

First Sunday after Christmas
"A Christmas Parable"
Hebrews 2:10-18

This morning I'd like to do something I don't usually do.
On this the first Sunday of Christmas, a day when we have our minds full of many things,
a day when it might be harder than usual to listen to a sermon ,
I'd like to tell you some stories.

The first story I want to tell... is actually a parable about Christmas.
It's also a parable that helps us make sense of today's Gospel reading.

And here is how it begins:

There once was a time when all the angels were gathered about the heavenly throne of God
for a discussion.

Things were in a mess down on earth.

The creator had become terribly concerned about the state of the creation:
wars, fighting, famine, bloodshed all over the world.

"I've tried everything," God declared.

"I have spoken to them some of the most beautiful words they could ever hope to hear.

Think of the glorious psalms, the hymns, the poetic passages of Scripture.

They love to read about peace and goodwill, but they don't like to live it

God continued. "Then I sent them the prophets. Prophets like Isaiah.

They love Isaiah, the promises of release from their sufferings, freedom from their exile.

"But do they listen to the prophets?

Do they produce justice and righteousness rolling down like waters?

Not often enough."

The angels were silent.

Many of the angels -- Gabriel, Michael, and others had been on earth on many occasions.

They had seen for themselves the sources of God's lament and shared God's concern.

"I think the only thing left is for one of you, a member of the heavenly court,
to go down to earth." God said.

Live with them, not just for a moment, but every day.

Get to know them, let them get to know you.

Only then will the kingdom of heaven be truly communicated to them.

Only then will they take notice of the great gap between the way they have been living and the
way they were created. Only then will we be able to reveal to them who I created them to be.

The angels stood around in another awkward silence.
They had been to earth before, to deliver messages from God
or to effect some momentary intervention into human affairs.

They weren't about to volunteer for long-term duty in such a murderous, difficult place.

The silence lasted for what seemed like an eternity.

Finally, God himself broke the silence.
Quietly, with determination, but without any sense of resignation or bitterness, God said,
"Then I will go."

Our Gospel today is a sad, unusually bloody story.
It tells of a frightened flight to Egypt in great haste.
A poor refugee family fleeing for its life.

All this is against a background of a horrible slaughter of innocent Jewish babies,
one of the many that would afflict God's chosen people down through the ages.

It's a story that has been repeated a thousand times over—
kings and tyrants greedy for power and riches...
willing to see their people suffer...so that they can live in privilege.

Using any means necessary, they persecute, murder, and destroy families,
just to hold on to their power.

In many cases, people flee their own cities and their home country...
with little but the clothes on their backs... refugees fleeing to a strange land.

Our 2nd Reading from the book of Hebrews proclaims,
that the Almighty God of the Universe,
was "not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters."

For this to be true it means that God does not mind getting mixed up
in all the blood, tears, and suffering of this world.

As Hebrews puts it,
"He did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham...
in other words, people like us.

He came even as a humble child in Bethlehem, to meet us in the midst of whatever brokenness
we suffer. He came to heal our hurts and redeem us from our sin
and to give us the hope of new life.

*For in Christ we are a new creation... the old has passed away,
behold, the new has come.*

Let me close with one more story...

Two Americans were invited by the Russian Dept. of Education to teach.

And the place they were sent to teach was an orphanage where many of the orphans had been returned to the care of the State, after being removed from an abusive foster home.

When December rolled around these two teachers decided to include the birth of Jesus in their lesson plan.

To do this, they first taught the story of Jesus' birth. Then they provided materials the children would use in constructing the manger scene.

One little boy named Misha, who was about 6 years old, had all the details of the manger scene correct, except for one detail: he had placed two babies in the manger!

The teachers asked him about this, and he re-told the story accurately right down to Mary laying the babe in the manger, which was amazing since this was the first time he had ever heard it.

Then he started ad libbing.

"When Mary laid the baby in the manger," Misha reported, "Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him, I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay.

Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him, I couldn't... because I didn't have a gift to give him like wisemen did.

But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift.

I thought if maybe I kept him warm that would be a gift. So I asked Jesus, "If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?" And Jesus told me, "If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me."

So I got in the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and told me I could stay with him ...always!"

After telling this story, Misha, cried and cried until he shook all over.

He had finally found someone who would never abandon him. Never.

Somehow this little orphan had put to words, the Christmas story and gave us a glimpse of what it means.

Two things were happening simultaneously:
the gift this boy brought was the most valuable he could give: himself.

And with this gift, he was also realizing the eternal presence of the one who said,
“Lo, I will be with you always, even til the end of the age.”

Friends in Christ,
Jesus indeed has come for people like us.
He enters our broken world and He promises to never leave us or forsake us
to be with us always, even to the end of the age.

Amen