

Stories for Christmas Sunday
December 29, 2019

Today the message will be a series of stories and music. Christmas is about the greatest story of God's love. It invites us to enter into our stories and embrace the sacred in them. In each of the stories there will be lessons about how people found the sacred in the midst of their ordinary lives with all of their joys and struggles. I pray that you will find yourself in at least one of the stories so that you may become more aware of the sacred in your own life. Then the birth of Christ will happen again and again in your life.

1. Recognizing Jesus: Shoe Cobbler by Melvin Newland (based on Leo Tolstoy's "Martin the Cobbler")

One of my favorite Christmas stories is about the old shoe cobbler who dreamed one Christmas Eve that Jesus would come to visit him the next day. The dream was so real that he was convinced it would come true.

So the next morning he got up and went out and cut green boughs and decorated his little cobbler shop and got all ready for Jesus to come and visit. He was so sure that Jesus was going to come that he just sat down and waited for Him.

The hours passed and Jesus didn't come. But an old man came. He came inside for a moment to get warm out of the winter cold. As the cobbler talked with him he noticed the holes in the old man's shoes, so he reached up on the shelf and got him a new pair of shoes. He made sure they fit and that his socks were dry and sent him on his way.

Still he waited. But Jesus didn't come. An old woman came. A woman who hadn't had a decent meal in two days. They sat and visited for a while, and then he prepared some food for her to eat. He gave her a nourishing meal and sent her on her way.

Then he sat down again to wait for Jesus. But Jesus still didn't come.

Then he heard a little boy crying out in front of his shop. He went out and talked with the boy, and discovered that the boy had been separated from his parents and didn't know how to get home. So he put on his coat, took the boy by the hand and led him home.

When he came back to his little shoe shop it was almost dark and the streets were emptied of people. And then in a moment of despair he lifted his voice to heaven and said, "Oh Lord Jesus, why didn't you come?"

And then in a moment of silence he seemed to hear a voice saying, "Oh shoe cobbler, lift up your heart. I kept my word. Three times I knocked at your friendly door. Three times my shadow fell across your floor. I was the man with the bruised feet. I was the woman you gave to eat. I was the boy on the homeless street."

Jesus had come. The cobbler just didn't realize it.

Reflection & Song -Noel: <https://youtu.be/XMqFal5GCbA>

2. If I Could Only Become a Bird

Paul Harvey tells the story about a family on Christmas Eve. This family had a tradition where the Mother and children would go to the Christmas Eve service, and the Father would stay home and read the paper. When the family returns home from church, they would all gather to open up their presents.

The Father was not an evil man, but he just couldn't believe in the childhood stories anymore of God coming as a baby in a manger. As the family left for church, he opened up the evening paper and began to read by the fireplace.

Suddenly, he heard tapping on the window. It was a bird flying against the glass of his window trying to get out of the snow into the warmth of his home. The man had compassion on the bird, and he went outside, hoping to bring it in.

As he approached the bird, the bird just flew against the window even harder. Pretty soon, the bird flew into the bushes below the window, half frozen, yet too afraid to be caught by this huge man. The more the man tried to reach for the bird, the more the bird flew frantically into the snow and thorns of the bushes.

After a few minutes in the cold and seeing the bird continue to injure itself, the man yelled out in frustration, "Stupid bird, can't you understand that I'm trying to help?" The man paused and thought, "If only you understood you wouldn't fly away & if only I could become a bird, and get you to understand."

Just then, the church bells rang, as they always have on the hour. But when the man heard the bells this time, he fell to his knees and began to cry, saying, "Oh, God, I didn't understand. Oh, God, I didn't understand."

God came in human form that we might understand from where we have come and how we could be restored to God.

Reflection & Song

3. Christmas Truce:

Christmas Truce 1914 -World War I

<https://youtu.be/6KHoVBK2EVE>

"Christmas in the Trenches" song

<https://youtu.be/B5on4WK1MpA>

Even at the distance of a century, no war seems more terrible than World War I. In the four years between 1914 and 1918, it killed or wounded more than 25 million people, peculiarly horribly, and (in popular opinion, at least) for less apparent purpose than did any other war before or since. Yet there were still odd moments of joy and hope in the trenches of Flanders and France, and one of the most remarkable came during the first

Christmas of the war, a few brief hours during which men from both sides on the Western Front laid down their arms, emerged from their trenches, and shared food, carols, games and comradeship.

Their truce, the famous Christmas Truce, was unofficial and illicit. Many officers disapproved, and headquarters on both sides took strong steps to ensure that it could never happen again. While it lasted though, the truce was magical, leading even the sober Wall Street Journal to observe: "What appears from the winter fog and misery is a Christmas story, a fine Christmas story that is, in truth, the most faded and tattered of adjectives: inspiring."

The first signs that something strange was happening occurred on Christmas Eve. At 8:30 p.m. an officer of the Royal Irish Rifles reported to headquarters: "Germans have illuminated their trenches, are singing songs and wishing us a Happy Xmas. Compliments are being exchanged but am nevertheless taking all military precautions." Further along the line, the two sides serenaded each other with carols, the German "Silent Night" being met with a British chorus of "The First Noel" and scouts met, cautiously, in no man's land, the shell-blasted waste between the trenches. The war diary of the Scots Guards records that a certain Private Murker "met a German Patrol and was given a glass of whisky and some cigars, and a message was sent back saying that if we didn't fire at them, they would not fire at us."

The same basic understanding seems to have sprung up spontaneously at other spots. For another British soldier, Private Frederick Heath, the truce began late that same night when "all down our line of trenches there came to our ears a greeting unique in war: "English soldier, English soldier, a merry Christmas, a merry Christmas!" Then as Heath wrote in a letter home the voices added:

"Come out, English soldier; come out here to us." For some little time we were cautious, and did not even answer. Officers, fearing treachery, ordered the men to be silent. But up and down our line one heard the men answering that Christmas greeting from the enemy. How could we resist wishing each other a Merry Christmas, even though we might be at each other's throats immediately afterwards? So we kept up a running conversation with the Germans, all the while our hands ready on our rifles. Blood and peace, enmity and fraternity -war's most amazing paradox. The night wore on to dawn -a night made easier by songs from the German trenches, the pipings of piccolos and from our broad lines laughter and Christmas carols. Not a shot was fired."

Reflection and song:

4. Blessing Video:

My Christmas Eve: <https://youtu.be/Yt83CS1DxGI>