Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945
Series 2: “You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR and the New Deal

File No. 1106

1937 December 24

Lafayette Park, WA - Christmas Greeting
THIS IS THE PRESIDENT'S READING COPY
SPeECH OF THE PRESIDENT
CHRISTMAS TREE
JACKSON PARK
DECEMBER 24, 1937.

Last night before I went to sleep I chanced to read
in an evening paper a story by a columnist which appealed
to me so much as a Christmas sermon that this afternoon,
on the occasion of lighting the National Christmas Tree in
Lafayette Square
Jackson Park in front of the White House, I am going to
read to you from it. Here is this parable:

"We were sitting in a high room above the
chapel, and although it was Christmas Eve, my good
friend the dominie seemed curiously troubled. And
that was strange, for he was a man extremely
sensitive to the festivities of his faith.

The joys and sorrows of Jesus were not to him
events of a remote past but more current and living
happenings than the headlines in the newspapers.
At Christmas he seems actually to hear the voice of the herald angels.

My friend is an old man, and I have known him for many years, but this was the first time the Nativity had failed to rouse him to an ecstacy. He admitted that something was wrong. "Tomorrow," he said, "I must go down into that chapel and preach a Christmas sermon. And I must speak of peace and good will toward men. I know you think of me as a man too cloistered to be of any use to my community. And I know that our world is one of war and hate and enmity.

And you, my young friend, and others keep insisting that before there can be brotherhood there must be the hashing of heads. You are all for good will to men, but you want to note very many exceptions. And I am still hoping and praying that in the great love of God the final seal of interdiction must not be put on even one.
You may laugh at me, but right now I am worrying about how Christmas came to Judas Iscariot.

It is the habit of my friend when he is troubled by doubts to reach for the Book, and he did so now. He smiled and said, "Will you assist me in a little experiment?"

"I will close my eyes and you hold out the Bible to me. I will open it at random and run my fingers down a page. You read me the text which I blindly select."

I did as he told me, and he happened on the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew and the twenty-fifth verse. I felt sorry for him, for this was no part of the story of the birth of Christ but instead an account of the great betrayal.

"Read what it says," commanded the dominie. And I read, "Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, 'Master, is it I?' He said unto him, 'Thou hast said.'"
My friend frowned, but then he looked at me in triumph. "Now I remember. My hand is not as steady as it used to be. You should have taken the lower part of my finger and not the top. Read the twenty-seventh verse. It is not an eighth of an inch away. Read what it says."

And I read, "And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it.'"

"Mark that!" cried the old man exultantly.

"Not even to Judas, the betrayer, was the wine of life denied. I can preach my Christmas sermon now, and my text will be, 'Drink ye all of it.' Good will toward men means good will to every last son of God. Peace on earth means peace to Pilate, peace to the thieves on the cross and peace to poor Iscariot."
I was glad, for he had found Christmas, and
I saw by his face that once more he heard the
voice of the herald angels."
Last night before I went to sleep I chanced to read
in an evening paper a story by a columnist which appealed to me
so much as a Christmas sermon that this afternoon, on the occasion
of lighting the National Christmas Tree in Lafayette Square in
front of the White House, I am going to read to you from it. Here
is his parable:

"We were sitting in a high room above the
chapel, and although it was Christmas Eve, my good
friend the dominic seemed curiously troubled. And
that was strange, for he was a man extremely sensitive
to the festivities of his faith.

"The joys and sorrows of Jesus were not to
him events of a remote past but more current and liv-
ing happenings than the headlines in the newspapers.
At Christmas he seems actually to hear the voice of
the herald angels.

"My friend is an old man, and I have known
him for many years, but this was the first time the
Nativity had failed to rouse him to an ecstasy. He
admitted that something was wrong. 'Tomorrow,' he
said, 'I must go down into that chapel and preach a
Christmas sermon. And I must speak of peace and good
will toward men. I know you think of me as a man too
clerested to be of any use to my community. And I
know that our world is one of war and hate and enmity.

"And you, my young friend, and others keep
insisting that before there can be brotherhood there
must be the bashing of heads. You are all for good
will to men, but you want to note very many exceptions.
And I am still hoping and praying that in the great love
of God the final seal of interdiction must not be put
on even one. You may laugh at me, but right now I am
worrying about how Christmas came to Judas Iscariot."

"It is the habit of my friend when he is
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"I will close my eyes and you hold out the
Bible to me. I will open it at random and run my finge-
ers down a page. You read me the text which I blindly
select."

"I did as he told me, and he happened on the
twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew and the twenty-
fifth verse. I felt sorry for him, for this was no
part of the story of the birth of Christ but instead
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"'Read what it says,' commanded the dominic.
And I read, 'Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered
and said, 'Master, is it I?' He said unto him, 'Thou
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"My friend frowned, but then he looked at me
in triumph. 'Now I remember. My hand is as steady
as it used to be. You should have taken the lower part
of my finger and not the top. Read the twenty-seventh
verse. It is not an eighth of an inch away. Read what
it says.'"
This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.
"And I read, 'And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it.'"

"'Mark that!' cried the old man exultantly. 'Not even to Judas, the betrayer, was the wine of life denied. I can preach my Christmas sermon now, and my text will be, 'Drink ye all of it.' Good will toward men means good will to every last son of God. Peace on earth means peace to Pilate, peace to the thieves on the cross and peace to poor Iscariot."

"I was glad, for he had found Christmas, and I saw by his face that once more he heard the voice of the herald angels."
It Seems to Me

By Heywood Broun

We were sitting in a high room above the chapel, and although it was Christmas Eve, my good friend the dome seemed curiously troubled. And that was strange, for he was a man extremely sensitive to the festivities of his faith.

The joys and sorrows of Jesus were not to him events of a remote past but more current and living happenings than the headlines in the newspapers. On Good Friday, I have almost expected to see the stigma on his hands, for each year he feels that Christ is crucified again. But on Easter morning the stone is literally rolled away, and at Christmas he seems actually to hear the voice of the herald angels.

My friend is an old man, and I have known him for many years, but this was the first time the Nativity had failed to rouse him to an ecstasy. He admitted that something was wrong. "Tomorrow," he said, "I must go down into that chapel and preach a Christmas sermon. And I must speak of peace and good will toward men. I know you think of me as a man too cloistered to be of any use to my community. And I know that our world is one of war and hate and enmity.

The One Recourse.

"And you, my young friend, and others keep insisting that before there can be brotherhood there must be the bashing of heads. You are all for good will to men, but you want to note very many exceptions. And I am still hoping and praying that in the great love of God the final seal of interdiction must not be put on even one. You may laugh at me, but right now I am worrying about how Christmas came to Judas Iscariot. You may remember that one of your great heroes, Gene Debs, once said, 'As long as there is a soul in prison I am not free.' Peace on earth must be for all or it is not peace."

It is the habit of my friend when he is troubled by doubts to reach for the Book, and he did so now. He smiled and said, "Will you assist me in a little experiment?"

"Like the men of Athens," he asked, "I am too superstitious. I will close my eyes and you hold out the Bible to me. I will open it at random and run my fingers down a page. You read me the text which I blindly select."

I did as he told me, and he happened on the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew and the twenty-fifth verse. I felt sorry for him, for this was no part of the story of the birth of Christ but instead an account of the great betrayal.

"Read what it says," commanded the dominie. And I read, "Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, 'Master, is it I?' He said unto him, 'Thou hast said.'"

Close to the Test.

My friend frowned, but then he looked at me in triumph. "Now I remember. My hand is not as steady as it used to be. You should have taken the lower part of my finger and not the top. Read the twenty-seventh verse. It is not an eighth of an inch away. Read what it says."

And I read, "And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of it.'" "Mark that," cried the old man exultantly. "Not even to Judas, the betrayer, was the wine of life denied. I can preach my Christmas sermon now, and my text will be, 'Drink ye all of it.' Good will toward men means good will to every last son of God. Peace on earth means peace to Pilate, peace to the thieves on the cross and peace to poor Iscariot."

"And whether the old man was right or wrong I was glad, for he had found Christmas, and I saw by his face that once more he heard the voice of the herald angels."
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