

Year B, December 24, 2017
Christmas Eve
Christ Church, Mexia

I have to confess - "My wife hasn't spoken to me since last Christmas. I asked her what she wanted for Christmas, and she said, 'Oh, just surprise me.' So, at three o'clock last Christmas morning, I leaned over and (yelled), 'Boo!'" (Hodgin, 407)

Stories! This is a time of stories, and I can't think of any I have enjoyed more in my life than the one I just read you from Luke about Jesus' birth. I look forward to hearing it each Christmas and I had thought of some different ways to think and talk about it this year. But this is an extraordinary year; this morning we celebrated the 4th Sunday in Advent and now, just a few hours later, we are celebrating Christmas Eve. So instead of talking about this favorite story, I want to share another one with you - one that I think conveys the underlying, but perhaps overlooked, message of Luke's story.

I don't know whether the following story is true or not. It is something that circulated on the Internet years ago - you may have seen/heard it, but like the story in Luke, I think it is one that we cannot hear too often.

"A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art (they had).

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and (sadly) died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and (he) grieved deeply for his only son. About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, 'Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly... He often talked about you, and your love for art.' The young man held out the package. 'I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this (painting).'

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and

offered to pay him for the picture. 'Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift.'

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few years later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings (because he had no heir). Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. 'We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?'

There was silence... Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, 'We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one.'

But the auctioneer persisted. 'Will somebody bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?'

Another voice angrily said. 'We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!'

But still the auctioneer continued. 'The son! The son! Who'll take the son?'

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. 'I'll give \$10 for the painting...' Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

'We have \$10, who will bid \$20?' 'Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters.' The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections.

The auctioneer intoned: 'Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!' and pounded his gavel. A man sitting on the second row shouted, 'Now let's get on with the collection!' The auctioneer laid down his gavel. 'I'm sorry, the auction is over.'

'What about the other paintings?'

'I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will... I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that

painting would inherit the entire estate, including all the other paintings. The one who took the son gets everything!

Tonight, we recall that over 2,000 years ago God sent his son to be incarnate – to be our Savior, our Redeemer. But each one of us is like the innkeeper, who gets to decide if there is room for Jesus. What good is it that Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem, if he is not also born within us? Much like the auctioneer in this story, God's message to us today is: 'The Son, the Son, who'll take my Son?' Because, you see, whoever takes God's Son gets everything!

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit. Amen