

Christmas Eve 2016

This corner of S. Main Street is a busy place for a church to be.

Lots of cars pass by every day, with their drivers paying varying levels of attention to the task of driving, to their phones, to their children in the backseat.

You can hear them go by if you are seated in the rear of the church.

I am glad our lot is built up a bit or I expect that by now more than one car would have come out of the roadway and hit this building.

As it is, I have heard more than one accident on Main Street, screeching tires, a thud, metal scraping against metal.

So far, the injuries have not been great.

We hope or mean for Christmas to be peaceful.

A time of reconciliation, acceptance, and the renewal of relationships.

Silent night, holy night, all is calm; the snow lay on the ground.

But you might also picture it as a collision, with the excitement, drama, and danger that comes in those. Stock car drivers revel in trading some paint at Darlington and Talladega; they are not the only ones who find a moment of confrontation exhilarating.

Football players love to hit someone.

All of us who have desired and found another with whom to share life know the wonder and danger of bringing together two sets of expectations, two histories, and two bodies.

Grown children home for the holidays; adult siblings assembling; in-law dynamics.

Collisions are all around us; perhaps all are dangerous but some are life-giving.

Those with ears to hear will notice the many oppositions,

the conceptual collisions that run through the readings and hymns of Christmas.

In the still silence of the little town of Bethlehem, Phillips Brooks saw the hopes and fears of all the years meeting in the birth of Christ.

All that had been feared; that God might come; that God might never come and

All that had been hoped that God might come; that God might never come;

these all collided in his coming into the world.

Or remember the words that open the Gospel of John, that Jesus was born among us as bearer of grace and truth.

Grace and truth do not necessarily together.

Grace is unearned forgiveness and relational wholeness;

truth is what they put on your report card and paycheck;

the hard, cold figures that seem to tell you what you are worth.

Somehow these collide and resolve (?) in the birth of Christ.

The proper response to this birth is also an unexpected collision, as we sing in *Joy to the World*; let heaven and nature sing, heaven and nature sing.

That was and is an unexpected union.

The irreconcilable division between the realms of heaven and earth, between angels and humanity, between the sacred and the profane has often structured the way we have thought the universe was arranged.

Death was the only way from here to there, but this birth showed us another passage, and through that passage, a new song is sung together.

Wasn't it Isaac Newton who showed us that for every action, there is an equal and lesser reaction?

If your Ford Expedition, going 50, hits my Honda Accord, going 30, I will be the one getting a new car out of it.

The collision of God and humanity that has happened, that is happening in Jesus, is something like that. We have been blinded-sided by divine love, overtaken by holiness, spun around and left staring into the possibility of eternal life.

All that seemed opposed, the countervailing forces of the universe; grace and truth; heaven and earth; humanity and God; are met in this Lord Jesus.

And the greater force, from God's side of the collision, has enfolded the lesser and transformed it.

It is a non-violent collision, of a different order than a Nascar race incident or a defensive stand on the football field.

Indeed, the laws of physics and nature do not apply.

Something before then unheard of and since then not seen again has come to pass.

We emerge tonight from a season of collision, between our Christmases past and this Christmas, which may feel like something less than the best.

From the collision of our faith with a culture that has plenty of use for that faith (or some strange version of it), this time of year;

from the collision of our identities as consumers and our hope to be, most fundamentally, the people of God.

May the dust and debris of these collisions settle around you, in expectant silence, as we come, even rush, to the altar of God, offering our humanity to

the one who holds all things,

Jesus, the Word made Flesh, who waits to draw you near again.