

KEEPING CHRISTMAS

It is a good thing to observe Christmas day.
The mere marking of times and seasons, when people agree to stop work
and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom.
It helps one to feel the supremacy of the common life over the individual life.
It reminds each of us to set our own little watch, now and then,
by the great clock of humanity which runs on sun time.

But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day,
and that is, keeping Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people,
and to remember what other people have done for you;
to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world;
to put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance,
and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground;
to see that your fellowmen are just as real as you are,
and try to look behind their faces to their hearts hungry for joy;
to own that probably the only good reason for your existence
is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life;
to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe,
and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness --
are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and the desires of little children;
to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old;
to stop asking how much your friends love you,
and ask yourself whether you love them enough;
to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear in their hearts;
to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want,
without waiting for them to tell you;
to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke,
and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you;
to make a grave for your ugly thoughts and a garden for your kindly feelings,
with the gate open --

are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world --
stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death --
and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago
is the image and brightness of the Eternal Love?

Then you can keep Christmas.

And if you can keep it for a day, why not always?
But you can never keep it alone.

- Henry Van Dyke