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## *Holy Hacks: December 13, 2019*

**By the Rev. Julia Mitchener**

Have Yourself a Messy Little Christmas

I have a dirty secret. It's about my closet, which, every year about this time, morphs from a fairly organized place for clothes and shoes into something resembling the loading dock at a UPS facility following a Category 5 hurricane. I love my closet. As the mother of young children, it is sometimes the only place I can go for privacy. My son and daughter know not to enter it without permission. Because of this, my closet is where I hide things—especially things that will soon find their way underneath the Christmas tree.

I start with the best intentions, stacking gifts neatly in storage bins and pushing them into a corner behind some coats. That works fine until Thanksgiving, when my ability to keep up with Amazon packages does battle with my capacity to do things like tying up a turkey's bottom. By mid-December, all semblance of order is gone. I am merely grabbing boxes off the front porch, running them upstairs at breakneck speed, then tossing them into any empty space I see.

This is not how I want things to be. I've seen pictures of other people's gift wrapping "stations." How I long to be the kind of person who has a gift wrapping station! Actually no—I just long to be the kind of person who is able to get dressed on Christmas Eve without wondering if I can squeeze into a pair of my six-year-old's tights because I can't find any of my own.

Christmas can be a season of great joy and contentment, but it can also be a messy time. Not just in terms of our closets and our kitchens, but in terms of our emotions and our relationships as well. Getting together with extended family can trigger happy memories, or it may reopen old wounds we thought had healed. We may enjoy decorating our house, putting on parties at our children's schools, and buying presents for friends, but our endless "to do" lists often leave us feeling stressed and inadequate.

I find comfort in the certainty that the first Christmas wasn't perfect either. Luke's gospel tells us Jesus spent his first night in a feeding trough. Matthew's version of the story suggests Joseph wasn't all that excited to learn his fiancée was pregnant. Then, of course, there was King Herod, whose evil scheming sent the Holy Family into exile before they'd even gotten Jesus into training pants.

But none of this stopped God. None of it. God saw the reality of human existence—the complicated relationships, the abusive leaders, the things that don't go at all like we'd planned—God saw all of this chaos and, in Jesus, climbed right into it. Christmas is proof positive that God is not put off by our messiness. On the contrary, God embraces it. This is the great Good News of the Incarnation—that God gets right into the cluttered closets of our lives and says to each of us, *There is no place I would rather be.*

This Christmas, I wish for each of you some moments in which you sense how very much God loves you, how God longs for you, how God embraces you—all of you, not just the parts that are neat and tidy. Moments in which you know it doesn't really matter that you forgot the batteries for your child's new toy or that the tenderloin was overdone or that your house doesn't look as festive as your neighbors'. Moments of comfort and joy. Moments of self-acceptance and peace. Moments of Emmanuel, *God with us.*