

The First Sunday after Christmas

12/27/2009

A Christmas Story

On Christmas morning I received an unexpected present from someone who had attended services the night before. After we had opened everything under the tree and had a lovely breakfast, I checked my emails to find an unexpected one from a gentleman who wrote to say that he was so moved by our service on Christmas Eve that he would like to share with me a story that he had written for his six year old grandson; a story that was an attempt to explain something of the meaning of Christmas. I was so moved by the story that I emailed the gentleman back and asked if I could share it with you, the congregation. He graciously said "yes," so what follows is a Christmas story from grandfather to grandson.

"Peter had lots of friends in his kindergarten class. Practically everyone liked him, except maybe Phillippe who would sit by himself and not say anything. Phillippe talked funny and had a hard time saying some words. Most kids thought he was stupid, but Peter wasn't sure.

Phillippe would look down, shake his head no and not say anything when kids talked to him. It wasn't surprising they would make fun of him. He was so different than the other kids with his brown skin, thick black hair and sandals. He wore the same dirty shirt to school each day. Peter would sometimes watch him sitting by himself with his head down holding something with both hands against his chest.

One day Peter's curiosity got the best of him and he walked over, pointed to Phillippe's hands clenched over his chest and asked "What's that?" Phillippe just shook his head no. Peter started to get mad and walk away, and then stopped. Instead he reached in his pocket and pulled out something he had stashed there after lunch. Peter pulled out a small ball of chocolate wrapped in bright red foil and silently held it in his outstretched hand to Phillippe. The brown skinned boy looked up slowly puzzled. Peter said "It's okay. It's for you" and again held out his hand.

Phillippe released his clenched hands, took the chocolate and began to unwrap it. As he did, Peter could see what it was Phillippe had been holding against his chest. It was a small wooden cross that looked like it had been carved with a penknife. The cross was hanging on a black string around Phillippe's neck. The wooden cross was stained dark with the oil of human hands touching it.

Peter thought he saw a slight smile on Phillippe's face as the chocolate dissolved in his mouth, but the brown skinned boy was too shy to look up. It was time for recess and Peter asked Phillippe to come play soccer with him. There was no answer. Phillippe just stared at the tattered sandals on his feet.

Peter ran outside to shout and kick the black and white soccer ball around the playground as hard as he could. He was fast and loved to run and kick even if he didn't get a goal. Sometimes his teacher, Mrs. Teaberry, would have to blow her whistle to get Peter to slow down. Peter pointed to Phillippe sitting by himself on the playground and asked Mrs. Teaberry "Why doesn't he play?" She said quietly, "Not everyone is as lucky as you Peter".

On Christmas day, Peter was not surprised to find a mountain of presents under the tree. His parents, who loved him very much, had told him Santa would be good to good little boys. He began unwrapping and was delighted to discover a shiny new pair of black and white soccer shoes with red racing stripes down the side. Yippee! He slipped them on and raced around the living room almost knocking over his mom's favorite flower vase. He couldn't wait to get back to school after the holidays and run around the playground in his

new shoes. No one would be able to stop him now. He carefully wrapped the shiny shoes up and put them in his backpack so he would remember to bring them to school.

On the first day back at school Peter watched the clock waiting for recess. When the bell rang he ran to his backpack, carried the new shoes outside and started to put them on. The other kids were already shouting and running around. Peter noticed that many of them had on new jumpers, shorts and hats that Santa had brought them. Then Peter saw Phillippe sitting alone on the grass in the same dirty shirt.

Peter stopped putting on the new shoes and walked over to Phillippe. "Hi" Peter said. Phillippe just looked down and shook his head no. Peter sat down next to him. "Won't you come play?" he asked. Phillippe was silent. He stared at his left foot where the sole was falling off his sandal.

Peter held out his hands and said "Here, I want you to have these". Phillippe looked up in disbelief at the beautiful new soccer shoes, but didn't move. "These are for you" Peter said again still holding out the shoes, "they don't fit me". With a little more encouragement Phillippe finally tried on the shoes. They were a perfect fit. The shoes seemed to glow against his smooth brown skin. Peter had never seen a smile like the one that exploded on Phillippe's face. Peter was smiling too. "Now come on, let's play" Peter said. The two boys started chasing each other around the playground laughing.

When Peter got home that day his dad asked him, "How did you like the new shoes? Were they fast?" Peter smiled and said "Yes daddy, they were really fast!" Then he went to his room and threw his backpack on the bed. As he did the backpack opened and something spilled out on the floor. It was a small package wrapped in the same red paper that his shoes had been wrapped in. There was no note on the package. Peter opened it. Inside the paper was a black string holding a small wooden cross. Peter held the dark wood in his hands for a moment, and then hung it around his neck."

The End

This story is dedicated with love to Jamie.

Grandad
December 20, 2009