

SERMON DELIVERED AT HOLY GHOST ANGLICAN CHURCH IN GENOA BY
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In the US we have what is called Public Broadcasting Service. PBS. Commercial free, just news. Several years ago PBS ran a human interest program about the theoretical physicist, Richard Feynman. Some have compared his mind to that of Albert Einstein.

PBS told the story of Feynman's friendship with a fellow who was an artist. The artist taught Feynman a bit about art, and Feynman taught the artist a bit about physics. During the program Feynman held up a flower. He said that his friend the artist believed there was no special talent needed to appreciate the wonder of that flower.

Feynman agreed to a certain extent that everyone could look at the flower and say that it is beautiful. But as a scientist, he was able to "see" much more of the flower than most folks. He could see the miracle of the intricate cells working together to support life. He could see the flower's color that attracted insects. He could see the process of cross pollination. Feynman could see more in that flower in a few minutes that most of us would see in a lifetime of looking at it.

You know, we're still in the Christmas season. And Christmas, too, is deserving of that same kind of looking.

We need to "see" Christmas in ways that move beyond the sentimental (Christmas cards where people just sign their names and tell you nothing about what's happened in their lives since you last heard from them) and the ordinary (the mad scramble to buy people gifts for re-gifting). For us Christians, we should never confine ourselves to looking at a Christmas card that shows a neat and warm and cozy and tidy picture of the nativity without thinking WAY beyond the Incarnation – way beyond Christmas. We should see Christmas with the same depth as Dr. Feynman looked at that flower.

If from Black Friday to Christmas we see only the baby lying in the manger, we see only part of the picture. We didn't celebrate Advent by pretending that Christ has not come. And we don't celebrate Christmas by pretending we don't know what is going to happen to this child – and the impact that whole story will have on us.

What happens when we let ourselves see beyond our cozy and comfortable notions of Christmas and beyond is well said in this story. Admittedly it is more of a children's story, but which of us is too sophisticated to learn from a child's story?

Three little trees stood on top of a mountain. They dreamed of what they wanted to become when they grew up. The first little tree looked up at the stars and said, "I want to hold treasure. I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I'll be the most beautiful treasure box in the world!"

The second little tree looked out at a small stream trickling by on its way to the ocean. "I want to be traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings. I'll be the strongest ship in the world."

The third tree looked down into the valley to where there were many men and women and boys and girls in a busy town. "I don't want to leave this mountain top at all. I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me, they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world."

Years passed. There was lots of rain and lots of sun. The little trees grew tall.

One day three woodcutters climbed the mountain. The first woodcutter looked at the first tree and said, "This tree is beautiful. It is perfect for me." After some swoops of his shining ax, the first tree fell. "Now I will be made into a beautiful chest. I shall hold wonderful treasure!" the first tree said.

The second woodcutter looked at the second tree and said, "this tree is strong. It's perfect for me." After some swoops with a shining ax, the second tree fell. "Now I shall sail mighty waters!" thought the second tree. "I shall be a strong ship for mighty kings!"

The third tree felt her heart sink when the last woodcutter looked her way. She stood straight and tall and pointed bravely to heaven. But the woodcutter toppled it. Any kind of tree will do for me." he muttered.

The first tree rejoiced when the woodcutter brought her to a carpenter's shop. But the carpenter fashioned the tree into a feedbox for animals. The once beautiful tree was not covered with gold, nor filled with treasure. She was covered in sawdust and filled with hay for hungry farm animals.

The second tree smiled when the woodcutter took her to a shipyard, but no mighty sailing ship was made that day. Instead, the once strong tree was hammered and sawed into a simple fishing boat. She was too small and too weak to sail an ocean, or even a river. Instead she was taken to a small lake.

The third tree was confused when the woodcutter cut her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. "What happened?" the once tall tree wondered. "All I ever wanted was to stay on the mountain top and point to God."

Many days and nights passed. The three trees nearly forgot their dreams. But one night, golden starlight poured over the first tree as a young woman placed her newborn baby in the feed box. "I wish I could make a cradle for him, her husband whispered. The mother squeezed his hand and smiled as the starlight shone on the smooth and sturdy wood. "This manger is beautiful," she said. And suddenly the first tree knew she was holding the greatest treasure in the world.

One evening a tired traveler and his friends crowded into the old fishing boat. The traveler fell asleep as the second tree quietly sailed out into the lake. Soon a thundering and thrashing storm arose. The little tree shuddered. She knew she did not have the strength to carry so many passengers safely with all the wind and the rain. The tired man awakened. He stood up, stretched out his hand and said, "Peace, be still." The storm stopped as quickly as it had begun. And suddenly the second tree knew she was carrying the King of Heaven and Earth.

Early one morning a couple years later, the third tree was startled when her beam was yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to her. She felt ugly and harsh and cruel. But three days later, with the sun shining and the earth trembling beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything. It had made the third tree strong, And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world!

The coming of Jesus presents us with the transforming power of the gospel to be God's people. Please never reject him. Please never sit in darkness.

The story around which we gather this Christmas season is one of transforming hope for new life. That we can see the path more clearly, and make a new beginning as God's people.

Where that happens, heaven and earth do sing out. And like those 3 trees you will know to where you are called and what you are to do.