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The universal lessons from Jesus

by [Editorial Board](#)

FOR SOME years now, around Christmastime, there has been a pseudo-controversy going on — promoted if not wholly created by various talky people on radio and TV — about a “war on Christmas,” seen as a concerted effort by the disciples of secularism to eliminate or ignore religious elements of the holiday. Now, with a new administration coming to power, the war apparently has been won — by the righteous. “You can say again, ‘merry Christmas’ because Donald Trump is now the president,” [proclaimed Corey Lewandowski](#), a former aide to President-elect Trump, who has himself voiced similar sentiments.

Actually, we’ve been at liberty to say “merry Christmas” for quite a few centuries; this isn’t like the early Christians emerging from the Roman catacombs into the bright light of freedom. But it’s true that social pressure arising from the effort to avoid giving offense to people of other faiths, or of none, has led to some silly evasions and to a great many spare and uninspiring greeting cards. Probably, though, no amount of training was ever going to condition many of us to replace “office Christmas party” in everyday speech with “holiday party” (the amount of misbehavior being about the same at either). After centuries of use, wishing someone a merry Christmas has become a fairly innocuous statement of good cheer, with widespread appeal.

And much of the message in the Gospels does have such appeal. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew, a product of centuries of Jewish thought and debate over the deepest questions of life. He is revered as a prophet by Muslims, and his teachings are respected and honored by millions who do not accept the idea of his divinity in any way. But these teachings are also often honored in the breach. This Christmas might be a good time to give a thought to passages such as these from the Book of Matthew:

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, Blessed are the merciful . . . the pure of heart . . . the peacemakers.” Even more timely, perhaps, are these words of Jesus:

“ ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ ”

A few hundred miles north of little Bethlehem was the great ancient trading center of Aleppo, like Bethlehem a part of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus' birth. Today much of the city is in ruins, thousands of its inhabitants murdered, maimed, dispersed to any place that will take them and to some that will not. Few of these strangers are being welcomed by our own country — fewer than by our far less populous neighbor, Canada, whose people have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to aid and support them. Blessed indeed are they, for understanding that the true meaning of Christmas is more than a jolly greeting.

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