

## **Christmas Eve, 2022 Sermon**

It was bitterly cold in this upper mid-western town this particular year, with temperatures well below zero, snow knee-deep. It was Christmas Eve. And despite the weather, everybody in this small, rural farming town went to the midnight Christmas Eve service at the local church, regardless of the weather, or whether or not you believed in Jesus. Because it's just what you did on Christmas Eve. You went to church.

But one man, a husband, father, just couldn't bring himself to go this year or any year for that matter, because he didn't believe in all this Jesus stuff. He didn't believe in things like incarnation, or virgin births. He thought he would be hypocritical if he attended this Christmas Eve worship service. And so as he did every year on Christmas Eve, he apologized to his family, wished them well as they bundled up and headed out to the midnight service, and then settled down with a book, a fire in the fireplace, and as he always did this night, poured himself a nice warm hot toddy.

All of a sudden, there was a loud thud on the large window pane at the front of his house. A few seconds later another thud, followed by another, and another. So the man got up to go see what was going on outside, thinking it must be kids throwing snowballs or something. But being this far out in the country, with no neighbors within miles, it just didn't make any sense that kids would come around on Christmas Eve and pelt his house with snowballs. And then, looking down on his porch, he noticed a group of birds that are gathered, hopping around, looking for somewhere to stay warm, out of the storm. Clearly these birds were in distress.

The man quickly realized they had been drawn to the light inside the house, and so they were flying into the large glass window looking for warmth and shelter. Once he realized what was going on, he decided to head out to the barn out back, because he figured if he opened the barn door, seeing the light, the birds might fly inside to stay warm.

So he put on his galoshes, his jacket, and headed out to the barn in the deep snow, where he opened the doors, lit a light inside, and then waited to see if the birds would go in. But they didn't. They stayed on his front porch, still in danger. So he thought he'd try some food to entice the birds to fly into the barn.

He spread some breadcrumbs from his porch out to the barn on top of the snow, hoping the birds would see the food, which would then lead them to fly into the barn. But nope. The birds completely ignored the bread crumbs as they continued to flail around on the man's front porch.

Tired of trying to shoo them into the barn, he then tried to herd them together, scattering his arms around them. But still, the birds just scattered everywhere except into the barn.

And then he realized - the birds were afraid of him - afraid of this strange terrifying person trying to gather them up, to shoo them into the barn. Maybe they thought he was trying to do them harm.

At his wits end, he tried to figure some way – any way he could to convince the birds that he was only trying to help them, to save them from the storm, to give them shelter and food. But what could he do? Because every move he made seemed to just scare the birds. And so they scattered, frightened of this man who was just trying to help save them. The birds, as he realized, were afraid of him.

Frustrated, he soon realized that the only way he could save them, the only way he could save them, was to become one of them. To be like them, to speak their language, to tell them not to be afraid, that he was there to help them, to save them. Because it would be only then, when the birds could see, and hear, and understand in their own way, that the man was truly trying to save them, when they listened to and responded and trusted in him, and followed him that they would be safe.

And it was in that moment that the man knew what he had to do to help these poor struggling birds on his porch. And that was to become one of them.

No, this is not an original story of mine, but actually from a radio broadcast by the legendary radio commentator Paul Harvey. Some of you may remember him and his radio broadcast from the 50s through the 70s on Mutual Radio and elsewhere. This particular broadcast was from the year 1965. And as he would finish his broadcast he would always end his with his famous ending..."and now you know the rest of the story". Remember that?

But the rest of the story is this, and it's my own interpretation. We – you, I, are those birds, lost, scared,

frightened, in a hostile world – a world full of danger at every turn. The man in our story is God – a loving God who cared so much for his people (those birds) that he would do anything to save them – anything. Anything to keep us out of danger and harm and to give us a chance at life – and abundant life at that.

But we wouldn't listen to him. We wouldn't trust him. We wouldn't trust his voice. We were afraid of what we saw as a mighty, powerful, and scary God. A vengeful God even. A God who wanted to harm us.. And so whenever God would draw near us we would scatter just like those birds on that front porch on that cold Christmas Eve night in the upper mid-western town. And so we made decisions that were deadly, harmful to us. And it seemed as though no matter what God did, no matter how much love and care he showed us, we turned away, frightened, failing to trust this God who loved us. Sound familiar?

And so God, having exhausted everything God could think of to save us, saw that only by becoming one of us would we listen to him and trust him, and follow him. Becoming one of us – to speak our language, to know what our lives are like, to laugh, to cry, to struggle just like us. Even to die as we ourselves die.

This is the love of God for us in Christ Jesus, just like the love of that man trying to gather those birds to safety in that storm that Christmas Eve night. And so tonight, God is born among us again. God, and God's love for us comes to us to speak our language, to live among us again, to become one of us. As evangelist St. John writes in the gospel of St. John, the Word has become flesh and dwells among us. To gather us into the family of God. And his name is Jesus - in the Hebrew “ Jeshua” which means salvation, or the one who has come to us so that we might see the glory of the Father.

Oh come all you faithful. Thanks be to God

The Rev. Gregory Shreaves

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