

*Seeds for Celebration*

*for the*

**JUBILEE!** *Community*

*Asheville, North Carolina*

*Autumn, 2009*

*Via Negativa*

*Sorrow Songs*

## VIA NEGATIVA – Sorrow Songs

There are over 5000 of them. The authorship of almost all of them is unknown. Their musical structure forms the basis of the blues, soul, jazz, rock and roll, hip-hop – nearly all contemporary popular music. They were composed by slaves and passed down in the oral tradition. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they nearly disappeared from the American musical scene. In the last hundred years, they have been called, “African/American spirituals.” Originally (we are fairly certain) they were called “Sorrow Songs.”

According to singer, actor and musicologist, Joe Carter (who died in 2006), the Sorrow Songs of the American slaves form a body of music unlike any other in our U.S history. They are more than simply notes, words and rhythm. They are rooted deeply in pain and suffering. They are almost always about death. And yet, they express a vibrant, effervescent and almost magical conviction that there is more going on than the misery – more going on than the torment and the affliction. These Sorrow Songs reverberate with an enchanted affirmation that there is more happening in this life than circumstances that surround us. Sorrow songs consistently declare that, finally, well-being does not depend upon an outside state of affairs.

Sorrow Songs are not the same as Gospel Music. Gospel tends to be more upbeat and rooted in religious terminology. Sorrow Songs can be upbeat; but they are inextricably grounded in agony and distress; and their religious imagery is clearly less doctrinal and much more personal than Gospel songs. Slaves – according to Joe Carter – were not comfortable with Christianity, but imminently in love with God and Jesus.

Not only that, but the Sorrow Songs were not just for performance or singing in church. The songs, in the singing, offered a magical kind of spell that took the singers to freedom – took the singers home – took the singers to be with Jesus – on “the other side.”

Every autumn at JUBILEE!, we celebrate the Via Negativa. We celebrate the dark side: the pain, the suffering, the emptiness. Beginning at the autumnal equinox, for nine or ten Sundays, we focus on those parts of our lives, which do not bring us joy. Which do not bring us delight. Or happiness. Or pleasure. We focus on the sorrow and distress, which inevitably comes into our lives. Into all of our lives.

Now why in hell do we do this? Why do we purposefully bring up all the crap? Why do we sing, chant and yabber about the parts of our lives, which we wish-to-God didn't exist?

Good grief! Isn't it better to leave well-enough alone? Like it or not, we are each and all forced to deal with divorce or rejection, with cancer, heart disease or some debilitating malady - with loss of jobs, with failure, depression, broken dreams, despair and death. We deal with those kinds of things all our lives, for God's sake!

Yes, we do! And it is precisely because of that, that we do what we do, at JUBILEE!

One of our affirmations is that The Holy is found in everything. Everything. Every thing. Every friggin' thing. So, like the Sorrow Songs, we don't stick our heads in the sand and pretend that bad things don't happen. Rather, like the Sorrow Songs, we face our struggles head on. We sing with our struggles, dance with our anguish, sit in silence with our loneliness. And always – all ways – like the Sorrow Songs, we affirm that there's more going on than we can see. There is more happening in our darkness than we can even imagine. Like the Sorrow Songs, we sing out the hope that The Holy is in the midst of it all; and we will find our way home to freedom.

- Howard

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS****September 27, 2009 – I BEEN ‘BUKED**

Exodus 32: 7-14

*Now let me alone so that my wrath may burn against them and... consume them.*

Luke 15: 1-10

*This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.*

Nobody likes rejection. Nobody likes to be kicked around, pounded down and pummeled to a pulp. You've got to be a card-carrying masochist to enjoy the kind of abuse of hearing yourself called a scumbag or sicko, a tool, twirp, twit – a hairball in the bathtub drain of life. Whether it's getting turned down for a date, dumped by a mate, losing a job or not getting invited to the party, being rebuffed or rebuked sucks.

There are times, of course, when - because we feel so poorly about ourselves – we seem to seek out rejection, interpret benign behavior as abuse or perk up at the slightest put down.

There are times, also, when we - knowingly or unknowingly - open ourselves to rejection by placing our goofy butts in precarious places, be they social, financial, emotional or relational. A beer-bellied TV junkie ain't gonna look good in the local triathlon. Mr. Hetero-Macho-Man just might get a little slam-dunk in a gay bar.

But, even when we're doing our best to live a kind and generous life, we get scorned. Disrespected. Ridiculed. No matter who we are or how we live, there are going to be people who take us down and experiences that leave us feeling unwanted and forsaken.

Misery does, of course, love company; and it can be assuring to know that we all go through this one way or another. But, finally, it hurts; and we hear ourselves singing our own sorrow song; and just maybe, in the singing we remember that there's still a tender rhythm and a melody that's all part of the show.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS****October 4, 2009 – WADE IN THE WATER (Blessing of the Animals)**

Psalm 148

*Praise the Lord from the earth.*

Matthew 6: 25-34

Consider the lilies...

Sometimes we want to run from it all. When we begin to feel like life's punching bag, we now and again choose to hop the first fast freight and chug our sweet cheeks out of town. Fast freights come in various guises, of course. Thrills, sex, television, malls, money, drugs and alcohol can truck your sweet tootie out of your misery for a moment or two. But, each of them usually end up dumping you back on the poop pile feeling even worse than before.

At times, it's best to simply face whatever it is that's taking you down – acknowledge that your life has somehow gotten plopped in the crapper - and not just floating around in the crapper, but in full flush. Facing your problems like this can give a whole different twist to the tune, "Wade in the Water."

Animals are good for reminding you that there's more going on than your misery. Animals have a way of reconnecting you with a bigger picture, a broader horizon, a much more vast panorama of possibility. Animals can remind you that no matter how bad it is, there's still a tree to climb, a lap to sleep in, a butt to sniff. Just spending time with an animal can help you realize that life is a whole heap bigger than whatever it is you're going through. More ways to behave, flavors to savor and scents to sniff. Spending time with an animal may be one of the best ways to deal with sorrow – one of the best ways to wade much more deeply in the water.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS****October 11, 2009 - MOTHERLESS CHILD**

Amos 8: 4-7

*Hear this, you who trample on the needy...*

Luke 16: 19-31

*Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed.*

We all know that there's enough food on this planet to feed every human being every day; but it doesn't happen. Starvation and malnutrition are continuous and relentless. We are all fully aware that there are enough resources in this world to provide safe housing, substantial clothes and basic medical care for every one of our species; but vast populations go without any of it.

A case could be made that the so-called "industrialized" or "developed" countries have essentially abandoned the so-called "third world" or "developing" nations unless those nations have oil or other natural resources deemed necessary for industry to survive. Aid from the "developed" world, is – at best - token, in comparison to what is spent on the military, on Wall Street bailouts or even dog food. Did you know that the average American dog owner spends nearly \$13,000 on his or her dog over the course of the animal's lifetime? And, according to the 2007 census, there were 72 million pet dogs and 82 million cats in the U.S.

In a very real sense, large numbers of our species have forsaken much larger numbers of our kind. But, in the process, we have all found ourselves cut off from each other – cut off from a sense of unity, of global concord, of unconditional compassion.

All humans have a common sorrow song to sing. All humans have experienced abandonment, collectively and individually. We know this song. We all know in some profoundly expansive way, what it means to be an orphan.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS****October 18, 2009 – EZEKIEL SAW THE WHEEL**

Habakkuk 1: 1-3, 2:1-4

*The righteous live by their faith.*

Luke 17: 1-10

*If you had faith the size of a mustard seed...*

You can have faith in the sun coming up, faith in the moon waxing and waning, faith in the tides, faith in the change of seasons, faith that life will go on. You can have faith in all kinds of expressions of the world's natural order.

You can have faith in your child or faith in your parents, faith in your siblings or faith that Uncle Arv will again get drunk and obnoxious at the next family reunion.

You can have faith in life after death, faith in Jesus, Mohammed, Brahma, Shiva, The Great Spirit or the Grand Wahoo. You can have faith that all shall be well or faith that all life will be hell. There are some who have faith in the existence of aliens, truth of conspiracy theories, that there is no global warming and Rush Limbaugh is our savior.

Faith is, of course, all about how you assume things are and how you expect things to be. Faith admits up front, however, that there ain't no guarantees. Just because you have faith in something don't make it so.

So, when it comes down to it, what good is faith? It could be argued that faith is just one more way of deluding ourselves instead of simply accepting things for what they are. Why don't we just lose our goofy irrational pipe dreams and let things be?

No good answer here; but spend a little time on a cancer ward or in Alcoholics Anonymous or a grief support group and you hear again and again: faith can get you through the hard times. Faith can deal with sorrow head-on. Faith can light even the darkest path.

Admittedly, faith is unreasonable. Crazy. Illogical. Sort of like life.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS****October 25, 2009 – DRY BONES**

Ruth 1:1-19

*Where you go, I will go.*

Luke 17: 11-19

*Your faith has made you well.*

We all like the idea of rising from the ashes. We all want to be the Phoenix. We are keen on the concept of picking up the pieces of our lives and creating something new. Just because our relationship has gone kaboom, our job has melted down, our hopes and dreams have hit the landfill and our self-concept has been through the shredder, we truly want to believe that we can scoop it all up, get a bathtub of crazy glue and build it all over again.

However, there are times when we feel more like a Humpty-Dumpty than a Phoenix. We are pretty sure that all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put our splattered shambles together again. Whether we have fallen apart because of our own stupid choices, unavoidable accidents or the luck of the draw, there are times when we are fairly certain that not even the most skilled artisans could piece our pieces back into even a recognizable mosaic.

That's where that goofy old item called "trust" often waltzes in. Trust can't be owned, borrowed or rented. It can't be proved or disproved. Trust likes to show herself when you're lying out under the stars or lying in the arms of a true love. Trust can sashay into your living room with a song on the radio or a chirp from a night cricket. Trust and The Infinite seems to hang out together; so whenever you're doodling with one, the other almost always shows herself. Like all things infinite, Trust has a way of reminding you – re – minding you – that you can't know it all. Won't ever know it all. Shan't and shouldn't even think you know it all.

And, of course, if that's the case, then anything's possible. Even the shambles of your own skanky life might somehow reform themselves. That's the message of all sorrow songs.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS****November 1, 2009 – STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER**

Genesis 32: 22-32

*I will not let you go unless you bless me.*

Luke 18:1-8

*I will grant her justice so she will not wear me out.*

"I don't know exactly what a prayer is," writes poet, Mary Oliver, "I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass, how to be idle and blessed."

We all pray one way or the other. To gods, to government, to the lottery, to the powers that be, to the night wind, to our lucky stars. The most militant atheist prays to something that he'll find a parking place before he circles the block for the 6<sup>th</sup> time.

We pray silent prayers of thankfulness without words, without religious notions, without even thinking at a dazzling moonrise over the mountains or a child sleeping soundly. We pray prayers of petition to gods or doctors or miraculous spirits when we sit with a deathly-ill loved one.

And with all these prayers floating around, you gotta wonder if some of them bump into you now and again. You could speculate that maybe some of these prayers that are being cast about from so many points of view just might stir your chowder or season your gumbo. If we are part human, part Divine – an alloy of time, space and infinity – then some of these zillions of prayers

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that are being murmured, mumbled, sung, shouted or silently and unknowingly expressed might just dance around, over, under and through us.

Whether we're the consciously praying type or not, it just might be that we are unknowing recipients of countless prayers of gratitude, healing, blessing, strength and hope. Every moment of every day.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS**

**November 8, 2009 – I WANNA BE READY**

Deuteronomy 10: 12-22

*Walk in all God's ways.*

Luke 18: 9-14

*All who humble themselves will be exalted.*

Most parents would agree: No one is ever really, totally ready to have a baby. Likewise, it could be assumed that no baby is ever entirely ready to be born into this world. It would be absolutely understandable to begin every day chanting, "I'm not ready. I'm not ready."

How in the world could anyone possibly be ready – prepared, organized, geared up and primed - for events and experiences which haven't happened yet? Incidents and occurrences about which we know nothing? How you gonna be ready for the unknown?

Since 1907, the Boy Scouts of America, have had the same motto: Be prepared. In 1912, Juliet Low began the Girls Scouts with the same motto. But, how do you do that?

For scouts – both boy and girl - being prepared simply means keeping the body strong, the mind alert, learning skills along the way and paying attention. Being prepared comes down to living the scouting way. Walking the walk. Taking it one step at a time and keeping your loose-goosey butt in whatever path seems to be taking you where you want to go.

No one can prove to you that the path of love, forgiveness and compassion will get you where you want to go. Nor is there any evidence that that path of love will prepare you for whatever might happen. But according to a whole heap of the folks who have attempted to walk that path, two things seem clear: 1) The path ain't easy; 2) It gets you where your heart longs to be.

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS**

**November 15, 2009 – THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD**

Exodus 34: 5-9

*Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity...*

Luke 19:1-10

*He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.*

I remember being taught in my childhood Methodist Sunday School that Jesus lived a sinless, blameless life. Never screwed up. Never made stupid choices. Never wrecked the family car, never used a fake I.D., never smoked dope, never cheated on his girlfriend, never did anything that his daddy didn't want him to do. Of course, you gotta admit, when your daddy is God, that's some serious pressure.

I bought into that goof-free-Jesus idea for awhile. But, the more I read about the boy, the more I began to think that he had to be a screw-up. He had to have bumble-blundered pretty regularly or he wouldn't have had such a good handle on how to live.

It takes a monumental landfill of hurting and being hurt to realize that forgiveness is the best medicine. It takes a long history of causing boo-boos and being boo-boo'ed to realize the value of compassion. It takes many times of missing the boat to recognize the inestimable value of booking passage on the good ship, "Love."

My guess is that the Bible-story writers got it wrong. Or lied. Or just didn't know. I'm speculating that Jesus went through some hard times between the ages of 12 and 30 – that period when we know nothing about his life. I'm thinking that maybe he had some unpleasant times – screwing up and being screwed by life – all of which enabled him to become such a fine teacher about living. Enabled him to be someone to whom almost anyone - who has ever hurt or been hurt - can connect. Maybe that's why so many call him, "Prince of Peace."

**VIA NEGATIVA: SORROW SONGS**

**November 22, 2009 - SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT**

1 Chronicles 29: 10-13

*Blessed are you, o Lord...*

Luke 20: 27-38

*God is Lord not of the dead, but of the living. To God, all are alive.*

What if there's no such thing as "after-life?" No such thing as "before life?" What if it's all just "life?" What if the questions, "Where do we come from and where are we going?" are irrelevant?

I know, I know. That is one of those questions that you ask when you're with a group of nerdy college friends around a pitcher of beer sometime after midnight. Philosophy and religion majors love that kind of stuff. Frat boys have better things to do.

But, if we are indeed sailing on our little blue boat through an infinite sea with never a harbor or port, you gotta wonder if time is just an idea; and infinity really is what it's all about. Is it possible that our species invented the concept of time just to give us all something to hang on to?

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Most world religions look to something – gods, goddesses, revelations, ideas, enlightenment – which stands outside of time. Whether it be Allah, Yahweh, Shiva, Ambika, Buddha, The Great Mystery, The Ultimate Nothing or The Grand Wahoo, all of these critters are timeless. They don't live and die. They're hanging out in The Infinite Café somewhere on the outskirts of Eternalville.

And the followers of these wild and wooly religions seek out those unseen infinite beings and worship them as ultimate – the final word – the top dog. As if to say that every religious follower somehow senses that there's more going on than we can ever think. More going on than beginnings and endings, up and down, on and off, birth and death. When St. Augustine said, "My heart is restless till it rests in Thee," maybe Thee is simply The Infinite.

# A.H.S.C.K.N.Y.E: Outside the Box

## (Advent/Hanukkah/Solstice/Christmas/Kwanzaa New Years/Epiphany)

### AHSCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX

**November 29, 2009 – OUTSIDE THE KNOWLEDGE BOX (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent)**

Psalm 80: 1-7

*Let thy face shine that we may be saved.*

Mark 13: 33-37

*You do not know when...*

You can color outside the box or live on the edge. You can move it off the dance floor, depart the text, take it out there or get on your pony and ride. So many ways to leave the well-worn path behind, to find your highway in the sky or take the road less traveled. So many ways to follow your heart instead of the crowd. Or, in the words of the original motto of Starship Enterprise - say it with me: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.

The holiday season before us – the next five weeks – is based on some of the most outside-the-box experiences our species has yet to come up with. We will celebrate a young girl being impregnated by a Divine Spirit. We will celebrate an oil lamp staying lit for eight days with barely enough oil to sauté an anchovy. We will celebrate the longest night of the year when we decorate our homes with evergreens and mistletoe to keep the spirits of darkness and death away. We will celebrate the appearance of a huge star and singing angels to announce the birth of a god/baby. We will celebrate *umoja*, which means, “I am we” or “I am because we are.” We will celebrate three astrologers who followed a star a long, long way, to find a baby they thought was to be king.

We call these days, “The Holy Days” or “The Holidays.” They are times when we are reminded that most of life – most of the important parts of life – reside far outside the realms of our knowledge. These holy days are there to trigger our awareness that, as useful as knowledge might be, it ain’t the whole story.

### AHSCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX

**December 6, 2009 – OUTSIDE THE TIME & SPACE BOX**

Psalm 85

*Faithfulness will spring up from the ground.*

Mark 1: 1-8

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*

“Life is like a roll of toilet paper,” goes the bathroom wisdom, “the closer you get to the end, the faster it seems to go.” True. When you are 10 years old, 1 year is 1/10 of your life. When you are 50 years old, 1 year is 1/50 of your life. So, when you’re fifty, the year seems to go by 5 times faster than when you were ten.

We all know that, sometimes, when you lie out under the stars or get “lost” in a book, a concert, a meal or a session of love-making, time can scoot by at the speed of light. Likewise, when you’re waiting for the end of boring class or the end of a dull workday or the end of a tedious conversation, time gets real lazy and can stretch out until a moment feels like a month.

Some call it, “time distortion.” Some call it evidence that time is consciously malleable. Whatever you call it, the holidays kick it in high gear. The stories of Mary & Joseph, the stories of the Jews, the Maccabees and the oil lamp, the tales of dark spirits on the longest night are told and retold as if they had never been told before.

To anyone who is intent on celebrating the holidays, the ancient tales become far more than old yarns and legends. When we re-enact the nativity scene or light the menorah or bring evergreens into the house, it’s as if these old stories are happening again right here in our presence. Which is part of the magic of the holiday season. 2000 years of time get squished into a mystical momentary morsel. Of course, when the family descends on you like locusts, the holidays can feel like they last at least 2000 years.

All in all, these holiday celebrations seem to point to one unavoidable and inescapable principle: There’s far more going on than time and space. Or, as one frog said to another, “Time’s fun when you’re having flies.”

**AHCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX****December 13, 2009 – OUTSIDE THE FEAR BOX****(Hanukah begins sundown, December 11)**

Psalm 146: 5-9

*The Holy One lifts up those who are bowed down.*

Luke 1: 26-37

*Do not be afraid.*

Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Doubt is faith's quality control. Doubt keeps faith from getting smeared with superstitious smegma, cluttered with kooky claptrap or wasted with wildly-weird woo-woo.

Doubt is not the opposite of faith; but if there is an opposite, a good case could be made for fear. Not that fear is always necessarily bad. Healthy fear can keep your sweet butt out of the E.R., out of jail and out of the crematorium. Healthy fear can keep you from keep you from walking across the interstate at rush hour, standing on your head on your Harley at 50 miles an hour or doing anything after drinking and shouting, "Hey, ya'll, watch this!"

On the other hand, a life guided by fear can keep you from faith better than bad breath and body odor can keep you from getting a date. When you live in fear and allow fear to call the shots, there's no room for trust. No room for hope. No room for confidence. Fear pops the faith balloon and kills the party. Allowing each decision and turn in life to be directed by fear, inevitably leads you to a tiny walled-in cell. A prison where your faith-fed soul can starve.

If the holidays are anything, they are a carnival of faith. A festival of joyful expectation. A salute to infinite possibility. The holidays are a celebration that we never, ever need to live our lives boxed in by fear.

**AHCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX****December 20, 2009 – OUTSIDE THE SECURITY BOX****(Winter Solstice is 12:47 p.m. EST, December 21)**

Psalm 89: 1-4

*I have made a covenant with my chosen one.*

Luke 1: 39-47

*Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*

"Security is the waiting room," writes The Reverend Tom Robbins, "it's the lobby. Not only do you have the wring libretto, you're stuck in the lobby and missing the show."

Don't you find it interesting that, despite the recent economic earthquakes, eruptions and meltdowns, we still call stocks and bonds, "securities." We still carry around the impossible idea that this wumpy, willy-nilly financial system - whatever financial system - can provide anything akin to security.

Security is finally, of course, a state of mind. If you feel secure because you hold 1000 shares of Sweetcheeks - Makers of Holistic Hemorrhoid Helpers - then you may well be able to rest at night. But, to assume that security has any guarantee, is blatantly ludicrous.

The holidays remind us that what we call "security" is exceptionally illusive. The holidays sing and celebrate that as yucky and tenuous life may be, underlying it all is an infinite holy mystery - a mystery which offers blessing upon blessing - a mystery which offers compassion and love - a mystery in which we have no promises, but rather a regular assurance that somehow, all shall be well.

During the holidays, we light lots of candles - candles to dispel the darkness - candles to stir our memory - candles to enhance the magic. Candle flames are, at best, ephemeral. Short-lived. Gone with the slightest puff or breeze. No security there. But candles help us make it through the night, can light our path, can remind us that there is far more going on than economic cesspools.

**AHCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX****December 24, 2009 - OUTSIDE THE RELIGIOUS BOX (Christmas Eve)**

Luke 2: 1-20

*And Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.*

As far as we can tell, Jesus had no intention of starting a new religion. There is nothing in any of the gospels about cathedrals or hymnals or organs or building funds or boards of directors. There's nothing about preachers, popes, pulpits, penance, pews, proselytizing, piety, prayer books or praise bands. There is, of course, a good basis for pot-luck suppers. On practically every other page of the gospels, Jesus is having dinner with friends.

There is not much organized religious instruction in the Jesus stories. There is, however, a whole lot about love. And forgiveness. And compassion. There is a whole lot about living abundantly and faithfully and authentically.

With all of the Christian Church's history of horror and hypocrisy, if Jesus did ever return, there is a strong possibility that he would look at the Christian Church and say, "Take my name off of that." On the other hand, he might say - as he said to his crucifiers - "they know not what they do."

Jesus was not born in a temple. He didn't attend a religious parochial school. As far as we know, he was never ordained by any particular religious order. He was Jew who was, in some crazy way, convinced that there are far more important things than religion. More than anything, he wanted people to live full and abundant lives. And he was utterly convinced that living lives of love could make that happen.

**AHSCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX****December 27, 2009 – OUTSIDE THE ISOLATION BOX  
(Kwanzaa December 26-January 1)**

Isaiah 45: 22-25

*In the Lord, all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory.*

Luke 2: 25-40

*Mine eyes have seen your salvation.*

*Umoja* is one of the seven guiding principles of Kwanza. It's essential meaning is "unit;" but it's literal Swahili translation is "I am we," or "I am because we are."

*Umoja* is also, an all-female village located in northern Kenya. It was founded by Rebecca Lolosoli, a Samburu woman, for homeless survivors of gender-based violence, and young girls running from forced marriages.

In our United States' tradition of independence, self-sufficiency and individualism, we have often missed the inestimable significance of community. Of unity and cooperation. Of collaboration and teamwork.

None of us – not one of us – could ever claim to be a self-made person. We are each and all dependent upon each and all. Were it not for our parents, we would not exist. Were it not for our ancestors, we would not have any organized structure for society. It would be easy to make a case that were it not for farmers, builders, urban engineers, and so on and so on... we simply could not survive.

The holidays remind us that we aren't the only bozos on this bus. Not the only fruit in this yogurt, not the only olives in this salad. Millions upon millions of our forbears have celebrated these self-same holidays. Have prayed and sung and chanted and eaten and drunk way too much. The holidays remind us that we are part of a human community much larger than our little world of pleasures, promises, pains and problems. There's far more going on than our own notions and ideas.

The holidays offer us a golden opportunity – if we will take it – to dance our sweet patooties outside the restrictive walls of our own little ways of living.

**AHSCKNYE: OUTSIDE THE BOX****January 3, 2010 – OUTSIDE THE MAP BOX (Epiphany)**

Isaiah 60: 1-6

*Arise, shine, your light has come; and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

Matthew 2: 1-12

*When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

OK, I gotta admit, the GPS way of getting around is pretty cool. Snap that puppy on the dashboard of your car or click a button on your Blackberry and bingo! You know right where you are! And if you tell it where you want to go, that little techno-triddler will take you there. Sweet.

But, I gotta say that I miss maps. Fold out a map, scan it and study it till you find where you are and where you want to go. Then, consider all the roads that can get you there. Scope out the rivers and the lakes that are in the area. Check out where the hills and canyons are. Find the roads less-traveled. Consider all the little towns with crazy names.

But even maps can't get you completely where you want to go. Neither maps nor GPS gizmos can describe the people you'll meet on the way, the wild flowers by the road or the stirring and magnificent thunder storm that may happen at just the right time. Maps and GPS'ers are totally inefficient at guiding you to joy or wonder - to passion or delight. Never trust a map or GPS which promises to bring you a place where you discover who you are and why you're here.

The heart has guidance systems that no map or satellite can touch. The holidays remind us of that. The holidays can click on our heart's signal, log it on to Infinity and lead to discoveries beyond our wildest dreams.