scholars and scientists. Sitting with us at the table they opened their treasures and presented their gifts, each one an answer to my question, what and where is this deeper, cosmic love?

In “a new religion”. The voice spoke with authority. I surveyed our visitors all busily juggling for a piece of cake to see who had spoken. Astonished, I recognized Julien Huxley peering over his glasses at me. My surprise wasn't that the once famed founder of UNESCO was deceased since 1975 but that he'd been an adamant atheist in his lifetime and cared about religion at all. He explained, “Atheists don't reject Christianity because it is too difficult but because it's a religion of heaven and humans” and so disregards Earth. Being a retired clergy from a fading denomination I was all ears to hear his vision of a new religion. It's “one that accepts the Earth as the science of evolution reveals it and loves it for what it reveals about the nature of love”. Earth as revelation, that would be a new religion.

“And what Mother Nature reveals”, continued the Zoologist brushing crumbs from his tweeds, “is inter-relatedness. Just look at the way water, air, soil, plant, and mineral are uniquely different but integral parts of Earth's life. No matter where you look, plant, animal, or human there is a capacity to extend care beyond itself and time. Everything nurtures something else to create more life and more future.” He took another bite before continuing. “It's cosmic as well. Every day the planet captures photons from Sun and thanks to the process of photosynthesis we have the flour and fruit in this delicious cake.” I smiled imagining this brave new church like a fruitcake where scientists talked of inter-relatedness and religious spoke of cosmic love, where David and parents pessimistic about their children's future sat beside grandparents like me optimistic about life in a loving universe.

“In evolution itself!” According to the second wise man, wearing a clerical collar but sounding more like a scientist, this was where I'd find cosmic love or “love energy” as he called it. “The whole evolutionary process is an incarnation of love” he was regarding his slice of the fruit and nut confectionery like it was the holy host. In his lilting french accent Teilhard de Chardin began to quote scripture, “Love is God made..” He paused. Love is God made flesh, I finished. After remarking on my first century theology he started again, “Love is God become element.” His theology had dramatically evolved.

I chewed for a bit on what difference an understanding of the evolutionary process as an incarnation of love would make in our conversation that was not an argument. With love as the nature of the universe and “the unified field in which everything existed” added the Jesuit paleontologist, love would be unlimited. There would be no Canadian or Iranian, no Christian or Muslim, no citizen or refugee, no wheat or cherry. Everyone and everything could be regarded as an emergence of love. The difference with such a consciousness, I realized could be evolutionary

David appeared skeptical. I reminded him of Martin Luther King Jr's march for civil rights. Of Nelson Mandela becoming President of a post-Apartheid South Africa. Emergence is the cosmic drive to resolve tension and bring peace and order out of chaos and conflict. It happens, I said. Hadn't it brought from molten galactic rock our own planetary home! I ventured further. Perhaps the current violence was the cradle of a more complex expression of love. What would that look like, he wanted to know.

Bolstered by a third slice I got personal. First, we would no longer frame one another in the age old adversarial roles of mother in law and son in law. We would see one another first and foremost as incarnations of love. Next he might see the displaced women in the apartments he serviced, women new to Canada, unable to understand him, nervous of all men in uniforms also as incarnations of love. Taking his fourth slice, he smiled as if to say that would take a while. I smiled back trusting the wise man's treasure, the cosmic power of emergence, was already at work.

“Have you looked within?” The woman, from her crown of white hair to the tips of her black patent pumps shone like the sun, from her core. “After all, each of us has fourteen billion years of radiance within us. Everyone and everything's an expression of that primal light and unifying love that's Universe.” Barbara Marx Hubbard's laugh lit up the room.

The Mother of Conscious Evolution, as she was called, was aglow with the success of the webinar she'd hosted during the Paris Climate Talks. “The internet enabled thousands to synchronize their intentions for a sustainable planet. I called it psychic activism.” She laughed delighted at her creative turn of phrase. “Each vision, hope and prayer typed into the computers appeared on their screen as part of a band of light circling the Earth. I called it the Amplified.” Using technology the octogenarian turned the radiance within, our personal potential she called it, into a mass resonance of love for the future. It was brilliant!

It came like a bolt out of the blue. The cosmic love I'd been searching for was the radiance within. Barbara was searching the goodies plate, “Found one,” she said biting into a peanut butter ball. The mother of five, grandmother, author, speaker, political activist, and now internet teacher dismissed any praise for all she'd accomplished: “The incessant activity of universe is to radiate.” As to her ability to create language that describes our new powers in this new age of communication, she smiled and said, “Radiance is the primary language of the universe. It's the way Universe gets things done.” Her words lit a fire deep within us.

Suddenly we saw our search for what was missing in a Christmas of sunny holidays and desperate refugees in a new light. Barbara, searching for a second peanut butter ball, said we'd had an evolution of consciousness. David and I would say the wise woman had shown us the gift and challenge of radiance, the way Universe was working to get things done through us.

Then a fourth voice, with a Spanish accent and velvet with empathy joined in, "What exactly do you feel drawn to do?" The speaker seemed deeply drawn to David and spoke directly to him. "Like you, I ask myself, is it possible to change the direction of the world? Can we get out of this spiral of sorrow and death? Can we learn to walk and live in the ways of peace?" Both men it would seem faithfully followed the allurements of their questions. The elder was a wise man.

I was stunned. I hadn't expected a fourth wise man. But more than that, I hadn't expected Pope Francis to be in my son-in-law's kitchen in Oshawa. What would be his treasure? He carried no wooden chest jingling with coins nor a precious vase harbouring a priceless perfume. His suit was dusty, from his trip to the middle east, he said. He'd gone there taking a Rabbi and an Imam on his pilgrimage for peace. His jacket ruffled, from a day of prayer and fasting after terrorists' attack on Paris, he explained. His shoulders were rounded like he carried the pain of the world. It was the sixth mass extinction of species. So he'd projected their images on the Vatican walls during the climate conference. Clearly he was a man of heart and soul. His gift would not be of the material world. As with all treasures, we would discover the papal father's gift in the most unexpected place.

"Non, gracias". Francis, a man of simple needs graciously declined when offered the plate of fruitcake. He would not be distracted from his more profound desires. Goodwill among all, the reason for his visit. Peace and justice for the poor, it had called him to his vocation. Hunger for a future Christianity with greater respect for other religions and the natural world. Day by day it pulled him along his life journey. Then he offered us the invitation to say with him, "Yes, we want it now!"

One by one the table of seekers felt the compassionate curve of gravitational attraction, the longing for belonging. Stronger than our cynicism or resignation. Deeper than our mistrust of strangers and fear of enemies. His invitation drew out our forgotten and buried desires for union, unity, and one world at peace. One minute we were unaware of it. Then like a nickel, when a magnet is held close springs toward it, our answer was there. "Yes, we want it now!" Some said it aloud, some silently, all with awe and wonder that the gift he had to give us was allurements itself. Then he asked again, "And what exactly do you feel drawn to do to create the world you long for?"

David and I sank into our chairs. Our search for what was missing was over. The table was laden with gifts waiting to be opened. From Huxley, inter-relatedness, life's need for diversity stronger than our illusion of separateness. From Teilhard emergence, waiting at the edge of every conflict in all chaos to bring peace and order. Radiance, the capacity by which every thing in the universe can display its magnificence and work like Barbara to create a future that works for all. And lastly, freed by Francis, allurements. This was not only our forgotten longing for unity and belonging but the means by which we could bring it about. These powers of the universe, our own creative strategies of existence, were unexpected treasures. Then as suddenly as they'd come the wise ones having presented their gifts, were gone, returned to whatever part of the unified field of love from which they'd come. It was just Dave and I with our different passions, his for politics and mine for religion, not arguing but smiling over a plate of crumbs at the kitchen table, rich with what we needed to travel different roads into a new year.