



**Auckland Unitarian Church**  
*Love beyond belief*

## The Grinch Who Found Christmas Anyway

21 December 2025 © Keola Whittaker

The Grinch and Scrooge are my favorite Christmas characters. Not in spite of their cynicism, but because of it. They're the only honest ones in their stories. Everyone else is performing joy, pretending Christmas magic just happens naturally. But the Grinch and Scrooge?

They've done the math. They've weighed Christmas against their pain and built excellent walls to protect themselves from a holiday that demands vulnerability they can't afford.

And here's what I love most: they're not wrong. They're not villains. They're survivors. And they do what survivors do.

Until, of course, they're visited.

That's the word the stories use. Visitation. Not invaded. Not confronted. Visited. Something arrives - unexpected, unwanted even - and breaks through despite their defenses. Cindy Lou Who's guileless question. The Ghost of Christmas Present showing Scrooge how others speak tenderly of him despite everything. Tiny Tim's genuine affection.

These visitations don't shame them into transformation. They crack open something the Grinch and Scrooge thought they'd sealed shut: the possibility of being seen, being loved, being part of something larger than their own protective isolation.

That's the pattern: they build walls, and love finds them anyway.

That's the magic of Christmas, if there is any magic: not that everything becomes perfect, but that something breaks through. Something visits. Something finds us in our isolation and says: you're not alone. You never were.

Let me take you back to a Christmas when I had my own visitation. It was 2011.

That year I became single after the most significant relationship of my life to that point had ended. He had made me a better person. He had encouraged my intellectual curiosity, traveled with me around the world, seen me more clearly than anyone had before. And then it was over.

I was devastated. Gutted. Walking around with a hole in my chest. And underneath the grief was a fear: What if I never find love like that again? What if I used up my chance?

I wasn't particularly spiritual then. I'd stopped going to church—couldn't manage the earnestness of it, the expectation that you'd show up with your heart open. My heart was in a locked box at the bottom of a well.

I didn't want to go home for Christmas. Home meant having to pretend I was happy when I wasn't. I couldn't perform one more minute of okayness.

So I did what any self-respecting Grinch would do: I ran.

I went with two close friends—people who had seen my tears, who loved me without requiring me to be okay—to Puerto Vallarta... to party...to escape. Dance under disco balls and colored lights and forget everything. No nativity scenes. No obligations. Just music and the permission to be lost.

I wanted to be lost. I didn't want love to find me—not romantic, not familial, not spiritual. I just wanted to disappear into the noise and the heat and not have to feel anything for anyone.

I was the Grinch on his mountain. I was Scrooge in his counting house. I had done the math, and I had decided: Christmas wasn't worth it. Vulnerability wasn't worth it. Love wasn't worth it. Not anymore. Not after what it cost.

And then Christmas Day arrived. Even in Puerto Vallarta. Even in dance clubs. Even when you're running.

We were on the dance floor, surrounded by strangers. The music was loud, relentless, perfect for forgetting.

And something happened on that dancefloor, during the forgetting.

A guy tapped me on the shoulder. Of course, I presumed he was going to flirt with me and just wanted to get closer to dance. I prepared myself. He was wearing red, green, and white. At the time I thought those were Christmas colors but later realized ... those are also the colors of the Mexican flag. But he wasn't there to ask

to dance or buy me a drink. He just said, with a big grin on his face, “Merry Christmas.” That was it. Merry Christmas.

For some reason time slowed down because I was reminded that it was indeed Christmas. I remember in that moment I could hear Christmas carols from outside the club mixing with dance beats inside. From what I recall, it was Silent Night outside and Rihanna’s “We Found Love” inside which is ... the weirdest mashup ever. And in a way, beautiful.

As I looked around to notice what Christmas was in that moment, I saw my friends dancing having fun, a couple people kissing, people take care of each other, listening and laughing, and everyone just having a great time. And then suddenly my eyes filled with tears. Because I saw it.

The space between us...right there on the dancefloor ... was holy.

All of it. Sacred. Every bit of it.

Some of us had all come here running from something. Breakups. Family rejection. Loneliness. Grief. The weight of pretending to be okay in a world that demands okayness. We had come to this dance floor a little hopeless, a little broken, a little lost.

And we were loving each other anyway. Strangers caring for strangers. Friends holding friends. Chosen family being family in the truest sense. We were finding love in a hopeless place—just like the song says.

I had run all the way to Puerto Vallarta to escape love. And I saw love all around.

I don’t know what happened to that stranger who gave me an unsolicited holiday greeting. He must have disappeared into the crowd. I guess he wasn’t there to flirt.

I later realized: THAT was my visitation. Not a ghost, at least I don’t think so. Not an angel, well probably not a literal one. Just a Christmas wish and love, arriving unbidden on Christmas Day, in the last place I expected it, in a form I didn’t know I was looking for.

And then I looked up. I saw the disco ball.

It was spinning above us, catching the light, throwing it everywhere—on faces, on walls, on moving bodies, on strangers kissing, on friends holding each other. It wasn’t generating light. It was reflecting it. And reflecting us. Taking one source and multiplying it, scattering it, making sure everyone got touched by it.

And I thought: That's God. That's what God is.

Not some distant light source demanding worship. But something that reflects us back to ourselves and each other. Something that catches whatever light exists and throws it everywhere, on everyone, without judgment or discrimination. Something that reminds us to keep dancing even when—especially when—we thought we were done dancing.

Think about it: The disco ball reflects you and me and the spaces between us. It reflects light so we can see each other better. And it keeps spinning, keeps moving, keeps reminding us: dance. Keep dancing. Even in a hopeless place. Especially in a hopeless place.

The disco ball doesn't care about respectability. It doesn't care if you're in a cathedral or a trashy club. It just catches light and throws it everywhere, on everyone, and lets the sacred land where it lands. God is manifest there in that disco ball.

Here's what I've learned: You can't outrun the sacred. You can't outrun love. You can build the most excellent walls, climb the highest mountain, lock yourself in the tightest counting house—and love will find a crack. Love will visit. Love will show up on a dance floor on Christmas Day and say: There you are. I've been looking for you.

That's the magic of Christmas—if we're brave enough to call it magic.

Not the magic of perfect families gathered around perfect trees. Not the magic of perfect weather or presents solving problems or everyone getting along. That's not magic. That's a picture book fairy tale that makes the people who can't achieve it feel broken.

The real magic is this: Love visits. Even when we're hiding. Even when we're running. Even when we've decided we don't want it, can't handle it, aren't worthy of it. Love shows up anyway—in forms we didn't expect, in places we didn't think to look, through people we didn't know we needed.

The Grinch doesn't transform because the Whos shame him. He transforms because he realizes they love each other—and might even love him—despite everything. Despite his cruelty, his theft, his years of isolation. He's seen and loved anyway.

Scrooge doesn't transform because the ghosts scare him. He transforms because he discovers he's been loved all along—by Bob Cratchit, by his nephew, by people who kept toasting him even when he was terrible. He was never as alone as he thought.

That's the visitation that matters: the discovery that you're loved. That you've been loved all along. That your walls were keeping out the very thing you needed most.

We all run sometimes. We all build walls. We all have seasons when vulnerability feels like too much, when Christmas feels like a demand we can't meet, when the gap between how we're supposed to feel and how we actually feel becomes unbearable.

Maybe you're nursing a broken heart. Maybe you're grieving someone. Maybe your family is complicated or painful. Maybe you've decided this whole Christmas thing isn't worth the risk.

I see you. I was you. I am you, some years.

And here's what I want to tell you: You don't have to perform joy you don't feel. You don't have to pretend. You don't have to show up with your heart open if your heart is in a locked box at the bottom of a well.

But. But.

Stay open -- even just a crack -- to the possibility of visitation.

Because love is relentless. The sacred is stubborn. And Christmas magic (the real kind, not the Hallmark kind) is simply this: love finds a way. It finds a crack in your walls. It shows up on a dance floor when you're trying to disappear. It arrives through friends who see your tears, through strangers who make space for you, through moments of unexpected tenderness that break you open whether you planned to break open or not.

You might not be able to outrun it. I couldn't. I ran all the way to Puerto Vallarta, and love met me there. On Christmas Day. Under a disco ball. In the space between bodies on a dance floor.

The magic found me. It will find you too.

And here's the other side: You might be someone else's visitation.

Right now, someone in your life is on their mountain. Behind their walls. Someone who's decided love isn't worth it, that Christmas is for other people.

You might be the one who breaks through. Not by forcing cheer. But by seeing them. By showing up. By being the love that arrives exactly when they thought they were alone.

Your text might matter more than you know. Your invitation might be the crack in someone's wall. Your presence might be the visitation that changes everything.

You don't have to be healed to be healing. You just have to show up. Be the disco ball. Catch whatever light exists and scatter it everywhere.

That's how the magic works. That's how it's always worked. Not through perfection, but through presence. Not through performance, but through showing up anyway, even when we're broken, even when we're running, even when we're not sure we have anything to offer.

We become each other's visitations. We become the magic for each other.

So here we are. Three days before Christmas. Summer Solstice. The longest day of the year here in Auckland, light everywhere, nowhere to hide.

Whatever you're carrying, grief, heartbreak, loneliness, exhaustion, you're allowed to carry it. You don't have to be fixed or healed or ready.

But stay open. Just a crack. Because love is looking for you this Christmas.

It will find you at a summer barbecue, in a text from someone who noticed you were struggling, in the space between friends who love you. It will find you in unexpected places.

The sacred doesn't care where you find it. It shows up on dance floors and beaches. It spins above us like a disco ball, scattering light, reminding us to keep dancing.

May you be visited this Christmas. May love find you wherever you're hiding. May the magic break through your walls—not to invade, but to remind you: you are seen. You are loved. You belong.

And may you be that magic for someone else. May you be the visitation. May you show up for the Grinches and Scrooges in your life, not with forced cheer, but with real presence. May you reflect light. May you scatter it everywhere.

The sacred goes where the dancing is. And the magic of Christmas is simply this: love visits. Love finds. Love breaks through.

You can't outrun it. I tried.

Thank God I failed.

Merry Christmas, Auckland Unitarian. Keep dancing. The light is here.

Amen.

**Meditation / Discussion questions:-**

The sermon talks about being someone else's "visitation," an unexpected moment of love breaking through.

- Has someone been that for you?
- Or have you been that for someone else?
- Have you discovered the sacred in unexpected places?