



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

Winter

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# A Christmas Message

*From Eric and Anne Kaestner*

After more than thirty years of marriage we have many memories, some good, some bad. However, when it comes to Christmas, the first year of our marriage comes to mind. We lived in a small two bedroom apartment above an antique store, right on a busy main road. There were bars just a few stores down from us, one on each side, and another in the bowling alley behind us. The outside wall of our building was covered in graffiti, put there by at least one of the gangs that patrolled the neighborhood nightly. When we first moved in the security in our building left much to be desired. We had several locks on the apartment door, but the door itself was old and flimsy. We had planned to spend Christmas day at Anne’s parent’s house.

However our plans quickly changed after we got home one evening and found our apartment had been broken into. It was one of many burglaries that occurred in the building over the nineteen years we lived there. The perpetrators had used a crowbar to get in. Goodbye door! Only Anne’s jewelry was taken, and the insurance paid for that. However, especially that first year, it gave us an uncomfortable feeling of anxiety. We usually spent Christmas Eve at Eric’s mother’s house, but we couldn’t do so that year. She was unable to climb the many steps in our building. So, since we couldn’t leave the apartment, Anne’s family came over to spend Christmas with us. Getting in and out of the apartment wasn’t easy. Eric would have to use a hammer to remove the nails from the plywood in our door. The thieves were never apprehended, which increased the tension we felt for months after that, especially in Anne’s case.

According to [www.CrimeInAmerica.net](http://www.CrimeInAmerica.net), robbery and property crimes always increase during the holiday season. Those of us with friends, family, and gifts tend to feel joy in the abundance of blessings God has given us. However, those who do not possess such things often become resentful and turn to crime. Fortunately, a small minority of the needy, those who look toward God’s gift to us (John 3:16), take a different approach. Their joy comes from within, not without (see Philippians 4:7). For they feel His peace and comfort even during times of loneliness and hardship (Job 19:25-27, 2 Corinthians 11:23 thru

12:10). Their inner joy bubbles up like a river (Psalms 46:4-5) and overflows to those around them. They look for satisfaction in the comfort and care they give to others less fortunate than themselves. For Jesus said, “...It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 NIV). Those who look to material comfort will never know the kind of joy that can be felt in knowing they have made the life of someone less fortunate than than ourselves, a bit better. For the love they have does not come from the flesh, but from the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:22-26).

We know that those in need are sometimes not very loving. And some can even be ungrateful. In their case, it may take more than a kind gesture to touch their stony hearts and melt

them for Christ. It will take a lot of prayer and evidence of a life that is totally lived for God! And don’t feel that you have failed if you have tried to show someone kindness and have prayed for them, only to see no evidence of a changed heart. The human heart is sometimes so proud and stubborn that it may take the kindness and prayers of many believers over several years before the ice can melt and Christ can enter in. The Holy Spirit will bring believers into the life of someone you want to reach. Each one will sow more seeds of faith until one finally sprouts roots (Matt. 13:18-23). Remember that it took years for hardness to grow in the human heart. The devil starts working on us from a very early age. So it takes time for the Holy Spirit to melt the

hardness that has built up over time before He can reverse the damage and bring the person to Christ.

Many times people have said that a truly evil person is like an animal. However, we want to tell you about a homeless, hungry animal we once knew. A year or two after we moved into our house we noticed a big gray cat that would often walk through the back of our garden. Anne was worried that our own cat, Sasha, would be upset about it. Sasha died in December 2005 but she lived for six years after we moved into our house. She loved people, but hated and feared other animals. So Anne used to shoo the cat away. Then one day, during the Summer, she noticed the cat, whom we later called Tom, resting under a shady tree where Anne had thrown bread for the birds.



She began to feel sorry for Tom but had to get him away from the birds and bread. For he was so hungry he was starting to eat it. She took some of Sasha's leftover cat food and placed it at the far end of the garden. As soon as she got back into the house, Tom went right over to the food and began eating it. After that he started coming around more often. And Anne, realizing how half starved he was, continued to put out food for him. He would eat the food with relish but, if we attempted to get near him, he would let out an intimidating hiss and run off. This went on for at least a month. Then we started moving his food closer to the house. We'd watch him from the window as he ate. After awhile he let us get closer to him, but occasionally became fearful and did his hiss and run routine.

The months went by and Eric took up the chore of feeding Tom. Then, after awhile we noticed that Tom was showing up at our house with injuries. We wondered how that could have happened. It looked as if he had been in a fight with another animal. We have raccoons and possums that come around at night. And cats are nocturnal. Then one day we noticed that his eye was damaged and began to worry about him. We put some food into the back of Sasha's carrying case and waited for Tom to eat it. Then we quickly locked him in and took him to the vet. The vet wouldn't open the cage because she said he started hissing at her and she thought he was vicious. Plus, we didn't want to spend a lot of money on him because he really was a stray. She gave us some medicine to give him and we took him back home. Tom disappeared for about two days. Then one morning, he showed up near our house, hungry as usual. Eric took his food out to him and buried his pill in it. We watched from the window as Tom devoured his food, stopping briefly when he tasted the pill, then going right back to eating again. After that Tom began to trust us. Eric was able to pet him, and pray over him. Eventually, with help of the medicine, and the prayer, his eye got better. After awhile we saw the sweetness in this stray cat. The birds would come around and eat from his bowl as he rested nearby. He knew they were there but never tried to attack them.

Then summer turned into autumn and the nights began to get cooler. Eric made a little bed for Tom out of a box and an old blanket. Eventually another cat showed up. She was small and multicolored and we called her Mixie. We soon realized that Tom had brought his mate over. We watched as Tom invited Mixie to share his food with him. And we came to the conclusion

that Tom's frequent fights and resulting injuries must have occurred while defending Mixie. To our dismay, Mixie would repay him by killing a bird now and then and leaving it in our garden. Anne thought it was Tom doing it at first. However, she soon learned that the birds and squirrels were not afraid of Tom. But they were panic stricken when Mixie was around! And she was so tiny next to Tom! We actually saw them mating one day, through out basement window. And we knew that eating his food and mating with Mixie were his two greatest joys in life. The weather continued to get colder, especially at night.



Tom would take his nightly trips to wherever he went and then return to his bed till morning.

One evening, to our surprise, we saw through the basement window, another cat sleeping in Tom's bed. Oh oh, we thought. There will be some kind of a cat fight when Tom gets back and sees him there. Yet the next morning we looked through the basement window and there was Tom, and the other cat, curled up, keeping each other warm, sleeping together. In time, Tom would actually be waiting for his food at our back door. Then one day we noticed that he had not come around lately. Days went by and we didn't see him.

Anne even saw Mixie come around to our garden looking for him. At least we were glad that it didn't happen around Halloween!



Anne began calling up pet shelters to no avail. And, since it is the law that it must be reported to the police if a cat is hit by a car, Anne called the different police stations too. They had no report of an injured or dead cat fitting Tom's description. We placed a photo of Tom up in our Vet's office with a note asking anyone finding him to call us. No one did. But one of the women who worked there told us that a neighbor of there's (it was a residential area) used to feed a cat that looked just like Tom. And he disappeared about the same time Tom did! We may never know just what- ever happened to Tom until we get

to Heaven some day.

Lately we have been listening to some albums of Christian Christmas music that Eric made for Anne. She was tired of hearing secular songs like "Jingle Bells" and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Clause." It's so sad that Christ has been taken out of Christmas and replaced by a cute, feel-good attitude and a spirit of greed and self-satisfaction. However, listening to the old Christian music gave us renewed joy, pondering the true meaning of Christmas. We are told how all Heaven rejoiced at the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. God the Father was



thrilled, and with Him, the angels sang for Joy. In order to really understand the love God has for us remember that "...God said, 'Let Us make man in **Our** image...'" (Genesis 1:26 NIV). And later, "Come, let Us go down and confuse their language..." (Genesis 11:7 NIV). In the case of our Creator, the word "God" has a plural meaning. "For there are **three** that bear record in heaven, the Father, the **Word**, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7 KJV). Jesus Christ was the name God the Father gave to God the Son when He left Heaven to die for our sins. But God the Son, also called "The Word of God" existed at the time the earth was created! "In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was **with God**, and the Word was God. He was **with God** in the beginning. **Through Him** all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made..." (John 1:1-4 NIV).

God the Son spoke through the Holy Spirit to inspire Solomon to write, "The LORD brought Me forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began" (Proverbs 8:22-23 NIV). It wasn't speaking about Solomon!

There's an awe we feel in these verses that shows the love that God the Father has for His Son, and the Son has for the Father. It says, "I was there when He set the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His command, and when He marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the Craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind" (Proverbs 8:27-31 NIV). God the Father

was the architect of the universe and God the Son was the builder! And the love they put into this, their creation of this world for us, was a reflection of their abundant love for each other.

One third of God's angels had already rebelled against Him (Revelation 12:7-9. Also, see Revelation 12:4). But God wanted children! His heart yearned for the love of one magnificent creation called "mankind." God didn't want to create a race of robots that would have no choice in the matter. He wanted us to have a choice to love or reject Him. As expectant parents eagerly prepare for their future child, the joy of both God the Father and the Son bubbled over as They enthusiastically made a perfect world for us. Yet knowing ahead of time that mankind could sin and reject Him, God the Father and God the Son conceived the only plan of escape that would be possible (Hebrews 2:3). If we should sin against Him, God the Son would come into this world and die in our place, taking our punishment upon Himself so that we would be restored to our Creator. And mankind did reject Him! "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination

of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain" (Genesis 6:5-6 NIV).

We were made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), with His emotions. And some of us know the pain of rejection we feel when we love someone so much and they hate and reject us. God felt that pain! Nevertheless, He had such compassion for us and "...God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:16-17 NIV). The one Person that God loved the most was His beloved Son. And the Son loved the Father and us enough to agree to suffer such hatred and rejection for us (Isaiah 53:3-6). He knew ahead of time about the nails that would tear His flesh (Psalm 22:16). He knew how His own creation would stand around mocking and laughing at Him (see Psalm 22:17). He knew that they would strip Him naked and "...divide My garments among them and cast lots for My clothing" (Psalms 22:18 NIV. Also, see Matthew 27:35).

God knew all that the Son He loves so much would suffer for us. Yet He was still thrilled when Jesus left all the glory of Heaven behind and came into this world to die in our place. How great a love can that be? "...At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8 NIV). How many human parents would be joyful at the prospect of their beloved only child coming into a world that would hate and despise him, and torture him to death? The love of God for us is beyond human conception! Yet we hear about that love in true Christian Christmas songs like "Hark The Herald Angels Sing" and, Anne's favorite, "Oh Holy Night." Truly we have only **one** Holy Father and He lives in Heaven, "...and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men..." (1 Timothy 2:5-6 NIV).

When we hear church bells on Christmas day, the old hymns they play may speak of "peace on earth and good will toward men." However, God's Son did not come into this world to bring us peace on earth (see Matthew 10:34-38). "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world... My kingdom is from another place'" (John 18:36 NIV). God's perfect peace can only occur in our hearts when we love Him and put Him first in our lives. We need to repent of our sins and surrender our hearts to Him who loves us so much! Only then can we receive a peace and joy that this world can never understand (John 14:27)! "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 NIV).

Have a wonderful Christmas everyone!

