

“The Heart That Grew Three Sizes: The Deceit of Hate”

John 3:19-20

As we begin the season of Advent, we are invited on a journey of transformation with the Grinch. When we think of him, we think of someone who hates something everyone else loves. It is shocking, truly, that anyone would hate Christmas. In the original story by Dr. Seuss, we are not told why the Grinch hated it; he just did. Here is the hate scene from the Jim Carrey version of this story: <https://youtu.be/8i7oSx1DAHI>

He didn't just dislike Christmas; he **loathed it**. In fact, that hate consumed him so much that he spent a tremendous amount of time and energy planning revenge on Christmas and all who celebrated it.

Why would anyone dedicate so much energy to hate?

Because hate is rarely the starting point. Hate is a **secondary emotion**, often a powerful defense mechanism fueled by hidden **primary emotions** like **fear** and **sadness**. When we have deep expectations that go unmet, disappointment can turn into resentment, and resentment can fester into hate. When we feel threatened—when something challenges our comfort or sense of existence - fear becomes a powerful shield of hatred against the perceived threat.

Hate is powerful because it distorts reality. It takes something beautiful, like Christmas, and makes it ugly. And the major problem with hate is this: **It ends up making us into the very thing we hate**. It shrinks our heart, leaving us as the primary victim of our own bitterness.

The good news is that we don't have to follow the Grinch down that dark path. Through Jesus, we know a better way—the way of the **Light**.

In our scripture for today, we hear a part of an encounter Jesus had with a respected authority figure, **Nicodemus**, who came to Jesus at night to learn from him. The symbolism is potent: Jesus is the Light, and Nicodemus is seeking him in the darkness.

But even Nicodemus, a seeker, struggled with Jesus's teaching because it defied the world's ways of fear, hate, and revenge. Jesus says to him, according to **John 3:19-20**:

*“And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.”*

From a logical perspective, who would hate the light? Everyone needs the light! Yet, hate distorts things, and thus people end up hating the very thing that can heal them.

Many of the people around Jesus knew his teachings were from God, but they resisted him:

- **Fear** of the Roman Empire led them to resist a spiritual kingdom.
- **Unmet expectations** - they wanted a military leader, not a spiritual teacher - led them to hate his non-traditional ministry.
- **Resistance to change** - Jesus was offering a way that would require a great change and sacrifice on their part.

Their hearts had already shrunk. Their capacity for seeing the true potential in Jesus became so diminished that they could not see his truth.

Consider in your own life and in our world how our hearts shrink all the time by the "little hates" that arise when we:

1. **Fear:** Perceiving a threat - to our safety, our comfort, or our identity - can lead us down the path of hate and resistance. Sometimes, even when we know hate is not the answer, our fears are too overwhelming.
2. **Get Disappointed:** When we expect certain things to happen a certain way and they don't, we turn to blame and anger. We let frustration fester and build up walls of resentment. Instead of accepting the changes, surprises, and imperfections of life, we allow bitterness to grow.
3. **Get Hurt:** Embracing our pain takes patience and a willingness to dwell in discomfort. When we resist the pain and sadness of our lives, that unhealed hurt often manifests as aggression or hate toward others.

We have a choice: to hold onto our fear, disappointment, and hurt, or to **let it go** and allow our hearts to grow.

I have found immense help in focusing on the discipline of **letting go**. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, there is a connection between the Large Intestine and the emotions of releasing grief, sadness, guilt and shame, and clinging. The healthy energy of the Large Intestine is the capacity for letting go, embracing change, and releasing what no longer serves us. I make it a practice to trace the meridian each day, affirming: "I let go of anger, fear, guilt, and shame."

This Advent, I invite you to pay attention to your **aversions** and the **little hates** that find their way into your heart. Invite God's grace into them. See what fear, pain, disappointment, or rigid expectations are keeping them alive. Pay attention to your reactions and struggles. Bring them all to the light of Christ, without judgment or deadlines.

**Do not let hate consume your energy, your health, your vitality, and your potential.** No matter how justified it may feel to harbor hate, trust the freedom and light that come from love.

The Grinch learned this the hard way. After all his conniving and plotting, he didn't feel better. The only thing that finally touched his heart was the **unconquerable love and joy of the Whos**.

And Nicodemus? He left Jesus that night without fully embracing the light. But later in the Gospel, we are told that he was the one who publicly defended Jesus and, alongside Joseph of Arimathea, prepared Jesus's body for burial with a large quantity of expensive spices. Nicodemus finally stepped out of the shadow and into the light.

This gives us hope for the world and for ourselves. **Transformation and healing are possible.** We can choose to let go of the prison of hate. We can choose to detox our hearts of bitterness so that we can receive the gift of the Christ Child, who comes tonight to save us not just from the world's darkness, but from the darkness in our own hearts.

**We can choose to let our hearts grow three sizes.**

May you leave this place with the courage to examine the shadows in your own heart. May the boundless grace of the Christ Child enter those places of fear and disappointment. Go forth, trusting that the Light has come into the world, and no amount of darkness, bitterness, or hate—even our own—can ultimately overcome it. **Amen.**