

HEALING YOUR 'BAH HUMBUG!'

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So I'm starting with an old bad joke ... surprise, surprise! [Congregation laughs] But it's the only good Christmas one I found. So here it goes.

There was a perfect man who met a perfect woman. And they had a perfect courtship and they had a perfect wedding. And, of course, their lives together were perfect! And so one snowy, stormy night they were driving around on Christmas Eve, and they saw somebody stranded. And it was Santa Claus with all of his toys!

And not wanting to disappoint the kids on Christmas Eve, they decided -- as a perfect couple -- they'd take Santa and start delivering the gifts to everybody. And then the storm got worse and worse, and they had an accident, and only one survived. And who survived? The perfect woman survived, because she was the only one who really existed in the first place. [Congregation laughs] Because there's no Santa, and there's no such thing as a perfect man. [Congregation moans and laughs]

And so, if there's no perfect man and no Santa, the woman must have been driving the car, and that would explain why there was a car accident. [Congregation moans and boos]

Okay! Alright. Hey, there's so booing in church! [Congregation laughs] There's no crying in baseball and there's no booing in church! I just want to get that clear!

So how many people here really love Christmas? Really get into Christmas? How many people; lovers of Christmas? And how many people would admit that you're not always totally into Christmas, and you have maybe some little "Grinchiness" and "Bah Humbug"-ness feelings every now and then about Christmas? Okay; about four of us. Okay; good. [Congregation laughs]

They did a survey, and they found out that 66% of Americans love Christmas. Sixteen percent are indifferent; they don't really care either way. And 15% hate Christmas. Do you know nearly half of Americans dread Christmas, even the ones that like it? [Congregation murmurs] And 45% of Americans would be fine if we had no Christmas at all.

And the question is: Why? Why do so many people hate Christmas? Oh, let me count the ways! [Congregation laughs] Here we go!

The first one is the increased level of stress on our time to get all the things done. Internal as well as external stresses. And the obligation of having to do things. Plus the financial stress. There's a lot of stress associated with Christmas.

Another one is the competitive and comparing gift-giving process. Like, have you ever said something like, "Hey, last year they gave us a really good gift, so we'd better get them a good gift this year." Or, "Last year, we gave them a good gift, but they gave us a really cheap gift, so we're not giving them as good a gift this year." [Congregation laughs] Or ever say, "How come I got this gift and they got such a nicer one?" The comparing part is really something that's a part of the Christmas experience.

Another one is how commercialized and how materialistic Christmas has become. It is something that really, really turns a lot of people off. Everything's gifts; everything's about presents.

Another thing is that there's a strong expectation that we should all be happy at Christmas.

Another one is going through the struggles of life "stuff" -- maybe having lost a loved one or first Christmas after a divorce. Or maybe there's some traumatic family memories at Christmas that don't

have a good association. Maybe being single or having to work on Christmas day. There are all kinds of life things that are challenging that make it harder to enjoy Christmas.

And then the final one is people who are just negative and cranky anyway; Christmas is just an excuse to let loose on some negativity. [Laughs]

I saw an article and it said, "*It is perfectly okay to hate Christmas.*" And the whole article was that many of us probably don't like certain aspects of it, but we're afraid to actually admit it. Because everybody is supposed ... Our culture promotes that it's the most wonderful of the year.

My all-time favorite Christmas characters are Scrooge and the Grinch. [Congregation laughs] And they hated Christmas more than anybody. And it isn't because they hated Christmas that I really like them; it is that they changed. They had incredible turn-arounds and transformed. Ebenezer Scrooge went from being a miserable, cold-hearted tightwad to being a kind and very generous and happy individual. The Grinch went from being an isolated curmudgeon, hating the Who's because they celebrated Christmas -- hating them because they were happy -- into a big-hearted individual who became a part of the community.

Today's message is entitled, "Healing Your Bah Humbug!" [Congregation laughs] Because their transformation was really about healing their humbug. You know, "Bah; humbug!" came from a Dickens book. It was written in 1843: *A Christmas Carol*. And it was really a reflection of his displeasure -- his disgust and even contempt -- at Christmas, which he thought was a fraud and an absolute sham.

But when I'm using "*Bah Humbug!*", I'm using more to represent the things in our lives that sometimes have our hearts closed. Or where we're hurting or struggling. And whether it's from family conflict or some kind of trauma or feeling of unworthiness -- any kind of pain in our lives that blocks us from feeling the fullness of the joy of Christmas ... and really the fullness and the joy of life.

Our "*Bah humbug!*" represents anything in us that really needs to be healed. Anything in us that needs to be transformed. Any darkness that needs to be brought to the light so that we can truly feel a level of peace and happiness at the holiday and elsewhere. It is that part in us where we need to have a breakthrough -- to have a spiritual awakening -- and really a spiritual rebirth and renewal.

Marcus Bach, in his book, *Because of Christmas*, says, "*Somewhere in life every thinking person must come upon his or her Bethlehem, the place of spiritual awareness, and the place of spiritual re-birth.*"

My favorite aspect of the real Christmas story was when Mary was told by the angel that she would give birth to the Messiah. And she was like, "*What? Me? I'm a virgin; I'm not qualified to give birth! That's above the pay grade; that makes no sense! That doesn't work!*" And yet, even though she had no idea, she was willing. She was willing and had the faith that God could work through her to do something more amazing than she even thought was possible for herself.

And similarly, I believe at Christmas that God is calling all of us to give birth to something greater within ourselves. A greater level of love; a greater level of joy; or peace ... or whatever it might be. With Grinch and Scrooge, there was a greater version of themselves. A more loving and kind version that had to be given birth through that experience. And it wouldn't have happened unless they were able to heal their "*Humbug.*"

So my question is: What is blocking you and inside of you that is preventing you from feeling the fullness of the joy of the season? The fullness and the joy of your life? What is your "*Bah humbug!*" that needs to be healed?

So we're going to look at four ways to heal our "*Humbug.*"

And the first one is to **BE AT PEACE WITH 'WHAT IS.'** As I mentioned before, one of the greatest stresses and pressures of Christmas is the expectation that you should be happy. That we should all be happy, and this should be the happiest time of the year. And if we're not happy, what tends to happen is we feel bad. We feel like something must be wrong with us. *"I must not be doing it right; I'm not living up to the standard of happiness and success that I expect, and that other people expect, as well."*

And what we end up doing is either going through the motions, pretending we're happy, or sometimes we withdraw and don't really engage. Then we make it worse by saying, *"Oh, I should really be happy. I should be doing better than this. I shouldn't be alone for the holidays."* We have all these "shoulds."

And any time we do this "should" thing, it really is a shame-based practice that is harmful, because it creates a lot of anxiety and the very opposite of what we want. It creates more unhappiness. Every time we pretend to be happy or force ourselves to be happy -- or reject what is going on in front of us -- we make ourselves unhappier.

Carl Jung said, *"What we resist, persists."* And he's saying: Whatever it is that we're resisting in our lives - - don't want to face, don't want to handle -- actually we attract more of it. We attract more of the very thing that we don't want.

The thing is -- the key to all of this is -- to find acceptance of being wherever we are. And letting it be okay wherever we might be. You know, acceptance isn't giving up; acceptance is saying, *"Hey, I'm not going to put that energy on resisting and hating and complaining and thinking I 'should,'" and just be at peace with that's the way things are at the moment.* It doesn't mean that things can't change or improve; it just means you take the pressure and the stress off of hating it and resisting it so much. Because that's what creates more unhappiness and creates more tension.

Whatever we're going through at Christmas -- whatever experiences are going on -- we need to make peace with it. If it's grief we're going through, we need to make peace that we're just going through grief right now. Or we're dealing with loss right now. We're going through divorce or struggling with addiction. Whatever it is, without blame, without shame, just saying, *"This is what's happening in my life right now."* And it's making peace with if we have to work on Christmas. Or making peace with if we are going to spend it alone. But also making peace with the fact that, if life is going well, and we're having it with our friends. Sometimes, we not only have a hard time accepting the not-so-good; we sometimes have a hard time accepting the good.

No need to feel guilty if your life is rockin' and you're all happy! That's a good thing! Can you accept all of it? The most important thing we can do is just make peace with whatever is going on in our lives at the moment ... particularly during the holidays.

I saw a thing with Tom Hanks. He was interviewed, and they were asking questions like, *"What did you really learn? What changed your life?"* And he said, *"Somebody taught me the importance of 'This, too, shall pass.'" He said, "If you're struggling, this, too, shall pass. If you feel like you're misunderstood and nobody likes you, this, too, shall pass. If you're on top of the world and everything's going your way, this, too, shall pass."* [Congregation laughs] *"If you feel you've got the world by the tail, this, too, shall pass."*

And what he's really saying here is: Be patient and present to what's going on. Because everything will pass. Don't think you can push your way and pretend some things away and try to keep only the good. No! Be present to all of it. That's the only way we can live a full life is to make peace with what's happening now.

We've all had different types of Christmas experiences. When I was a kid, I had a family of 10 with my parents. The house was packed. We were eating all day in pajamas; it was just the most fun time as a

kid. And I've been alone and been happy, as well. There are all kinds of different experiences that we can have at Christmas, and we just have to make peace with it.

I remember when my father died. He died in February, and so we had lots of time. And we always had the tradition that everybody flies home from wherever the world they're in, and we would all spend it together. And somebody said that maybe it's good, when someone has passed away, to do something a little different. So that Christmas, I have a sister who lived in Nigeria; a couple of siblings went to Nigeria. I'm born in Trinidad; some of them went to Trinidad. Some stayed in Canada. A sister was in Missouri. And I went to Waco, Texas, on a ranch for Christmas. I flew on Christmas day. I had brisket for the first time. I rode tailgate for the first time. [Congregation laughs] And I shot and touched a gun for the first time in my life.

And it was just a different experience! It wasn't that it "should have" been this or we "should have" been all together. It was just a different experience. And just embracing it and accepting it and making peace actually made it a pretty good Christmas, even though it was different. We're not all going to have the same Christmases with the same people; it's not going to be the same level of happy. But we need to make peace with what we have without comparing it to anything else. Or feeling bad about it. Because the only way to make the best of something is to make peace with it, and to find the joy right in that unique circumstance we're in.

And even if it's something sad and struggling, accept it and make peace with it. Because it will make it far worse and unhappier if we don't. Making peace helps us make the best.

The next one is to SET A CHRISTMAS INTENTION. Christmas goes by so quickly; at the end you think, "Wow! What happened? Where'd it go?" And I think something important that will help us is, at the beginning of Christmas, to use the power of intention. Set an intention for the kind of Christmas we want to have, and the experience we want to have, and what it is we want to do. Because otherwise, it can get wild and out of control. We can just go where the waves take us.

Intention is this power that makes the act of creation possible. God intended the world. God intended for you to be here. You are God's intention. And God has an intention for our lives and has given us the power and the ability to set our own intentions. But we don't always use it! Like, how many of us set an intention for the kind of day we're going to have today? Or set an intention for the kind of week we're going to have? Or set an intention for the kind of Christmas that we want to experience? Or set an intention for our lives?

The thing about intention: It is about taking charge of our own time; our energy; who and how we spend it so we can have an influence on the result of how those things unfold.

So my question is: What kind of Christmas do you intend to have? Do you intend to maybe slow it down a little bit? And be more present and engaged? Do you intend to maybe do a little bit more, because you haven't been as active? Do you intend to be kinder and more patient and more gentle? Do you intend to be more present to the people in your life? Or maybe a little bit more playful?

Intention is a power! Intention is like eating at Burger King; you can have it your way! [Congregation laughs] You rule! [Congregation laughs]

And so, again: What is your intention for how you want to feel and experience this Christmas?

And then the third one is you've got to **OPEN AND WALK THROUGH THE DOOR OF HEALING**. You know, it's important that we don't ignore the "*Humbug*" or the things that get triggered in us at Christmas. Because we can easily think, "*Oh yeah, when the holidays are over, it'll be all good.*" And it isn't! It's just

a trigger. The "*Humbug*" is a trigger of something that needs to be healed. It just so happened to get triggered at Christmas; but it doesn't take it away for the rest of the year.

And so for us to do that healing, we must be willing to open and walk through that door of healing. It's not just going to happen by itself.

I love it with Scrooge: The door opened for him because Jacob Marley's ghost sent these three ghosts of the past, present and future, and he got a chance to really observe his decisions and the choices he's made ... and how he treated people and the impact that he had. He had an opportunity to really do some soul searching of saying, "*Is this how I want to keep showing up in life? And what's the trajectory? Where am I going to end up based on how I'm showing up?*" And he was able to decide to choose and change.

Remember when he was at the graveside? I'm going to give you a paraphrase of what he said. He basically said: "*If a man's deeds affect his consequences, if I change my deeds, will my consequences change?*" And, of course, the answer was, "*Yes!*" And so the door was open, and he walked through and he changed himself. He acted in a greater way. He was more joyful. He went to his nephew's house and celebrated. He was kind and generous to everyone.

Our "*Humbugs*" can be healed, but we must be willing to open -- when it gets triggered -- to do the inner work and to walk through that door of healing.

The Grinch -- and I'm going to use the Jim Carrey version -- the door opened for him to heal by, not only his hate, but by Cindy Lou Who's love for him. And she got them to understand him and nominated him to be the holiday "cheer meister," or whatever that was. And he made a difference; they say his heart grew three times that day! He became a part of the community.

Every one of us has some "*Humbug*" that we need to open a space and to walk through that door of healing. And we need to do it! When Scripture says, "*Faith without works is dead,*" faith opens the door, but the works you've got to do is to walk through that door.

And remember when Jesus said, "*Lazarus, rise and come forth*"? He called him forth, but Lazarus still had to do the work: to rise and come forth.

And so we all need to look: What is that "*Humbug*" that needs healing within us at this time and to open the door and walk through it?

I have two "*Humbugs*" around Christmas. And they're really around two plays that I don't like. And the first one is *White Christmas*. Anybody ever seen *White Christmas*? The play? A few of us ... And the other one is the *Nutcracker*. Don't like that one, either. [Congregation laughs] Has anybody ...? How many people have seen that?

So when I was in my 20s, I was starting to get into theater. So I went to *White Christmas*. Because the song was so nice, I thought I'd love the play! But it was about these two entertainers -- these two guys -- and they met two women entertainers. And one of the couples really hit it off, and the other ones really didn't. And the rest of the play was about how these people who didn't like each other ended up liking each other at the end. I don't know why that was a "*Bah humbug!*" for me, but I really wasn't that into it! [Congregation laughs]

And then the second one was the *Nutcracker*. I went to go to my first ballet; never been to one. See the thing; my God, no one's speaking! It's only dancing on the top of their toes! [Congregation laughs] And if you know what it's about, it's about a girl who gets a toy nutcracker. And magically, it comes to life. And then it starts fighting an army of really big rats! This is what it's about, and I'm like, "*My God, I can write a ballet then!*" [Congregation laughs]

And so fast-forward 30 years until the last couple of months. And so we're doing these "Out & Abouts," you know? We go to the MIM or we go to these different places. Somebody recommends the *Nutcracker*. And I'm like, "No!!!! Please!!!! No!!!!" [Congregation laughs]

And it's like, "But, Rev. Maraj, you've got to go; that's the whole thing -- out and about with you!" It's like, "No!!!! Oh, God. Okay. I'll go." And then somebody else says, "Hey, 'White Christmas' is playing; let's go!" And I'm like, "No!!!!!" [Congregation laughs]

And guess what? They were last Thursday and Friday: consecutive days. The universe was conspiring for me to heal my "*Humbug!*" [Congregation laughs]

And I went to *White Christmas*, and it was fabulous. The dancing and the music; it was incredible! And then the *Nutcracker*. There was a concert by Billy Joel; there was a Suns game; and there was the *Nutcracker*, all at the same time. It took an hour-and-a-half to get there. The play didn't begin for 30 minutes; it was delayed 30 minutes. I didn't get to socialize with the people, which is what the whole "Out & About" thing is. I'm thinking, "God, this is not looking good." [Congregation laughs]

But I saw the thing and, oh, my God! The dancing and the music was so incredible. I was so, so, so touched. And I was moved. And I could say I am healed of my "*Humbug.*" I loved these plays! [Congregation cheers and applauds]

Now, I never want to see them again; I'm complete! [Laughs with congregation] But ... Ha! But I'm saying ... At least it won't trigger pain or anger when someone mentions it. And so ...

My question is: So what is the "*Humbug*" you've got to heal? And are you willing to open a space and, when it gets triggered, instead of pushing it away, or "should"ing yourself out of it, to say, "Hey; what work do I need to do? Or who is it that I need to forgive? Or what is it that I need to let go? Or what is it that I need to accept and just be okay? Just find peace in it?"

The Grinch and Mary and Scrooge were all called to give birth to something greater. And that is because there's unexpressed love still in us. There's unexpressed joy in us still. There's unexpressed beauty and kindness and genius that we haven't fully allowed to come forth. So the triggering of the "*Humbug*" is really a sign that there's something in us that wants to be healed so we can express more light and love and joy and goodness in the world, in ourselves, and in our relationships.

And the last one for healing our "*Humbug*" is that we've got to make sure we have some fun. That we have some fun! One of my favorite parts of *A Christmas Carol* -- the Alastair Sim 1956 version -- is that, when he wakes up, and he's so giddy in the morning. Scrooge: he's just so happy! He's so joyful he got a second chance. He realized he could live a happy and joyful life, and he's just giddy like a child!

And when Scripture says, "*To enter the kingdom, you must become as a child,*" it's because children bring joy! They're always playing and smiling and happy. And we need to get back to that childlike nature.

Here's what Rhonda Byrne ... everybody remember *The Secret*? The author of *The Secret* says this. She says, "*Life is supposed to be fun! When you're having fun, you feel great and you receive and attract great things! Having fun brings the life you want, and taking things too seriously will have you attract more things that you have to take too seriously.*"

And that's an important thing.

And one distinction I want to make here is that: Having fun and being childlike doesn't dishonor or disrespect the fact that life is serious and we go through tough stuff. But going through tough stuff also

doesn't mean that life isn't meant to be fun and joyful. And we have to find that balance in between. Not forcing ourselves, but allowing it to come forth.

And so it's a matter of, this Christmas, choosing to go do some fun things. You know, if you want to go on a hot air balloon, or go for a bike ride, or a hike. I don't know what's fun for you, but find what's fun for you! And whether it's reading or going out to eat or cooking something nice -- like on a day like today, a grilled cheese sandwich and a hot bowl of tomato soup would be lovely to comfort the "winter-ness."

Recently, I've been throwing the frisbee. I've played badminton. I baked cookies. I don't really eat Christmas cookies, so I baked some sugar-free peanut butter cookies. And then I gave a few to my friend for her kids. And apparently, it did not go over well. [Congregation laughs] And I gave five cookies, and apparently there's five cookies minus one bite. And so that's okay! But I had fun doing it!

I'm looking forward to caroling. I haven't done Christmas caroling for a long time. And getting to do it with Steve on Tuesday with the VIPs; that's going to be so much fun!

But what makes you happy? What are some things that are playful and childlike for you? Because we really need to reconnect with that spirit. Maybe a massage; a spa day. Whatever it is, engage in it. Because we need to find that childlike joy again.

And also, wish the people in your life smiles. Wish them laughter. Wish them joy. Wish them playfulness. And wish it for yourself. Because that joyful, lively energy raises the vibration within ourselves and gives us the freedom to be more childlike and to feel more alive.

You know, I'm feeling a buzz like somebody is feeling in this room, "*Oh, Richard, please, please tell a couple more jokes before this thing ends.*" [Congregation laughs] I don't know; that's the vibe I'm picking up! And I've got to go with the vibe! Here we go! [Laughs]

So I got these two dogs. I named one Timex. And I named one Rolex. They're watch dogs. [Congregation groans]

Okay. Groaning is better than booing! So we're doing alright! Here we go ...

A friend of mine accused me of stealing his thesaurus. Not only was I shocked, I was appalled, aghast and completely dismayed. [Laughs with congregation]

Okay. You know, one of my dogs ate all of the Scrabble tiles. One of my dogs ate all of the Scrabble tiles. And I'm afraid it's going to spell disaster. [Laughs; congregation groans]

Okay. So if you love Christmas or you're indifferent to Christmas or you hate Christmas, Christmas is really a time of love and an opportunity to heal some of the things in us that we sometimes hold ourselves back from being able to experience or fully express.

So, this Christmas, I encourage you to make peace with whatever your "Humbug" is or whatever is going on in your life and your circumstances. Secondly, set the intention for the kind of Christmas you want to have and how you want to experience it. Third, open and walk through the door of healing. And finally, have some fun. It will give us all a fuller and richer experience of life and Christmas if we all are willing to heal our "Humbug."

God bless!