



Of Seeds and Flowers



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Merry Christmas 2016

This story was written by a doctor who worked in South Africa. If this story doesn't light your fire maybe you are working with wet wood.

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny premature baby and a crying 2 year old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, since we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator). We also had no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in.

Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates). "And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it is no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

"All right," I said, "put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray for and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the 2 year old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During prayer time, one 10 year old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. "Please, God", she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon."

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, "And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen". I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything, the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door.

By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty- two pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box.

Continued on the last page.



A Drop of Rain... A Bit of Sun

Let Go, Let God

The journey to the manger can be long and hard or we can slip in through the main door of simplicity, silence, solitude and surrender. In Christmas a power has been loosened to change our hurting world, our hurting hearts.

When the Almighty God became a little baby all distance and fear were taken away. He was born as we are, from a woman's body. He became a baby whom we could see, who was carried in the arms of those who loved Him. - a baby nursing at His mother's breast, a baby whose diapers (swaddling clothes) needed changing. - a baby whose parents taught him how to talk and how to use a spoon and held His hand when He learned to walk.



Jesus is the visible face of the invisible God. - most approachable in the weakness of a newborn.

It is easy to talk to the Child-Prince, the Infant-Savior. Christmas can lift the weight and fear and shame and guilt of the years. Let it go! Start over again. - fresh, free, forgiven, unashamed. Lay your burdens at the manger! Walk lightly! The good news is that God wants more for you than you are willing to settle for, and He will give you the power to achieve it. You are the reason for His coming and the reason for His staying. The Kingdom of God is WITHIN YOU! Fan the Flame! Follow the star! Come Lord Jesus!

Advent is a time of serious spiritual preparation for the coming of Jesus in the flesh. Advent is the Liturgical Season- the Christmas-Epiphany season, that celebrates light, the Divine light; just as Lent is the season of preparation for the Easter-Ascension Liturgical season that celebrates life. - the passion death and resurrection of Jesus, and Pentecost is the liturgical season that celebrates LOVE. The remainder of the liturgical year is filled with Scriptural readings that give us instruction on how to live a Christian life of LIGHT, LIFE AND LOVE.

MY SUGGESTION FOR AN EASY BUT EFFECTIVE PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS: Listen, really listen closely to the **words of the traditional Christmas carols**. Reflect on the words, let them become real, alive in your intellect and then let them lead to **some type of prayer response**.

You are called to be a child of the Light. Let the LIGHT penetrate any of the darkness that is in your heart, reveal it and heal it. Pray that the LIGHT penetrate all of the darkness in our culture, reveal it and heal it. WHAT A CHRISTMAS IT WILL BE!!!! THE CHILD WILL TRULY BE BORN ANEW IN YOUR HEART AND IN OUR NATION.

"Make ready for Christ the Savior", shouts Thomas Merton, "whose smile, like lightning, sets free the song of everlasting glory that now sleeps in your, paper flesh, like dynamite."

"To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but being a living mystery, It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." Cardinal Suhard

TRANSFORMED PEOPLE, TRANSFORM PEOPLE!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!

VISION AND REALITY

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS: The Blessed Mother is the only woman mentioned in the Quran. Mary's Islamic titles include SAIMAH (she who fasts) and SIDDIQAH (she who confirms the truth). The Quran describes the angels as saying, "O Mary! God has chosen you and purified you-chosen you above all women of all nations of the world."

"Mary is the mother of Jesus and the Mother of us all." "The veneration of Mary is inscribed in the very depths of the human heart." Martin Luther. And again, Martin Luther called her, "the highest woman and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ." and described her as "nobility, wisdom and holiness personified."

Mother Theresa said she often prayed thus: "Mary, Mother of Jesus, please be a Mother to me NOW."

Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest who volunteered to die in place of a stranger at Auschwitz said: "Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did."

"Only after the Last Judgment will Mary get any rest. From now until then she is much too busy with her children." St. John Vianney

Using an odd fishing metaphor St. Catherine of Siena said, "Mary is the sweetest bait - chosen, prepared and ordained by God to catch the hearts on men."

The Fire Inside

In every cell of our bodies and in the very DNA of our souls we ache for someone or something that we have not yet known, ache in a way that leaves us dissatisfied and restless inside our own skins. Our lives always seem too small for us. Moreover, and this is the key-this is God's doing. God is the hand behind this "intolerable shirt of flame:" as T. S. Eliot puts it.

The fire inside us comes from the way God made us, namely, to crave the infinite and to be dissatisfied with everything else until that love is consummated. Thus, the fire inside us will never be extinguished simply by attaining the right partner, the right job, the right set of friends, or the right recognition. We will always be on fire. When Saint Augustine says: "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you," he is, of course, pointing out why God made us this way. It is a guarantee that we will never be satisfied with anything less than the infinite and the eternal.

Advent celebrates human longing. It asks us not to deny our longings but to enter them, deepen them, and widen them until we undergo a metamorphosis. Longing shapes the soul in many ways, particularly by helping create the space within us where God can be born. Longing leads us to the stable and the manger of Bethlehem. It carves out a trough into which God can be born.

The fire inside us comes from the way God made us, namely, to crave the infinite and to be dissatisfied with everything else. Ronald Rolheiser

If you have Netflix: "The Letters" and "Full of Grace" will touch your heart.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL AND ESPECIALLY FOR ALL OF THE LOVE AND SUPPORT SHOWN TO US FOR THE PAST 34 YEARS! We have served about 28,000 people, in one way or another, and we continue to serve by personal and spiritual counseling, "Of Seeds And flowers" and our regular Facebook postings.

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From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the .. could it really be? .. grasped it and pulled it out - yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying-out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked: "Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months. Packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child - five months before, in answer to the faith filled prayer of a 10 year old to bring it "that afternoon". "Before they call, I will answer." Isaiah 65:24

Prayer, faith filled prayer, is one of the best free gifts we have received. Let's continue to pray for one another: Father, I ask you to bless my friends reading this right now. I am asking You to minister to their spirit at this very moment. Where there is pain, give them Your peace and mercy. Where there is self doubt, give wisdom to work through the doubt. Where there is tiredness or exhaustion, I ask You to give understanding, guidance and strength as they learn to listen to Your plan for their life. Where there is spiritual weakness, I ask You to renew them by revealing Your divine indwelling, and by drawing them into greater intimacy with Your heart. Where there is fear, Your hugs, please, and bless with Your courage. Bless their finances, give them greater vision, and raise up leaders and friends to support and encourage them. Where there is any blocking sin, reveal it, and break its hold over their lives. Give each of them discernment to recognize the evil forces around them, and reveal to them the power they have in You to defeat them. I ask you to do all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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