

Christmas Eve - Year C - The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony - 12.24.21

Tonight we celebrate once again the Feast of the Incarnation. It's not often called by that name, rather we speak of Christmas. However, behind the lights, the ornaments, the creches and the poinsettias, behind the tradition and the beloved carols and the reading once again of the story of Jesus birth, lies the truth of the Incarnation. God came to us as one of us to dwell with us. God continues to come to us to dwell with us when we open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to receive the Holy One. God is with us here and now as we adjust to the news of variant surge. God goes ahead of us and embraces us as we balance safety with courage. God is here with us as we seek to worship in new and unusual ways.

How can this be, you may ask? How can God dwell with us? The answer is in one of my favorite stories. Stories are the way we make sense of some of the hard truths of life. Stories are the way we can touch that which is really real. And so, a story.

Once upon a time there was a little boy (it could certainly have been a little girl). This child had been going to Sunday School for years. After hearing about God for so long he decided it was time to go look for God himself. He thought the journey might be long, so he found an old gym bag that was his father's; he stocked up on root beer, granola bars, and Oreos; and then he set off, without telling his mother he was going. He was about six years old. Well, he hadn't gotten very far when he got tired and decided to rest awhile.

There was a park right there, and he cut across the grass to a bench. There was only one other person in the park, an old, old woman who was sitting on the bench. (It could certainly have been an old, old man). He climbed up beside her. The two sat there and didn't say anything for the longest time. Then he turned to her and asked her if she was thirsty. She smiled at him and nodded. Out came the root beer. They shared and sat in silence. Then they ate the cookies, the granola bars and finished the root beer. They were together about an hour, and she didn't say anything at all, just smiled at him every once in a while. So he talked. He told her stories of his mom and dad, his brothers and sisters, first year at school, his pets, everything.

Time passed and he thought of his mother at home. He realized that she'd be furious at him for going off without telling her, so he decided that he had better go home. He got down from the bench and picked up his empty bag. They'd finished everything. He said good-bye to the old woman and turned to go away. He took a few steps and stopped. He thought to himself, "She has such a lovely smile, I want to see it again." So he turned around, ran up to her, put his arms around her, and gave her a big hug and kiss. Her face broke out into that magnificent smile. He smiled back and headed for home.

His mother was waiting for him at the door, frantic. She grabbed hold of him and shook him. "Where were you? I told you never to go off without telling me. Where have you been? I've been worried sick."

He looked at her and smiled broadly, "You didn't have to worry. I spent the afternoon in the park with God!" Momentarily stunned, his mother was speechless. He continued thoughtfully, "You know, I never thought she'd be so old...and so quiet and thirsty."

Meanwhile, the old woman had gotten up very slowly from the bench, picked up her cane and headed for home. Her son, about forty-five years old, was waiting for her, frantic. "Mother," he said, "many times do I have to tell you not to go off on your own without telling me? I've been looking for you everywhere and was just about to call the paramedics and the police again. You can't just go wandering off. Where have you been?"

Her face was radiant. She smiled at him and said, "Oh you needn't have worried. I spent the afternoon in the park with God."

Her son was stunned and thought to himself. "Oh dear, she's much worse than before."

But she continued, rather thoughtfully, "You know I didn't expect him to be so young, and so talkative...and to love root beer!"