

Sermon for Christmas Eve, Candlelight Service 2018

“No Strings Attached”

Text: Luke 2:1-20 and “Barrington Bunny” by Martin Bell, from *The Way of the Wolf*

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Christmas is a time for lessons and carols, a time for telling stories. Some are ancient stories about shepherds and angels and a baby born in a barn. Some of them are stories from our childhood; stories of elves and flying red-nosed reindeer, of snowmen who come to life by the magical Christmas power of an old silk hat, and of Santa Claus. Each season brings new stories; stories that capture in a new way some of the miracle of the first story. The story of God’s love for us, a love so deep and marvelous that it came alive one night, a gift that became “Emmanuel.” “God with us.” We tell stories because they touch our hearts and not just our minds. They help us enter into the mystery of a Truth, one that’s larger than human reason and logic can explain.

Stories reveal different levels of truth that reach us wherever we are, ready to receive them on any given day. Christmas is a time for telling stories. So often the story of Jesus is portrayed as a kind of romantic, sentimental tale not unlike the decorations and secular stories and carols we hear this time of the year. Christmas is seen as a time of fellowship and fine food, a time to put aside just for a while the things that divide us, at least until the After-Christmas sales. We forget how marvelous and how costly a gift Christmas really is. We forget that the manger and the cross are both made of the same wood. We forget that this small child, this embodiment of God’s love was sent not just to be a gift, another trinket to wear around our necks for a season, but came to show us what God’s love is all about. It’s a love that is willing to die for us, a love that came to save us and set us free.

This is where Christmas really begins. This is why we tell the Christmas story again tonight because it did not end in the manger. We tell the story because of who Jesus became, what He taught, how He lived, how He died, how He was raised and that He is still risen! Tonight we celebrate the greatness of the Christmas gift and we remember the cost.

One particular Christmas story that illustrates this very well, the story “Barrington Bunny” by Martin Bell. It’s the story of a lop-eared, furry brown bunny with “unusually shiny eyes.” Barrington sets out encouraged by a great/mysterious silver wolf on Christmas Eve to give special gifts to several animal families living in the forest. Sticks for the beavers’ house, dead grass and leaves for the squirrels’ nest, and so on. As night begins to fall and a blizzard approaches Barrington discovers a baby field mouse lost and separated from his family and in danger of freezing. Knowing that bunnies are furry and warm Barrington covered the little mouse, hugging him tightly throughout the long, cold night as it slept safe and sound. The next morning, as the story goes the field mice found their little boy asleep in the snow warm and snug beneath the furry carcass of a dead bunny. Their relief was so great that they didn’t even think to question where the bunny had come from. And that’s pretty much where the story ends.

Needless to say, “Barrington Bunny” is a story that while sad offers up a powerful message about giving and sacrifice. A reminder of the costly nature of this incredible gift of God. A gift of grace. A free gift with no strings attached. A small baby born (for the most part) no differently than you or me who came to be a gift and to tell us that we too are gifts and members of the same family, the family of Our God. This baby, this Christ-child, showed us that life truly is a gift. He showed us that to be human is a gift. He showed us what it means to be made in God’s own image, to be a people after God’s own heart. What a remarkable gift! And that’s what Christmas is really all about.

Let us, then, praise God for that gracious gift. Let us receive it and allow it to transform us into gifts, gifts to one another. Gifts of grace. Free gifts, with no strings attached!

Come, Lord, Jesus.

Amen and amen.