

St Nicolas Day 2021 – Toy Service

SERMON

There are all sorts of reasons why people write stories, and one of those reasons is to help us to better understand things that we find difficult.

Jesus told those sorts of stories, and he called them parables.

I'm going to read you a story this morning, which is a modern parable, but set a long time ago, one Christmas Eve, in a little village far, far away:

"In this Village, children would eagerly await the visit of Santa Claus. But they wouldn't lie in their beds waiting – instead, they would watch at their windows. Santa Claus wouldn't fly through the air on his sleigh, and he wouldn't be carrying a sack full of presents on his back, but he would walk into the Village, and he would be carrying an old, battered violin case.

As soon as they saw Santa Claus, the children would leave their homes and follow him to the village green where there stood a great oak tree. There, beneath the tree, Santa Claus would open up the violin case, take out his violin and play a haunting tune. As he played, something miraculous would happen. Slowly buds would form on the branches of the tree and then the buds would open and clothe the tree in a rich green cloak of leaves.

And then, most wonderful of all, the acorns would appear and would fall to the ground and be transformed into Christmas parcels, one for every child in the village. When each child had received a gift, all the children would hurry home to open their parcels, always finding just what they most wanted.

One Christmas, something happened that had never happened before. Santa Claus stopped playing and looked around at all the children clutching their presents, and then frowned and looked slightly bewildered. As he peered up into the tree for a while,

The familiar smile was no longer on his lips and the twinkle no longer in his eyes. Suddenly he looked rather old and rather sad.

‘Someone has taken two presents,’ he said. ‘There should be one parcel left – a gift was for a child who could not be here tonight and now I have nothing for him.’

As Santa Claus looked into the eyes of each child, they all felt uneasy, and a little ashamed that one of their number should do such a mean thing. Then a little boy stepped forward holding out his gift. ‘Take mine to the child,’ he said. ‘I would be happy for him to have it.’

‘How kind,’ responded Santa Claus. ‘Because of your generosity you can come with me and give it to the child yourself.’

So while the other children made their way home, Santa Claus took the boy to the edge of the village where there was a path that led deep into the forest. The night was calm and still, the sky was lit by a full moon and the stars seemed to shine brighter than ever before. After walking for some distance, they reached a wooden shack. The boy could make out the shapes of some strange animals tethered outside, and he heard the sound of a baby crying inside.

Santa Claus motioned for the boy to push the door. Slowly and rather cautiously he made his way in and there he saw a mother with a newborn Baby. There were also Shepherds kneeling in front of them, and three finely dressed men were waiting with gifts of their own to give.

He could not explain it, but he felt compelled to kneel himself as he offered his gift to the baby!"

A story about generosity. Today's service is about generosity.

The story of St Nicolas of Myra (which I'm not going to retell today, as I know that you have heard it many times before) also reminds us of generosity!

So, we are challenged to be generous today, in the bringing of our gifts for the Salvation Army Toy Appeal, for children who are much less fortunate than we are!

But there is more to it than just that! Because generosity is at the heart of what we stand for as Christians. As a response to God's radical generosity, we are called to open ourselves up to be loving in our own radical sort of way!

As the Collect reminded us, we respond to what we have been given, by giving ourselves.

And there are all sorts of ways in which we can do that: In the words of the Old Testament Reading, we can *bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners and we can proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

In real terms, that means:

- Welcoming the refugee and asylum seeker
- Helping people to escape from the metaphorical prisons walls which they or others have built around them
- Showing compassion and pastoral care to all who have less than we do

- And reaching out with the words of eternal life which God, in Jesus, has called us to share

That final point is just what Isaiah meant by '*proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour*'!

And the story of Jesus welcoming the children, reminds us too of Jesus own generosity. When he said, '*Let the children come to me*' he was showing us that great generosity of Spirit, which he displayed so often in his life! The generosity of Jesus, shows us what God's generosity is like – he is so generous, in fact, that we can't even begin to understand it!

Our notice sheet has recently been full of requests for help in doing the work of *proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour*!

It's not just about giving our money (though, of course, that is part of it), or bringing toys for the Salvation Army.

We desperately need:

- Volunteers to help with SEA Church
- Volunteers to help with Friday Toddlers
- Volunteers to help with Youth Café and Youth Group

Without these volunteers we will not be able to *proclaim the year of the Lord's favour* to the young people of our village!

It's about (and I make no apology for keeping on saying it) being a church which is Caring, Sharing and Daring!

Each Christmas, we enjoy all the things that make up a modern Christmas, and if we are to truly follow Christ, we must open our hearts

and our wallets in response to his ultimate and overwhelming generosity!