

Haydenville Congregational Church
The Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian
Christmas Eve Service 2009

Christmas Eve Story

I want to tell you a story that was told to me during Advent. It's a story for old and for young, it is a story for YOU on Christmas Eve. The story is set in 1950, the town is in southern Florida, and the place is an orphanage, a home for boys.

The home for boys was run by a house mother, or matron, who loved all the boys very much. She doted on those boys. And so did the woman who came in to do the cooking and another woman who came in to help with the laundry. The three of them loved those boys—they cuddled them and read to them, they played with them and tickled them, they celebrated their birthdays with special cupcakes, they put them on their laps and held them. And the house mother prayed with the boys every single night when they went to bed. The house mother, the cook and the woman who helped with the laundry really loved those boys and they told them and they showed them.

The home for boys was a loving place but they did not have much money or much in the way of luxuries. There were few toys to play with, no TV, and one small radio that everyone gathered around. When the boys played outside they had to make their own fun—so there were lots of games of hide and seek and kick the can. The boys built forts in the woods, and they made up games that included everyone—even the littlest ones.

One day a big, fancy car pulled up in front of the home. The boys peered out the windows. They saw a man and a woman get out of the car and the boys knew right away this couple was wealthy. She had on a coat with fur around the collar and the cuffs. He had on a long camel colored coat. She carried a nice leather handbag, he wore a dashing brown hat. The couple came into the home and talked to the house mother....they explained that they wanted to adopt one of the boys. Everyone was excited when they realized what was happening and wondered which boy would be lucky enough to be chosen.

After the couple spent a few hours in the home with the boys, they took one seven-year-old boy aside to talk with him. In a small private room off the dining room, the couple sat down with the boy. The woman started the conversation.

She asked the boy, “Do you have your own baseball, mitt and bat?”

The boy answered, “No, ma’am.”

The woman asked, “Do you have your own bicycle?”

The boy answered, “No, ma’am.”

The woman asked, “Do you have your own train set?”

The boy answered, “No, ma’am.”

The woman asked, “Do you have your own radio?”

The boy paused and then said, “Ma’am, if you’re just going to buy be presents, I’d rather stay here.”

...if you are just going to buy me presents, I would rather stay here...

The boy was being honest: I would rather stay here where people love and hold me, tickle me and cuddle me, read to me and pray with me....I’d rather stay here.

This is a sweet story and I want us to remember this story tomorrow when we open our Christmas presents.

I want us to delight in the lovely gifts we are able to give and receive.

But I want us also to remember that the greatest gifts we give and receive are love and a sense of belonging, appreciation and trust, caring and affection.

Tomorrow we will open some wonderful presents but the greatest present we can give and receive is presence—precious time spent with each other, listening to one another, caring for one another, being helpful, being of service, being present to each other. The greatest present we can give to each other is our presence with each other. And the greatest present we receive each day, not just at Christmastime, is God’s presence with us.

God’s presence in our life is a present we cannot put in a box and wrap up with Christmas paper. But God’s presence is a gift we can experience every day, every hour by being quiet, spending time in prayer, being aware that God is near—bidden or unbidden—God is near.

The woman in the story who wanted to adopt the little boy did not begin talking to the boy by telling him how much she and her husband would love and cherish him. She did not start by saying that she and her husband would love and cuddle him, play with him and read to him, spend time just being with him. The woman made the mistake of telling the boy what she would BUY him. And that smart little boy knew—already at seven-years-old!!—he knew that he needed and valued things you cannot buy.

The little boy did not want to give up all the love and closeness he felt in the home with the three women and all the other boys to have a bicycle, train set, baseball and radio of his own.

THINGS cannot fill that place inside us that longs for love and meaning, purpose and a connection with others and with the divine. That smart seven-year-old boy knew: we don't have much here in this home but we have what matters....love, caring and trust.

Many many many years ago another little boy, a baby boy, was born without a home, without a crib, without any material possessions. A baby boy named Jesus. He did not have things but he had Mary and Joseph who loved and cherished him and **they told him and they showed him.**

And in time baby Jesus grew to be a man who loved and cherished many people and **he told them and he showed them.**

The greatest present we can ever receive is the presence of this divine being—the trinity of love in God our mother and father, Jesus our brother, and the Holy Spirit. The greatest present we can ever receive is the presence of Jesus who was born a helpless infant without anything to call his own. He had nothing but love. He lived with nothing but love and died with nothing but love. And the present, the gift of his presence, remains with us today.

And so this Christmas, let's remember that smart little seven-year-old boy who had the wisdom to say, "If you are just going to buy me presents, I'd rather stay here." This Christmas, let's remember that little baby boy born in a stable who had nothing but who also had everything—he was loved and cherished and a choir of angels rejoiced at his birth.

This Christmas, let's be grateful for our presents under the tree, AND let's give thanks for God's presence in our lives, a presence that surrounds and sustains us always.

Amen.