

“Let’s Talk About…” is a column in our monthly newsletter where we will learn one thing at a time about how we can love others the way they want to be loved. We will learn something each month that helps us understand and respect people who are different from us a little more deeply.

Let’s Talk About Christmas

Christmas trees are popping up everywhere, colorful lights are glowing in the dark, and familiar carols are beginning to take over the airwaves. This “most wonderful time of the year” is full of meaningful moments and memories. For many of us, those memories include people who have passed away. This season when everyone expects joy and generosity can be the most difficult season for many people. So as we begin our Gritty Advent here at Smoky Hill, let’s talk about the dark side of the holidays.

I could go a few different directions with this concept. There’s grief, for sure. There’s depression, which can set in around this time for a variety of reasons. Beyond depression, there’s a broader conversation to be had about mental health and how the holidays can impact it. But here’s what I see as the most important place for this conversation to begin: We pretend we are fine when we’re not. We keep holding ourselves to the same standards we do at other times of year, or even higher ones, and we try to ignore the stress or the grief or the pain of the emotions this season dredges up.

Maybe we don’t put on quite as much of a show as the Griswolds, but I promise, the pretense is more draining than authenticity would be. And authenticity doesn’t have to mean canceling Christmas! Christ was born into exactly this kind of world, full of horrible events and grieving people and families worried about the future. When we can trust each other with the reality of our gritty Advent and gritty Christmas emotions, then we can welcome Jesus into our real lives, not the ones we’re pretending to live.

So perhaps, if you’re not feeling up for baking six different kinds of cookies, say so. Maybe you and your family could watch a good movie together instead. Perhaps instead of a huge lights display, you light a couple candles in the window. Perhaps if this is a really difficult year for you and gifts seem like way too much, you spend what would have been your gift exchange time reading Luke 2 and recalling God’s gift to us. This is meant to be a season of light in the darkness, not trying to stare into the sun. I pray it can be a season of authentic connection with God and one another for all of us.

Our “Let’s Talk About…” column is one place where we can help one another learn how to be better allies for all our neighbors. If you have a question you’d like answered, or if there are things you wish others in our congregation better understood about your own marginalized identities or those for whom you are already a strong ally, please submit suggestions to <https://forms.gle/E9eRqZJGLgVagbDZ9> or email me directly at virginiag@smokyhillumc.org.