



Kicking Down Walls

Writing about Christmas is difficult. It's all been said so much and so often that it's hard to say anything in a way that inspires anybody (much less me) about the events of Christmas. I once played Gabriel at our church (don't laugh...even bad sinners can play the part of angels) and, as I read over the script (and it was a good one), I actually yawned. Here Gabriel is announcing the coming of God into history...and I'm yawning.

What is wrong with me? And I thought I heard God answer...

You're too religious. That is what's wrong with you.

Well, I do, after all, teach in a seminary, I am a Bible teacher on a radio program, I write books about you and I am ordained. It's hard to do all that stuff without being a bit religious, right?

Wrong!

Wrong? Okay, explain to me how I can be a religious professional without being religious.

Do I have to explain everything? Sometimes you're so religious it makes me blush.

Blush?

That's a metaphor. Try and pay attention! It happens all year long and, at Christmas, it is so apparent that I'm surprised you haven't noticed. Religion is a necessary evil. It's necessary because of me...and it's dangerous because of me. It's so easy to substitute religious words, religious concepts and religious actions for me. In fact, there are those who use their religion to keep me at arm's length and the people who are the worst are those who are professionals. A close second are the most committed to religious institutions. People think that if they can do enough religion, that they've done what I require when, in fact, it is just the opposite. The point of this whole thing is that I don't "require" anything that Jesus hasn't already given, thank you. However, reli-

gion that doesn't point to me, doesn't invite me to participate, doesn't allow me to be me instead of a theological/religious proposition...that kind of religion has put up a wall against me that I have to kick down sometimes.

Kick down? You do that?

Of course I do. I'm good...but I'm not safe. And child, Christmas was the time when I kicked really hard. They expected me to come as a reigning king or a conquering military leader and I came in a manger. They expected me to separate the religious from the non-religious, and I came to draw all men to myself. They expected to hurt those who didn't worship me and I was a physician. They expected me to want to be served and I became a servant. They expected me to be quite religious and I was a friend of winebibbers and sinners. They expected me to show my anger and I showed my tears. They expected me to hate those who deserved it and I loved those who didn't.

I don't usually think of it that way.

Try it...you'll like it. In fact, your heart will always be restless until it finds rest in me...the real me. I'm pleased with the expressions of worship and love that my people give me. But don't forget about me. Those expressions, like candlelight services, Christmas trees, nativity scenes and parties are all empty unless I come. Christmas, child, is the time when I said as clearly as I knew how, that I want to be invited.

What's that? I thought parties offended you, like commercialization and stuff?

Who told you that?

Some preacher. Come to think of it, I've said it a couple times myself.

Well quit it. It isn't the parties that bother me. It's the way people don't invite me. It's the way my people leave me out. Not that I'm angry, but sometimes it takes a swift kick to let people know I love them.

He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown

It isn't the parties that bother me. It's the way people don't invite me. It's the way my people leave me out. Not that I'm angry, but sometimes it takes a swift kick to let people know I love them.