

Christmas Day 2024 Christmas Treasures

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This sermon was given extemporaneously without manuscript.

Do you have any Christmas treasures? An ornament or decoration or tradition or secret family recipe you make every year....anything that has some meaning for you that connects you to the holiday and maybe someone precious to you?

We have many pieces of Christmas in our house that are connected to relatives who passed away a long time ago. Like this little Santa with his open sack filled with mini candy canes. This comes from Michael's family, it belonged to his grandmother who always had mini candy canes in Santa's sack, so because of that connection, we continue that tradition with putting little candy canes in his sack. We don't eat them all, but that's not the point.

What about the rest of you?

Thank you for sharing those treasures with us. I love how so many of them are simple, and even small. There is something about Christmas and small that goes together.

One of my treasures is this little book called *The Littlest Christmas Tree*. There is an inscription that reads Mrs. Budding Nelson, Christ Church Christmas Day 1957. I wish I knew the story behind the inscription. I can tell you Mrs. Budding Nelson is my grandmother, who died of Alzheimer's when I was still in seminary. Christ Church is the Episcopal parish she and my grandfather attended in Gary, Indiana, near their home in Crown Point. But that is all I know.

This little book came into my possession after my grandfather died and my mom and her sisters decided while cleaning out my grandparents house that I should have all their books, especially any books pertaining to church stuff. Because that is what happens when you have a priest in the family. I discovered this book in one of the boxes from my grandparents house that had all kinds of churchy stuff in it. Even though I was fairly close to my grandparents, I didn't remember seeing this little book before.

I love Christmas, and one of the things I collect is Christmas stories. I have a lot of them, and I had never seen this book, so of course I read the story. It's not bad. It must have meant something to my grandmother, because she kept it for a long time. You can tell the book was read more than once. I just wish I knew if it was a Christmas treasure of hers, because it has become one of mine.

One reason I collect Christmas stories is because of what we just heard: that wonderful, beautiful beginning of John's Gospel that is assigned for Christmas Day. John's Gospel does not have the story of Jesus' birth. Instead, has his mysterious description of Jesus and the Word made Flesh to dwell with us. We are given this Gospel reading on Christmas Day because the Incarnation, a church word for Jesus' birth, for God becoming flesh, is a mystery we can't ever fully understand. It is a holy mystery, not like a murder mystery where we try to figure out who done it. We can get close to holy mysteries, and whenever we do, sometimes we will discover something about God or us. One way to get close to a holy mystery is through music, that is why some people really love music. Another way to is through stories. So, every Christmas Day I like to share a story, because stories are for all people, and stories can help us get close to the Word of God made flesh and dwelling with us. This Christmas Day, I want to share with you this story, from a little out of print book, about the Littlest Christmas Tree.

The story is about three Christmas trees in a tree lot between a church and a department store in a city on Christmas Eve. They were the last three trees on the lot; all the others had been purchased and taken to their destinations. Two of the trees had a sold sign on them, which meant they were waiting to be picked up. The person operating the lot couldn't hear the discussion the trees had while they waited.

The largest tree talked a great deal about its esteemed history and heritage, claiming it came from the same line of Christmas Trees that Prince Albert gave to Queen Victoria many years ago and supposedly established the tradition of Christmas trees in every household to the present day. Because of its heritage, the large tree imagined it would be taken to a mansion, placed in a magnificent ballroom to be the center of elaborate feasting and hobnobbing with the wealthiest, most influential people in the city.

The prettiest tree also had a sold sign on it and talked all about how beautiful and elegant it was and imagined because of its beauty it would be taken to an important house and decorated with expensive ornaments purchased at famous jeweler's and artists shops.

The third tree was the smallest, and it did not have a sign on it. It was duly impressed by the heritage of the large tree and the elegance of the pretty tree. It was easy to understand why they had been sold and easy to believe they would end up in the places they imagined for themselves on Christmas Day. The little tree wondered where it would end up, imagining a tree without pedigree or good looks was probably going to be cut up for firewood.

As it got darker, the lights of the store went out, and the streetlights came on. A man dressed in a driver's uniform came to collect the large tree. When he saw the size of it he complained about having to get it on the car and get it in the house of his employer. He complained so much, the person who was working at the lot offered to go with him and help. So he left with the man in a large car, with the tree secured on top.

A bit later another man showed up for the pretty tree. He said it was so pretty any old ornament would look good on it, and roughly and without care, drug it away, trailing needles and a few branches that broke off along the way.

The street got dark and quiet as the littlest tree remained by itself in the tree lot. It wondered if the man who worked there was going to come back. It wondered what would happen to it, and unsold Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. Just as it was imagining the worst, the lights of the church next door came on, filling the lot with all the colors of the stained-glass windows. Then two people came into the lot and the tree heard them say things like, "This must be the one." "It's perfect! Just the right size."

Next, the little tree was picked up and carried into the church and placed next to the creche, with figures of Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus in a manger. The voices said, "There, isn't that a beautiful nativity!"

If anyone had noticed the water collecting around the base of the little tree, they might have assumed the snow on its branches was melting, when in fact, it was the tree itself crying for joy. Because it realized it had not been sold, it had been saved for this special place.

The little tree realized what so many of miss about Christmas, we too are saved, because of all the things we might treasure at this time of the year, it is we who – no matter our lineage, appearance, or wealth – who are treasured by God. We are God's Christmas treasure, which is why God became flesh to be with us.

Merry Christmas.